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The politics of interdependence in community-led landscape restoration

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growth of geographies of landscape restoration in Europe, the extent to which it provides livelihoods for local communities remains unclear. This article argues that landscape restoration constitutes a strategy of livelihood when enacted by place-based communities. Using an ecological livelihood framework and ethnographic fieldwork, this article explores a case of community-led landscape restoration transitioning a landscape degraded by industrial forestry to an ecologically diverse and resilient one. By being attentive to relations of interdependence, it illuminates the micro-politics, everyday practices and more-than-human relations that sustain and shape the restoration process. It reveals landscape restoration as a pragmatic strategy to address environmental vulnerability, disrupt dominant land use and imaginaries, and sustain the more-than-economic life of the community. The article suggests that practicing landscape restoration from a minor position of power requires translocalising the transformation of place and enlisting more-than-humans in the life project of the community.

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Introduction

The community of Froxán (Lousame, Galicia, NW Spain) is restoring 100 hectares of common land, transforming it from industrial timber plantations and abandonment into a communal, diverse, and resilient landscape. In May 2016, a forest fire came dangerously close to the village. While some suspected arson, most residents agreed the fire's speed and intensity were fuelled by planted and feral eucalyptus trees. The threat of losing their homes created a collective sense of fear. 'Once you see the wolf's ears, you decide you have to act,' said one resident, recalling how the trauma sparked a realisation: the plantation landscape had to be undone for the village's survival.

Landscape restoration is broadly defined as the repair of degraded ecosystems[1]. In Europe, it has become mainstream. EU laws, directives and funds aim to restore large areas of land and sea (European Commission, 2024). Meanwhile, a multi-million-euro nature-finance industry has emerged, linking land to financial instruments to generate ecosystem services through nature-based solutions and emissions offsets (Bertels et al., 2023; Davies et al., 2021; UNEP, n.d.). In development, livelihood and conservation programs in the Global South it is generally

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accepted that local communities are active participants and beneficiaries in the restoration process (Fischer, 2021; Fischer et al., 2023; Govindarajulu et al., 2023; Mansourian & Sgard, 2021). However, in Europe, where de-agrarianisation and depeasantisation are less of a process and more of a *fait acompli*, how landscape restoration might constitute a form of livelihood for local communities remains contested.

The case of Froxán highlights a dimension of landscape restoratio where place-based people initiate, lead and implement the transformation of their surrounding landscape to restore, generate and localise ecological, social, cultural, and economic relations between people and the environment. I refer to this as *community-led landscape restoration*[2].

The question of livelihood is central to the agrarian urbanisation debate, as new urbanities reshape agrarian spaces and the livelihoods of their inhabitants (Balakrishnan & Gururani, 2021; Bertuzzo, 2023; Ghosh & Meer, 2021; McGee, 2022). Despite varying theoretical approaches and vernaculars (see Introduction of this Special Issue), the focus remains on new urban forms and shifting urban-agrarian livelihoods—known as differential outcomes of the urban political project. Agrarian studies scholars argue this view can obscure the relational dimensions of livelihood and other political projects resisting or engaging with urbanisation (Gillen et al., 2022; Paprocki, 2020). In this article, I take the words and actions of those practicing community-led landscape restoration as my starting point. I approach the process not as a technical or ecological intervention, but as a situated socio-political one that, through disruption and maintenance, rearticulates diverse human and more-than-human communities.

This article draws on four years of sustained engagement with residents of Froxán and fieldwork conducted in the Lousame area (2022–2024). I employed a grounded theory approach to ethnographic fieldwork, using walking and talking, and semi-structured interviews ($n = 26$) to develop a relational understanding of landscape restoration. Relationality invites us to understand it as an emergent and dynamic process shaped by the voluntary and involuntary participation of multiple beings, historically situated socio-ecological relations and the rhythms of vegetal growth, rather than the outcome of a planned process. My engagement extended to individuals from neighbouring villages, non-profit organisations, volunteers, government officials, and forestry industry representatives. Additionally, I participated in four collective actions—tree clearing and planting events organised by Froxán residents. These experiences provided a grounded perspective on the practices, values, and meanings produced through restoration. I focused on how different social groups and more-than-human beings engage and are engaged in the process by attending to the micro-politics and structural forces shaping them.

