

2016-08-30

# Co-creating in the landscape with Dominica Williamson

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/6580>

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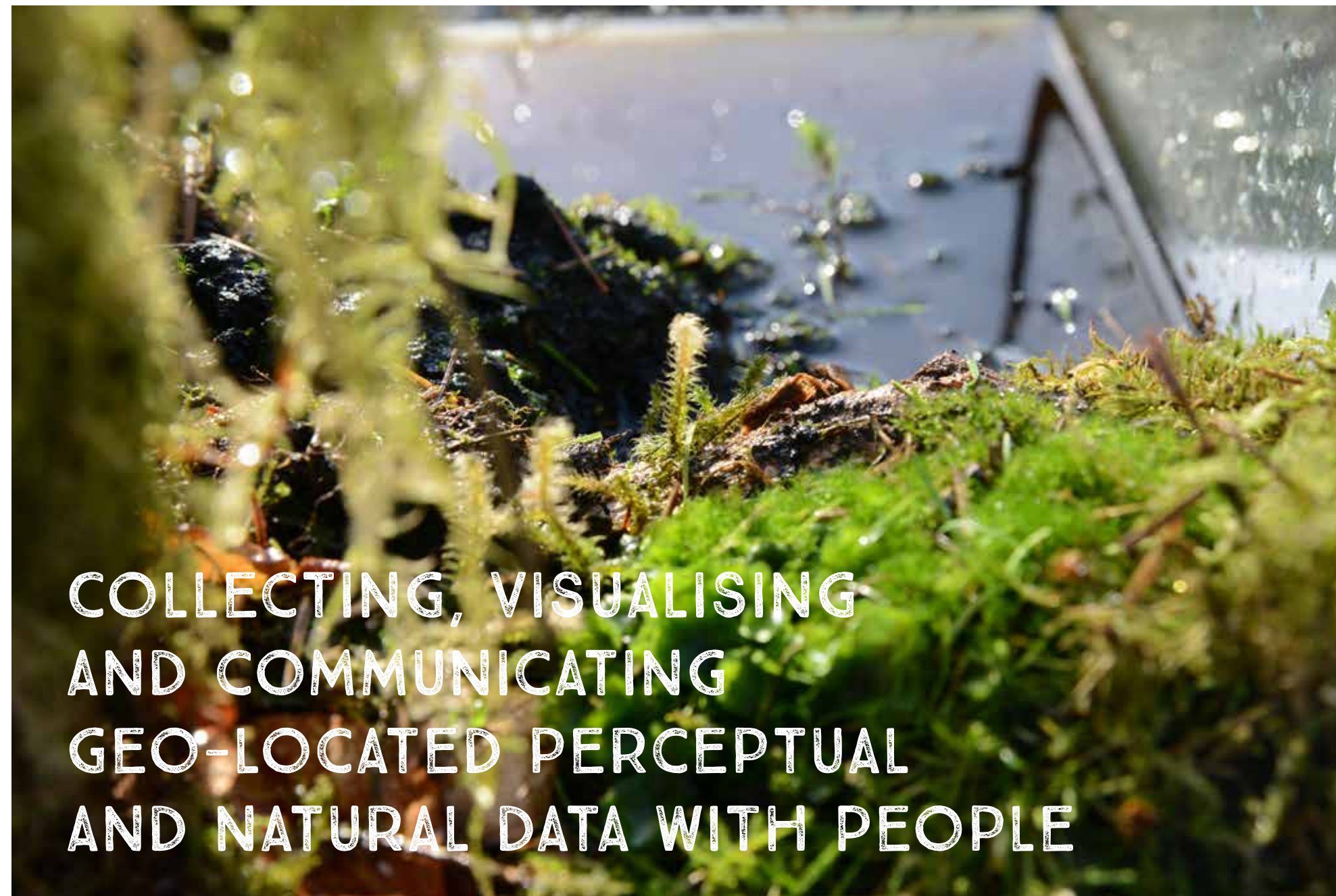
Plymouth University

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A close-up photograph of a terrarium. On the right side, a vertical strip of clear adhesive tape is visible, with a thick layer of green and brown moss growing along it. To the left of the tape, a dark brown pine branch with green needles is visible, extending from the top towards the bottom. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green. The text 'TAGSCAPE' is overlaid in the center of the image.

