

New Virtue in Virtuous Forests: Community Woodlands in Scotland a Decade On

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INTEGRATE CONSULTING
specializing in multi-method social
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& training



introduction

**The Virtuous Forest: discursive interventions in
Community Woodlands Trusts in Scotland – an
interim report.**

In *Social Science and Forests*, Liz O'Brien, Jenny
Claridge (ed.), Edinburgh: Forest Research. 2003

Research undertaken 1999-2001

Virtue?

- Woodlands are landscape
 - Landscape as a *sign*
 - what is *signified*?
- Positive values
 - Virtues, belong to both the land, and the people who invest the value.
- *Always enacted*



landscape and meaning

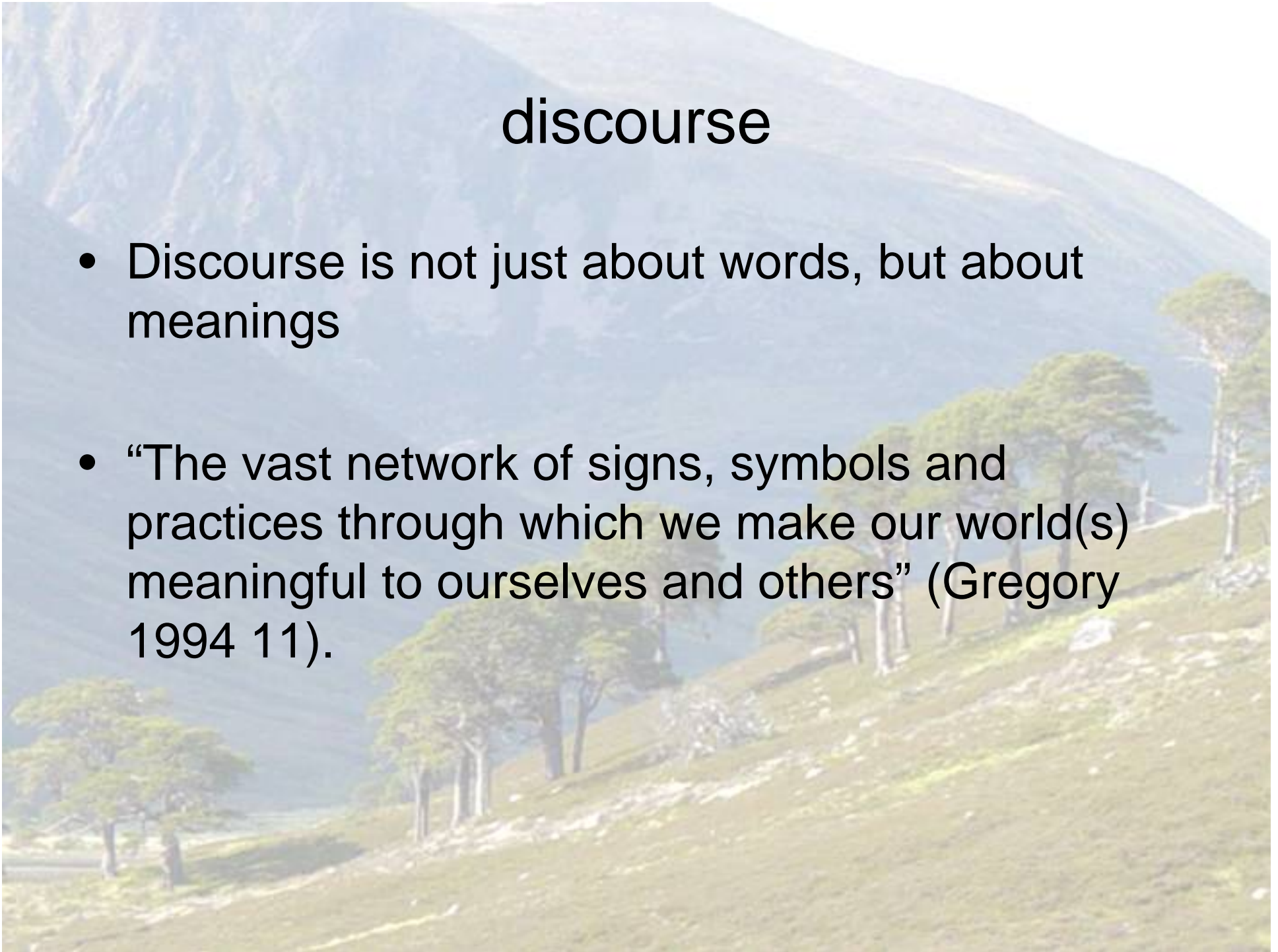
- In many ways, “a landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings” (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988).
- Landscapes are also, of course, material artefacts. Biological organisms and physical environments cannot be factored out of the making of place.
- Nevertheless, a landscape is something which is constructed by human inter-*action*, interaction between humans, and between humans and the physical environment.