In this article, I ask, how might community-led landscape restoration be a form of livelihood when enacted by place-based communities? This requires situating what it means to `restore' in Froxán in relation to the historic operationalisation of the commons for industrial forestry and the socio-political dimension of environmental struggle. Next, to highlight the ambiguous notion of livelihood within restoration discourses as they are increasing entangled with the urban political projects. Acknowledging the lack of direct economic rational in community-led landscape restoration, I propose viewing them through the prism of ecological livelihood, to render visible the more-than-economic and more-than-human articulations at play. Finally, I present three moments of ecological livelihood to reveal the way negotiating difference, participation and attentiveness to more-than-humans constitute strategies of disruption of the plantation economy and maintenance of the community in response to environmental vulnerability.

Industrial forestry in the commons

To understand the political basis of the landscape restoration of the Froxán Commons we must first understand how an agrarian common came to be operationalised to produce industrial timber.

Froxán is a village of 23 inhabitants. Surrounding its tightly clustered houses and private parcels and stretching to the ridge of the mountain is the *Monte Vecinal en Mano Común*[3] of Froxán (MVMC, or simply *monte*[4]) a distinct Galician commons property regime. A *monte* cannot be sold or divided, and *comuneiro* (commoner) status is tied to village residency. Not all residents are commoners; each household designates one representative to the *monte's* decision-making assembly. Traditionally, a *monte* sustained agrarian communities practicing subsistence agriculture and silvo-pastoralism and contained multifunctional woodlands that supplemented peasant livelihoods (Balboa, 1990; Bouhier, 1979; Díaz-Geada, 2020). Attempts to enclose *montes* occurred throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The Liberal State[5] nullified their status and sought to privatise them. In Froxán, the British-owned *San Finx Tin Mines Ltd.* (San Fins mine) partially expropriated the commons for tin and tungsten mining until the 1990s. Under Franco's dictatorship (1939–1975), the *Plan General de Repoblación Forestal de España* (General Reforestation Plan of Spain) effectively expropriated *montes* to bolster an autarchic forest replanting policy to supply industrial growth (López & González, 2002; Soto Fernández, 2014).

From the 1950s, economic liberalisation led to a major reorganisation of Galician territory. U.S. aid accelerated agricultural industrialisation, concentrating crop, livestock, and dairy production, deterritorializing facilities, and sharply reducing rural labour needs (Esperante Paramos, 2020; González de Molina et al., 2019). The *Plan de Estabilización*[6] (Stabilisation Plan) of 1959 fostered the growth of the A Coruña–Vigo coastal urban agglomeration and inland urban nuclei, concentrating investment, industry, and services. The double demographic phenomena led to a collapse of the agrarian socio-economic structures of the *monte* and sharp rural decline (Rodríguez González, 1997). It is at this point that agrarian uses of the *monte* had to increasingly compete with the development and spread of industrial forestry (Cidrás, 2022a; Ortuño, 1990). As rural economies collapsed, forestry policy promoted tree planting as a poverty alleviation strategy, encouraging peasants to plant Pine (*Pinus sylvestris, P. pinaster and P. radiata*) and later Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus and,* more recently, *E. nitens*). Today the previously grazed hills are covered with dense tree plantations. The predominance of pine and eucalyptus for industrial production has led to characterising Galicia's forests as extractive monocultures.

Protest and resistance from peasant communities over reforestation, access to resources and livestock led to a successful restitution of the status of the *montes* under the *Ley 52/1968, de 27 de julio, sobre montes vecinales en mano común (*Law of the common lands). However, by the 1970s, the *montes* had been significantly altered. As Soto Fernández (2016) suggest, the law changed the logic of the commons from a space of collective but unequal use to one of egalitarian use, stating 'a law which attempted to recreate a traditional common, but ended up creating a common that never existed' (p. 114). Additionally, the law aimed to legislate the *montes* as exploitable assets by the *Administración Forestal del Estado* (State Forestry Administration).