TAGSCAPE



# COLLECTING, VISUALISING AND COMMUNICATING GEO-LOCATED PERCEPTUAL AND NATURAL DATA WITH PEOPLE

This short run catalogue is a **stage one edition**, limited to 50 printed copies, prepared to coincide with TAGSCAPE's exhibition and workshop session called the **Living Room** at The Royal Geographic Society Annual International Conference 30 August to 2 September 2016

Laser CMYK printed on 100% Post Consumer Recycled Paper

Typeset in Open Sans and Bitter

Design by Dominica Williamson

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TAGSCAPE has worked with many different types of people and is workshoping in the woods and exhibiting in gallery spaces. Clockwise: *Avril, Ryan Putt's* grandmother's vivarium. Oliver Raymond-Barker's photograph of TAGSCAPE: Come Map with Me Artspace 101 exhibition in Plymouth University. Jason Parsons' photograph from Bellever. Tim Powles (Forestry Commission) taking Jason and colleague's for a bogy walk. Trevithick Learning Academy making a vivarium, and biking with Dave Davies of Sustrans.



To help learn about the natural data of the woods, Dominica has photographed them in the different seasons.

## About the project

TAGSCAPE is a project that explores ways of visualizing information about natural landscapes and turning it into innovative maps that will engage the general public and not just the specialist. Our source is not only geo-located data (the position of an object given in latitude and longitude) but also includes perceptual data – people’s feelings about a particular location as well as the value they place on it.

In the future, meaningful maps that reveal the unique character and importance of a particular landscape might influence policy decisions concerning how landscape is protected and managed, as well as how such decisions are communicated to the communities who live there.

A website and the idea behind TAGSCAPE is being developed by me, artist Dominica Williamson, as part of my residency, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, at the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Plymouth University. I have worked in close collaboration with Dr John Martin as well as engaging with other staff and students in the faculty.

By employing up-to-date mapping technologies and tools, I am assessing the character of a given landscape and making drawings using geo-located data and perceptual data. I am developing large-scale maps of two specific landscapes – from ground level, up through hedgerows, to trees and sky, and including everything from beetles to bats – these will be produced and exhibited in the locations they describe and displayed for the public to view. The landscapes used are a Conifer Forestry Commission site in Dartmoor and a Cornwall Nature Conservation site managed by The Sustainable Trust, which comprises 75-acres of Beech Grove.

Within these landscapes I am looking at archaeological features, plantations that exist on ancient woodlands and borders (specifically hedges and walls) and old pathways, as well as mining data. I am creating and accessing natural and perceptual data.

What has become apparent during this residency is that natural data is still ‘thin’ in some places and hard to bring into one database and so there is much work to be done to make open data available for all. Also, early on in the residency perceptual data became central to the project, therefore a methodology for collection and databasing was required.

This stage one catalogue begins to describe the methodology I am developing to attempt to address an element of this. It also starts to picture some of the people I am working with. Through deep workshopping using vivariums and open sensorial questions, I am calling for a bottom-up approach to describing a landscape - we need to work with specialists and non-specialists when describing a landscape, especially when it comes to its perceptual qualities.



Over several months, Ahmed Alboabidallah has scanned woods in various parts of Devon with Dr John Martin as part of his PhD. He's calculated the biomass of woods using this method. In Bellever (above) he has surveyed and scanned near a Rack cleared by the Forestry Commission.