landscape, discourse and meaning

- *landscapes* are more than the product of isolated material processes -- the shapes they become; what occurs within them; the human and non-human lives within them are strongly constituted out of human beliefs, representations, norms and endeavours.
- It is in this sense that we can call a landscape a discursive formation.

discourse

- Discourse is not just about words, but about meanings
- “The vast network of signs, symbols and practices through which we make our world(s) meaningful to ourselves and others” (Gregory 1994 11).



discursive formations

- A *discourse* is a system of meanings out of which a discursive formation is constituted. From the study of semiotics, the term points to meanings formed or *signified* by a sign or symbol.
- The relationship between a sign, and what is signified is socially constructed, that is, constructed through social acts, and can have little, or indeed nothing to do with the original content of the material sign.
- A *discursive formation* is a constellation of meanings which emerge out of collective representations -- representations performed in the inhabited life-spaces of communities, communities which may be local or extra-local to the discursive formation.

discursive formations

- Discursive formations are *iterated*
- Each time a formation is iterated, its particular set of meanings is constructed anew, and so discursive formations are always in flux
- Discursive formations are the constellations of meanings -- meanings of existence, entitlement, relationship and power which are constituted out of *acts* of representation, iteration and interaction (Giddens 1984).

discursive formations

- Are the stuff of social action. Social structures do not exist as independent entities but are iterated through the *praxis* of social actors. (Anthony Giddens 1984, Cohen 1989, 47)
- New Virtues in Community Woodlands are the positive meanings attached to certain woodlands as a result of *discursive interventions* by certain groups.



Virtues 2001

- a forest of heritage
- a forest of our ancestors
- a forest for our children
- a forest of local economic development
- a forest of bio-diversity

New Virtues 1 – Health & Wellbeing

From Forests for People Social Benefits Case Studies Report (Evans and Franklin 2008)

- new research internationally
 - studies in other fields
- new policies in Scotland
- opportunistic

New Virtues 2 - partnership

Partnership

- Partnership working was key new finding in F4P SBS Case Studies report

- increased capacity to support partnership working across a range social benefit provision

- Partnership with others

- local authority

- local health trust

- local educational trust

- local archaeology

New Virtues 2 – partnership

- New role of FE community officers
 - building partnerships
 - supporting and enabling
 - bringing forest expertise to new communities