In Galicia, eucalyptus, more than pine, has been the source of protracted socio-environmental conflict, whose plantation and feral form have been characterised as 'invasive' (Carballada & Logroño, 2016; Cidrás & González-Hidalgo, 2022; Merino & Gil, 2023; Rivera, 2011). Although contested, 'invasiveness' refers to its origin, its perceived behaviour as a fast-spreading tree causing environmental damage (forest fires, soil erosion, water consumption and biodiversity loss), and its management, often associated with the concentrated power of industrial pulping companies and government mismanagement of the territory[7]. Eucalyptus accounts for 27% of Galicia's 1.5 million hectares of forest cover. Most timber is purchased by ENCE Energía y Celulosas S. A. to be processed in its cellulose pulping plant in Pontevedra for export (ENCE, n.d.).

Froxán is at the forefront of 'De-eucalyptisation'[8], a Galician environmental movement against eucalyptus and the timber pulping companies through its elimination in the *montes*. They developed a model of citizen participation where volunteers known as the *brigadas deseucaliptizadoras*, or de-eucalyptising brigades (*brigadas* for short), assist local communities in eliminating and controlling the spread of eucalyptus and other invasive species such as acacia *(Acacia dealbata and A. melanoxylon)* (Cidrás & González-Hidalgo, 2022; Evans Pim, 2020; Verdegaia, n.d.).

In Galicia, 97.3% of forest space is privately owned, a third of which is managed under the MVMC system (Bastida et al., 2021). In the Lousame area, a municipality within the coastal urban agglomeration, most working-age adults are employed in the secondary or tertiary sectors. Few in the *monte* depend economically on forestry from the commons[9]. Of the six *montes* in Lousame I engaged with, none distributed profits from forestry to commoners due to marginal surpluses after taxes and maintenance costs for land, water, and roads—commoners instead receive residual firewood. These communities delegate management to third-party contractors or ENCE to plant, clean, and harvest the plantations in exchange for rent or a share of profit[10]. 'Cleaning' is a major preoccupation. Every 1–2 years, the commons must be cleared of underbrush, feral eucalyptus and acacia, especially on unproductive or hard-to-access sites. Feral weeds increase the risk of fire and soil erosion putting the life of residents and the plantation at risk. Hiring contractors to 'clean' the land can be costly when multiplied by tens or hundreds of hectares and can quickly exhaust a *monte's* budget[11].

In response to the forest fire, the community of Froxán decided to phase out the plantation, eliminate eucalyptus and acacia, plant slow-growing native deciduous trees and restore landscape features to improve water retention of the soil and protect against future fires. The goal is to direct ecosystem successions towards a mosaic of peatland, heath and climax forest[12]. Beyond the ecological goals, restoration can be understood as a long-term vision of socio-ecological transformation:

- Communal: To extend political participation to all residents, not just those with legal commoner status.
- Diverse: For the commons to host diverse ecosystems and support a range of social, cultural, and economic activities.
- Resilient: To create a self-regulating landscape that can withstand environmental shocks, reduce high-input maintenance, and disrupt dependence on the plantation economy by developing alternative land-management practices and sources of livelihood.

Restoration is a strategy to sustain the life of a community over multiple generations and counter the trend of rural decline. By removing the commons as a source of rent and a mode of production for capitalist accumulation for the timber industry, the community of Froxán is re-orienting the landscape and the embedded social relations to a site of reproduction, not of the plantation, but of material and immaterial stock of the community through a symbiotic relation with other life-forms.

Theorising landscape restoration as livelihood

Landscape restoration practices and sites of restoration are entangled with urbanisation. Under neoliberalism, ecosystems and biodiversity are increasingly being integrated into the flow of capital through financialisation and valuation (Adams, 2017; Apostolopoulou et al., 2014; Büscher et al., 2014; Heynen & Robbins, 2005; Kenis & Lievens, 2015; Masquelier, 2017). Payment for ecosystem services, nature-based solutions and carbon sequestration schemes offset industrial and urban emissions by funding restoration elsewhere (Apostolopoulou, 2020). Scholars have drawn attention to the unequal power dynamics of restoration resulting from the growing role of large institutional and philanthropic actors and the application of technology for measuring

nature capital (Holmes, 2024; Stanley, 2024). Geographies of restoration represent a fertile ground for examining the 'urbanisation of nature' as agrarian spaces are transformed by metabolic flows of networks, resources, scientific expertise, multi-scalar governance and capital (Kaika, 2005). At the same time, they are place-specific sites of transformation and political contestation as people and non-humans are 'collectively caught up within fields of power' (Barua, 2014, p. 916). Landscape restoration 'remakes socio-natures' (Apostolopoulou, 2020, p. 324) and has the potential for a productive exchange between critical conservation studies and critical urban studies.