For the past decade Joe Fenn of Sustrust has been carrying out Charcoal burns in Crenver Grove Cornwall. Sustrust sell the charcoal to help fund their activities and it helps keep English laurel under control in the woods.

## Why the project?

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) (ratified by the UK in 2006) defines landscape as:

“An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors (emphasis added)”.

A key factor of this definition is people’s perception of landscape. This has resulted in increased interest in exploring how people perceive and interact with their environment.

Landscapes vary due to many factors such as underlying geology, land use, flora and fauna, topography and cultural development. Natural England (2014) suggests that the combination of characteristics arising from physical and socio-economic influences, and their often complex interrelationships, makes one landscape different from another. A methodology for describing and identifying the variations in character is outlined by Natural England 2014. This method results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment. Central to this process is the ‘Landscape Wheel’ that defines “What is Landscape?” (below)

The use of Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is well established in the UK; with the vast majority of protected landscape (National Park (NP) and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)) in England having LCAs. These LCAs are often at the core of their management plans. As such landscapes play a major role within the English rural environment with approximately 26% of England’s land falling under a NP or AONB designation, both of which have a common aim to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of high scenic quality landscapes. The LCA’s methodology clearly identifies the need for the public to play an active role in the assessment process, as the perceptual and aesthetic elements are linked to stakeholder engagement (people). The ELC also identifies the active role the stakeholders play in creation and implementation of landscape policies.



In addition NP and AONB management plans are often reliant on stakeholder engagement, as there are many benefits to stakeholder participation. Stakeholder’s perceptions are also often related to culture ecosystem services and can provide a social or economic benefit to an area. However, the collection of perceptual data can be difficult compared with data collection from the other elements of the wheel. For example, geological/soil maps, ecological surveys, land cover maps and land ownership records all provide reliable sources of data. Public participation is problematic on the other hand, as it is reliant on people attending pre-arranged community meetings, where only stakeholders with an immediate interest participate (Berry & Higgs 2012).

Research work at Plymouth University has explored introducing ubiquitous technology into landscape management, protection and planning, as a means of collecting data while in situ, rather than in a village hall with a pre-defined community meeting. The work has led to the development of two apps called ‘Rate My View’ (RmV) ([www.ratemy.co.uk](http://www.ratemy.co.uk)) and ‘Landscape Connect’. The RmV, developed in partnership with South Devon AONB, allows user to provide continuous landscape-related feedback while in situ. Using GPS it locates the user, detects the direction the user is facing and allows them to submit words or short phrases that sums up their view. The Landscape Connect app, developed in partnership with Natural England and South Devon AONB, builds upon the previous RmV platform, adding new features for workshop organisers.

The work of the #tagscape project has allowed the development of methodologies that assist with the collection and understanding of perceptual and natural data. This deep workshoping approach allows stakeholders to engage with the natural environment and convey the landscape values that are important to them. It does this by returning to the sphere of organised community events, whilst also energising the paper-mapmaking hall approach through not just removing the walls of the hall but also A4 paper and clipboards. Participants so far have walked, danced, biked or photographed the landscape and at the end or during the activity they have all stopped to make vivariums - mini-landscapes built from the raw material around them. Once they’ve finished digging and scaping, Dominica asks open-ended questions about their senses, which will have been heightened during the activities she has orchestrated. She then encourages group responses and individual responses as well as follow-up activity, during which she digitally records and maps the data and shares it back.