New Virtues 3 – community assets

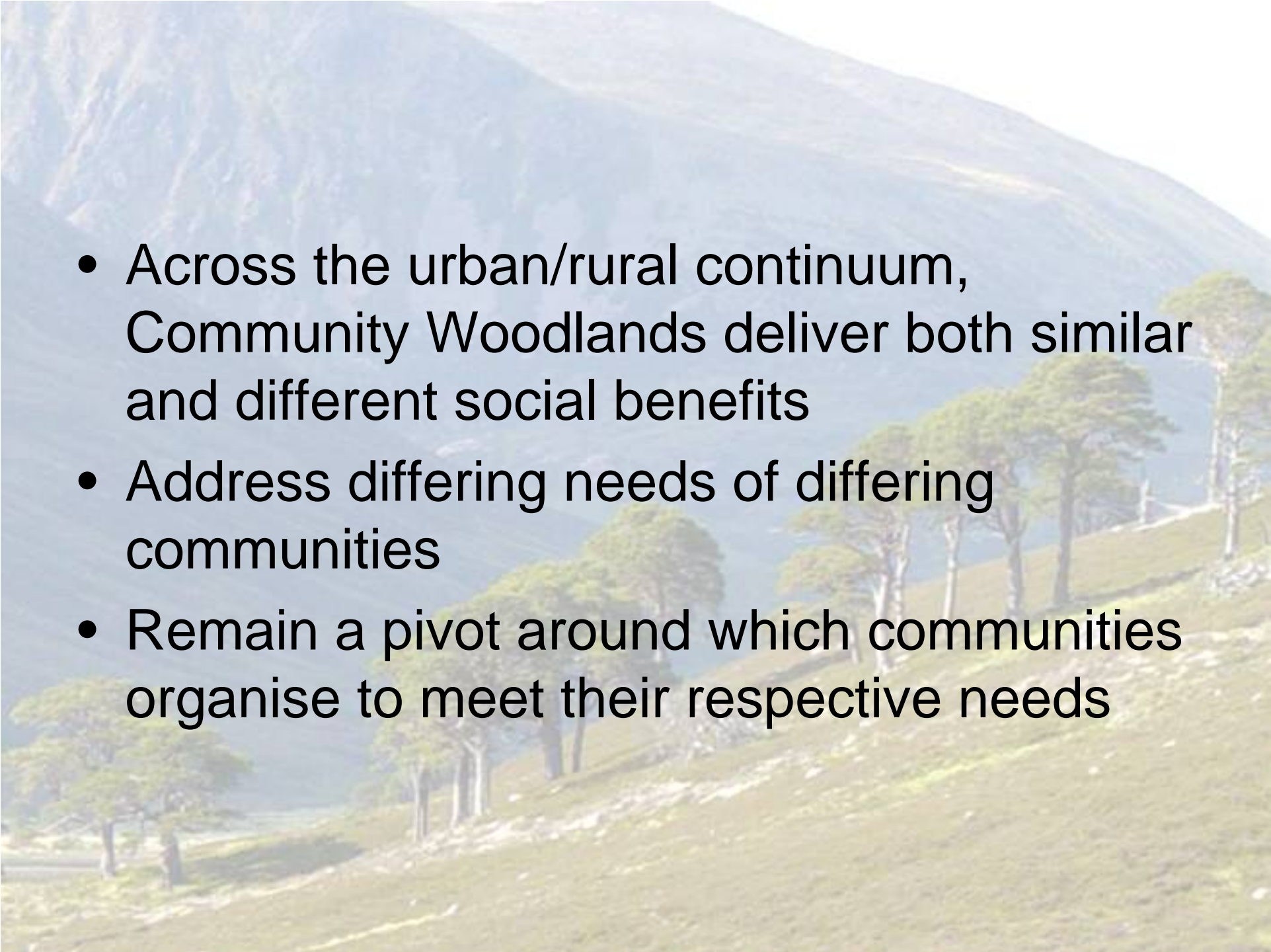
- Asset-based Rural Community Development (ABRCD)
 - Sustainable Development
 - Five Capitals
- Woodlands as the pivot around which communities develop
 - Across a wide range of activities
 - Providing a wide range of benefits

ABRCD

- Assets
 - Material Assets
 - Biotic environment
 - Geophysical environment
 - climate
 - Intangible Assets
 - Local knowledges
 - Ways of working together
 - Social capital
 - Bridging capital
 - Bonding capital

Some urban/rural differences

- Urban:
 - Social Enterprises primarily deliver services, especially health and well-being
 - Networks among other local service deliverers, often instigated by service providers rather than service users
 - Primarily addressing multiple deprivation
- Rural
 - Social Enterprises primarily deliver identity resources, local economic development benefits
 - Networks among local enterprises, more widely
 - Addressing local economy, identity, wider community

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- Across the urban/rural continuum, Community Woodlands deliver both similar and different social benefits
 - Address differing needs of differing communities
 - Remain a pivot around which communities organise to meet their respective needs

