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"Ideology, Bureaucracy and Aesthetics: Landscape Change and Land Reform in Northwest Scotland"

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Scottish devolution and land reform were high on the political agenda with Labour's victory at the general election in 1997. In the Highlands of Scotland, where disputes over the ownership and control of land have a long history, initiatives involving the community ownership of land were gathering pace, one of which was Orbost Estate in Skye. What began as an 'experiment' in building a new community with the intention of creating a model for land reform, by 2002 had become a symbol of community opposition and heavy-handed mismanagement by bureaucrats. The conflict between local objectors and the government-funded enterprise company that bought the estate, was fought on ideological, aesthetic and bureaucratic grounds. The discourse of conflict reflected opposing understandings of the social, historical and cultural environment - values that are associated with and 'naturalised' in the landscape. Rural development is increasingly subject to rigid planning guidelines based on notions of visual landscape aesthetics and imputed historical-cultural values associated with the area's tourist industry. In the absence of strong local democratic institutions, objectors and developers arrived at an uneasy compromise after several years of dispute, through the agency of the bureaucratic planning apparatus itself. This study illustrates how the multi-faceted concept of landscape mediates cultural, social and political issues, and is continually evolving in response to aesthetic, ideological and institutional agencies.
— Text from The White Horse Press website

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