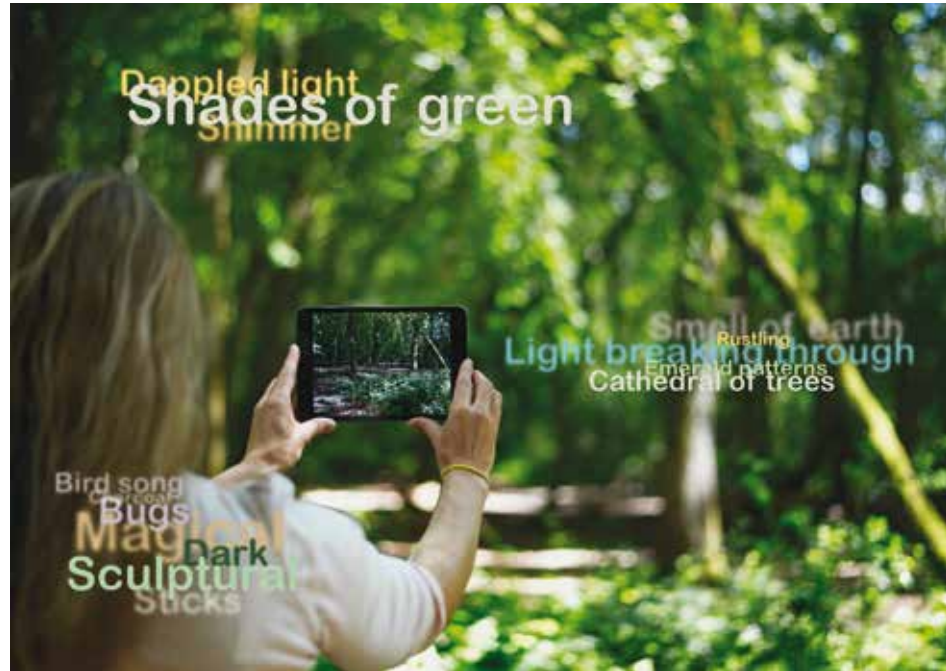
Dr John Martin

Notes

Natural England (2014), An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England Commissioned Report NE579, October 2014.

Council of Europe (2000), European Landscape Convention, Council of Europe, Florence October 2000.

Berry R. & Higgs G. (2012). Gauging levels of public acceptance of the use of visualisation tools in promoting public participation; a case study of wind farm planning in South Wales, UK. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 55(2), 229-251.



Top: Using RmV to gather perceptual data in Crenver Grove, Cornwall.  
Bottom: Connecting up with regular visitors to Bellever, Dartmoor.  
Photographs Andy Hughes

Top: Beth Harry's vivarium growing 3 months later. TAGSCAPE is integrating plant and tree identification during and after vivarium-making. Bottom: Avril, Ryan Putt's grandmother's vivarium.  
Photographs Andy Hughes



# Co-creating in the landscape

*Co-creating in the landscape with Dominica Williamson  
A response to #tagscape by Dr Kayla Parker*

In February this year, intrigued by the title, #tagscape, and the invitation on the poster to “Come and make a shared landscape with me,” I visited an exhibition at Artspace 101 in Plymouth. That lunchtime, the small gallery was busy with people examining the display of glass vivaria, or enclosures, (1) which contained miniature woodland landscapes constructed from twigs, moss, leaves and small objects – and, potentially, bacteria, fungi, and insects. A large vitrine (2) against one wall held a thick layer of humus-rich earth planted with glass microscope slides on which words had been written in white ink. A notice instructed me to write the word I associated with my journey to the gallery that day on one of the blank slides provided, and then to insert my slide in the earth where I felt it should go. As I wrote ‘cold’ on the thin flat piece of glass and placed it close to a smooth stone, I felt that I was participating in the making of a collective landscape, and part of a project that was both a scientific experiment and a visual poem.

Places matter. Place plays a central role in human experience. As the Canadian geographer Edward Relph has pointed out in his influential monograph, *Place and Placelessness* (1976), human beings have a deep need “for associations with significant places” – it is important to us to connect with place and “transcend placelessness” so that we can develop an environment for people that reflects and enhances the variety of human experience.<sup>(3)</sup> The sites chosen by Williamson reveal their phenomena through her and the project participants’ bodily experiences of these places, her #tagscape project allows our senses to connect with what is unseen beneath the visible landscape and captures experiences and meanings that are usually unnoticed in everyday life.