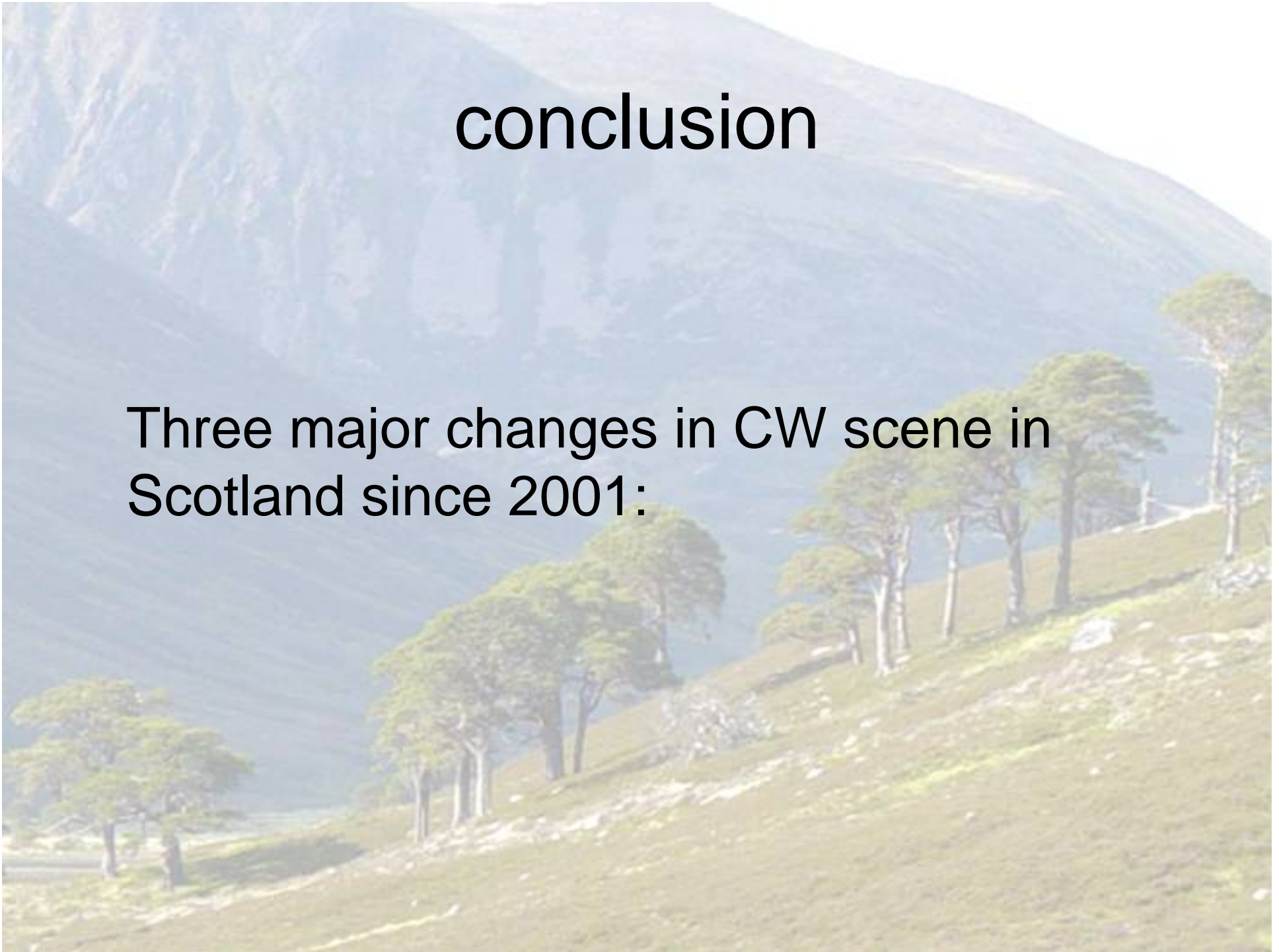


but....

- Transition to Sustainability?
- Losing pioneer cohort?
- Keeping it local?
- Keeping it bottom-up?

conclusion

Three major changes in CW scene in Scotland since 2001:



A photograph of a man with a red backpack standing in a forest. The man is wearing a white shirt and has sunglasses on his head. The forest is filled with tall, thin trees, and the ground is covered with grass and dirt paths. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

1) increased skill and professionalism in
CWs

-in research

-in project management

-in political presence (CWA)



2) New virtues of health & wellbeing,
– CWs as key partners in delivering these services

3) Changing role of Forest Enterprise and the FC more generally, not only to encourage, but to enact change in concert with communities