In Europe, livelihood is frequently enumerated as a socio-economic benefit of restoration, but unlike biodiversity or climate mitigation, it is the least defined outcome. This might be the result of inconsistent or absent monitoring (Brooks & Guth, 2020), but the question might be livelihood for whom? Social science perspectives on restoration schemes reveal how different groups are bundled into the designation of 'local communities' as stakeholders (Holmes et al., 2022; Keulartz, 2009; Toth et al., 2020). This flattening obscure the diversity of stakeholders, unequal power relations and their variegated capacity to generate livelihood from a transformed landscape. Others highlight that considerations for local communities remains discursive and performative reinforcing the view that restoration schemes are outside impositions benefiting others (Fleischman et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2021; Toth et al., 2020). Martin et al. (2021), insightfully show how rewilding schemes in Scotland implicitly project transient visitors and outside investment as the end users and beneficiaries of landscape restoration rather than local communities. Instead, the benefits are narrowly extended to those with property rights and capital to tap into new markets. Despite geographical proximity, local communities, most of whom do not work or own the landscape, remain disarticulated from it. Livelihood is a projected, if not uncertain and uneven, outcome of a mediated process.

In community-led landscape restoration, lack of access and capital prevent local communities from directly generating economic livelihood from the asset of land. In Froxán, commoners have some rights to the commons, but not everyone is a commoner and individuals cannot act unilaterally. Permissions are negotiated. Moreover, local communities with no formal bundle of rights lack the recognition given to private landowners, state actors or scientific experts to access nature finance schemes and protected status. Community-led landscape restoration operates from a *minor position of power* that diminishes the immediate economic rational. Unlike top-down restoration schemes, it appears as a counter-hegemonic project of defence of place rather than delivering ecological gains through technical goals or financial incentive (Bathla, 2024). Livelihood, in this case might be less about 'making a living' by leveraging different forms of capital to secure subsistence (De Haan, 2012; Scoones, 1998; Turner, 2017) and more about leveraging power to address environmental vulnerability and meaningful engagement with the world (Bebbington, 1999; Blaikie & Brookfield, 2015).

Instead, I propose community-led landscape restoration are sites of *ecological livelihood*[13] in which the economic dimension of the landscape and the practices enacted by groups are repositioned as a set of ecological relations with other human and more-than-human communities (Gibson-Graham & Miller, 2015; Miller, 2014). Ecological livelihood, as a framework de-centres capitalocentric relations in favour of non-market relations by drawing attention to practices of negotiation, participation, re-evaluation of patterns of consumption and production. A key concept, *interdependence*, positions those making a living in relation to other human and non-human life projects and highlights their articulation through dependency and reciprocity. Miller (2014), suggests that ecological livelihood is continuously co-constituted by making a living, having a living made for us by others, and making livings for others (p. 22). Landscapes, like livelihoods, are relational and come into being through a confluence of more-than-human relations and bio-politics, political economies of power and capital (Barua, 2014; Paprocki, 2021; Tsing, 2005). Ecological livelihood's consideration for the more-than-humans echoes Barua's formulation of landscapes as the 'dwelt achievements of people and animals' (Barua, 2014). However, rather than knowing the

landscape as an assemblage of human and more-than-human projects, ecological livelihood is best understood as an 'ethical practices of habitat maintenance' to 'build the resilience of more than human community economies' (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016, p. 6). This suggests, a sensuous process of environment making grounded in everyday practices (Loftus, 2012). People remain central as 'intentional, *political* actors' (Büscher & Fletcher, 2020) animated by imaginaries, politics and values while recognising their dependence on more-than humans.

Like restoration ecology, community-led landscape restoration is a disturbance. A deliberate disturbance of existing land use and hegemonic political projects by those who inhabit the landscape. It is 'sites of struggle for many ways of being, human and nonhuman' (Tsing, 2017). Altering the landscape as livelihood means altering the relations embedded in it 'as experimental and concrete utopia seeds' (Monte-Mór & Limonad, 2023, p. 70). One resident of Froxán described the plantation as a substrate to be excavated. Restoration, then, involves unearthing existing systems, practices, and features that have been disrupted while simultaneously generate new ones to navigate uncertain futures. In the following sections, I will present three strategies of ecological livelihood to explore the emergent politics of interdependence in community-led landscape restoration.