Dominica Williamson is an artist who intends her project to have “a lasting, positive impact on people and the natural environment.”<sup>(4)</sup> As an expert practitioner and amateur, she co-creates ‘landscape maps’ with the people and communities who use a particular place. Working in the field, she engages and encourages them to actively participate in artistic and cultural activities, then weaves together geo-located data - the position of an object given in latitude and longitude - and perceptual data - people’s feelings about a particular location as well as the value they place on it.

In #tagscape, Williamson seeks to push beyond the conventional boundaries of representing landscape and communicating ideas about our relationship to place through image making and verbal description. Through her strategy of art-making as collective process, she draws attention to our rapidly changing

relationship to the natural environment and questions the landscape tradition in Western art. Her emphasis is on observing nature through being in the landscape and foregrounds an embodied response that draws on the range of senses and emotional states experienced, rather than relying on sight alone and merely looking at surface features. As Liz Wells observes, “(n)ature is both ‘internal’, fundamental to what constitutes us as human, and ‘out there’ in that we experience the external world through the senses, including sight.”<sup>(5)</sup> #tagscape reminds us that our experience of environment is always culturally mediated. Landscape painting and photography are pictorial representations of land as a working environment or as a space for contemplation, in which the image stands in or is a metaphor for the scene portrayed. The frame presents what Wells refers to as a ‘slice’ of what is chosen by the artist to be ‘seen’ of the environment – and as audience or viewer we must look through this frame. In her project, Williamson seeks to expand our perspective ‘beyond the frame’ by offering multiple viewpoints rather than the fixed single, viewing position required by the framed image – the vivaria and other artworks may be examined from several positions and they are always ‘in process’.

Through promoting an interactive relationship between the natural and material world and human beings, the project challenges the binary structures of traditional Western thought and collapses the distinctions between hierarchical dualities. Matter – in the form of the vivaria’s co-created landscapes constituted of earth, stones, and sticks – and living material – flora and fauna – is brought into the cultural space of the gallery and exhibited as a living artwork that is constantly changing. Williamson embeds a holistic approach and an ethical strategy – nature and culture are interconnected, matter and mind cannot be separated into isolated units. She is the inspirational catalyst at the heart of #tagscape. Sharing new ways of engaging imaginatively with the natural environment, she transforms landscape from pictorial representation to a dynamic ongoing relationship with the natural places that are such an integral part of human life and experience, enabling us to connect more deeply with the world we live in.

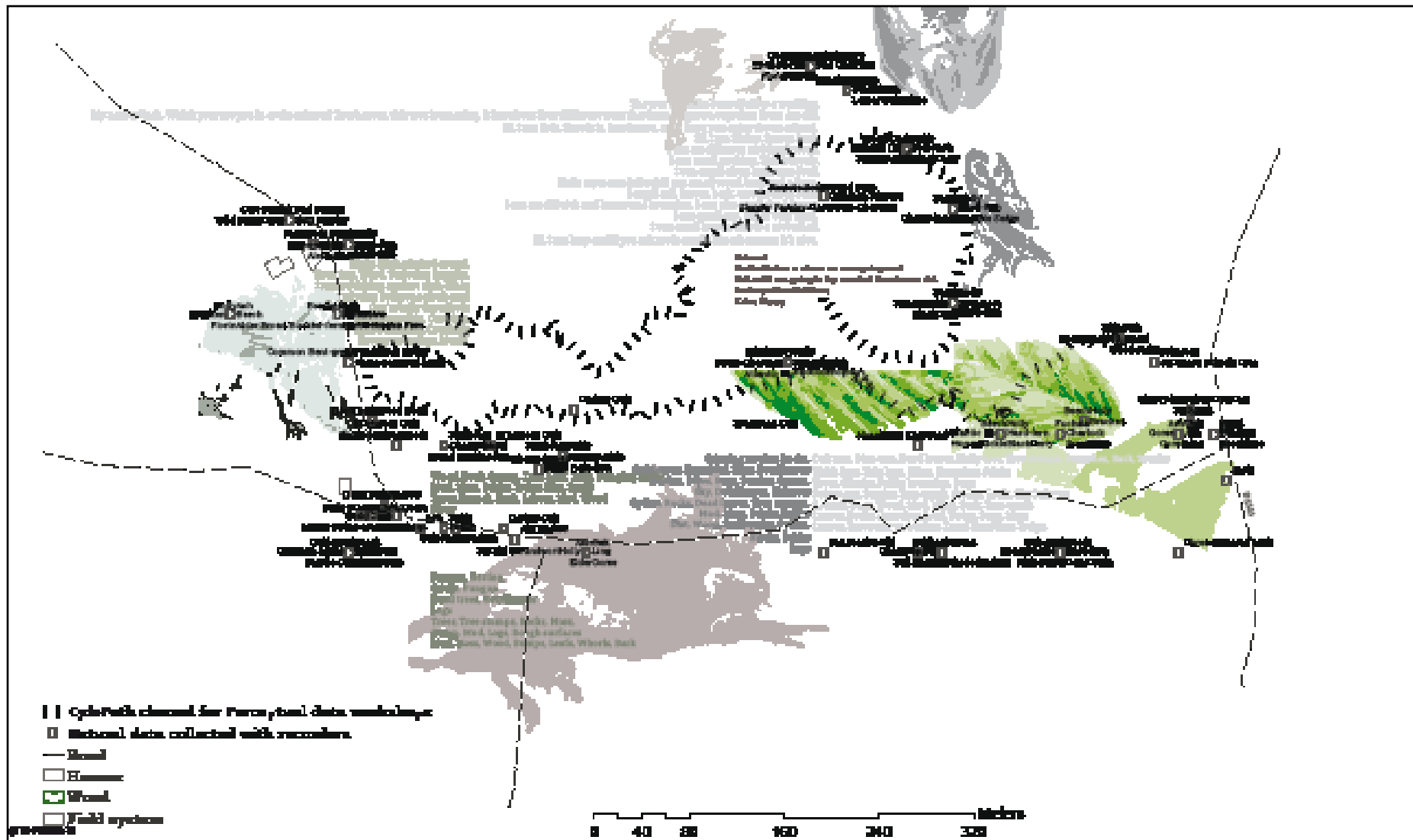
## Notes

1. A vivarium is an enclosed place for keeping live animals or plants in conditions that simulate their natural environment, for observation or study. The vivarium – from the Latin word vivere, ‘to live’ – is literally ‘a place of life’. The plural of vivarium is vivaria, although vivariums is also used.
2. A vitrine is a glass-paneled display cabinet or showcase used for small artefacts, specimens, or works of art.
3. Edward Relph (1976) *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion. p. 147.
4. For more details of the project, please see the #tagscape website: <http://www.tagscape.co.uk>
5. Liz Wells (2011) *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 5.

Prepared for The Royal Geographic Society Annual International Conference  
30 August to 2 September 2016.



Truro and Penwith College FdA in Photography and Digital Imaging (Plymouth University) students spent two days in Bellever Forest walking, making photographs and gathering perceptual data based on all the senses. This is their vivarium.



*Sketchmap of Crenver Grove, Praze-An-Beeble, Cornwall.*

Perceptual data participants: Children from Trevithick Learning Academy, Camborne, Cornwall  
Medium; ArcMap, Excel, Illustrator, biological data, Crenver Grove charcoal, watercolour

## Locating the data

Once Dominica has gathered data through vivarium-making workshops and from other means, she enters the results into the software package Excel and then onto maps she has made using Geographical Information Systems Software.

Concurrently, she is drawing dead animals found in the woods (which people are bringing to her when they happen upon them). She is turning these drawings into digital polygon shapes that in time are becoming part of base maps. She is also drawing the leaves, trees, plants, bugs and walls of the woods and their fungal networks. Such drawings are merging into the map to help 'show off' as well as 'shout-out' the character of a landscape. Two end maps will emerge - one of Crenver Grove, Cornwall, and one of Bellever Forest, Dartmoor. The map above, like the vivariums and this catalogue, are evolving works and have been co-produced.

## Who is running the project?

**Dominica Williamson**, Leverhulme Trust Artist-in-residence from The School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Plymouth University. Dominica is a trained artist and designer, who draws her inspiration from the landscape.

Through her work, which blends fine art practice with design, she aims to create process-based, collaborative work which questions and searches for sustainable methodologies and tools, and exploits bold illustration and communication styles. She has collaborated with individuals and organisations in a variety of areas - from photographers, editors and programmers to PhD sciences students and professional archaeologists.

**Dr John Martin** Leverhulme artist-in-residence award from The School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Plymouth University. Dr Martin is involved with a number of large-scale research projects that range from working with local Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in South Devon, North Devon and Tamar, to statutory and non-statutory agencies including Natural England, the Environment Agency and English Heritage.

His research interests are: Landscape Character Assessment, Use of ubiquitous technologies in landscape management, protection and planning; Seascape Assessment, The application of Knowledge-Based Systems (KBS) in Landscape Character Assessment and Geo-environmental Engineering Sustainable and inclusive development of brownfield sites.

## The following people have assisted TAGSCAPE's development in 2016

**Ryan Putt** Environmental Consultancy MSc Student from The School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Plymouth University. Ryan has been working in the same landscapes as Dominica during the summer of 2016 and has assisted her with workshops, allowing them to collaborate data. His overall goal is to further knowledge and encourage best practice on how to enhance and protect the diversity and quality of landscapes for future generations. His research interests are: Natural Capital Accounting; Landscape Perception & Character; Ecosystem Services Valuation.

**Dr Kayla Parker** is a Lecturer in Media Arts at Plymouth University, where she convenes the Moving Image Arts (MIA) research group. Kayla has created the first essay for TAGSCAPE. She is an artist film-maker whose research centres around subjectivity and place, embodiment and technological mediation, from feminist perspectives, with an interest in the interface between still and moving image, and expanded cinema. She also curates programmes of artists' moving image, for screening in the gallery and cinema, and on fixed and mobile urban screens.

TAGSCAPE would not have been possible to undertake without the **Leverhulme Trust Residency** award. It is with a special thanks that such an award exists.

The workshop(s) session and exhibition at the 'Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)' would not have been possible without the support of the society and funding from Affinity. Thank you.

We would also like to thank all those people who have given support and time to help make this project work. Particularly:

**Dr Victor Abbott, Dr Paul Lunt, Mike Lawson-Smith, Mr Paul Ramsay, Dr Kayla Parker, Dr Katharine Willis**  
(Plymouth University staff)

**Ahmed Alboabidallah, Paul Aldersley, Cole Collier, Ryan Putt, Beth Harry, Adam Guy, Rebecca Shellock**  
(Plymouth University students)

**The late Pip Richards, and her husband Joe Fenn**  
(Sustrust director and manager)

**Tim Powles**  
(Forestry Commission)

**Roger English**  
(AONB)

**Maria Bailey**  
(YHA)

**Jason Parsons**  
(Truro and Penwith College)

**Andy Hughes**  
(Artist)

**Colin French**  
(West Cornwall BSBI Vice-county Recorder)

**Anna Kruger**  
(Editor)

**Dave Davies**  
(Sustrans)

**Dave Readman**  
(CoTna)

**Oliver Raymond-Barker**  
(Photographer)

**Shelley Castle**  
(Artist)

**Sara Nicholas**  
(Writer)

**Xander Berkeley**  
(Royal Parks)

**Royal College of Art**