Practicing ecological livelihood in community-led landscape restoration

Recognising dependency and negotiating difference

The imminent risk of fire dislocated the timber plantation as the dominant economic relation and land use of the commons. Residents recognized their dependence on the landscape as a space of *life*, protecting and providing shelter, property, water, and energy.

The initial transformations were driven by self-interest, with funds from the Froxán Commons used to hire contractors for the de-eucalyptisation and restoration work. The community adopted a gradual, patchwork approach, phasing out plantations and intervening as funds allow. 'Unlike other projects we do not have two million euros to do everything all at once' remarks one resident. Early interventions included planting a chestnut tree, fire barrier on the most fire-prone flank. Large areas were cleared with heavy machinery. Parcels are either allowed to regenerate or replanted with species like chestnut, oak birch, wild cherry or sycamore. In 2018, they restored Campo de Lamas, a peat-bog drained for pine afforestation in the 1970s. Concrete fire water reservoirs were repaired or added and additional catchment areas were carved into the slopes.

From the start, opinions on how much the landscape should change remained contested. Some residents focused solely on preventing future fires, while others sought more extensive transformation and the opportunity to experiment with different land management practices, social and cultural activities, sources of energy and income. They might not share 'a common-being' on how they value the landscape or the extent and trajectory of its transformation. Instead, they share the limits of their commonality (Miller, 2013, p. 521): the need to protect their capacity to stay in place.

To overcome this split, the latter group of residents created Fundación Montescola, a non-profit organisation, as a legal entity to receive grant funding and hold assets. The organisation hosts activities in Froxán that the assembly is reluctant or unable to implement such as *brigadas*, forest schools or restoring the ruin of a mining forge. Despite these differences, their activities overlap in mutually supportive ways with those of the assembly. The work of members of Fundación Montescola reduces the cost to the Froxán Commons by contributing additional resources through grants and collaborations. The assembly is more likely to accept less 'necessary' or more 'experimental' proposals under such circumstances. This work is undertaken by a minority of individuals and is entirely voluntary, unpaid and at no expense to the assembly. A peatbog restoration, information placards, restoring abandoned buildings and land maintenance work have been funded in whole or in part by the work of Fundación Montescola. A faction of residents leverages the

social surplus of their voluntary work to simultaneously build capacity and access to the landscape, advance a more ambitious agenda and sustain the maintenance of the commons.

Collective action

The terrain and the resprouting abilities of eucalyptus and acacia complicate the restoration process. Steep sections land or lack of access make machinery difficult to use. In many parts, the common land features a dense underbrush of mixed native and invasive trees, requiring more delicate interventions. Hiring contractors to clean the land is costly as eucalyptus and acacia regrow rapidly in disturbed areas. Once a tree is one to two years old, it cannot simply be uprooted by hand. Cutting or breaking the tree is not an option as multiple saplings will grow out of a stump left in the ground. Once an area has been left to regenerate, it is no longer desirable to uproot the stumps with large machinery at the risk of compressing the soil and damaging recovering ecosystems. Without consistent, widespread action on the entirety of the commons, progress can be quickly undone.

Instead, some work must be done manually. Young acacia is eliminated by debarking and left to dry for several months before cutting it down. For young and adult eucalyptus, the trunk is cut close to the ground, and the stump is smashed with the blunt side of an axe to facilitate fungi colonisation and prevent regrowth. In practice, these techniques are labour intensive, repetitive and tedious. Under such conditions, the community is faced with the challenge of sustaining the maintenance over time from the quick proliferation of undesirable trees.

To overcome this obstacle, they have turned to collective action. In 2017, Froxán residents partnered with the local environmental group Verdegaia to launch the *brigadas* for clearing and planting trees on the Froxán Commons. The first action was a success and calls were repeated. Since, there have been over a hundred *brigadas* on parcels ranging from half to a few hectares. The post-action meals are paired with lectures, workshops, discussions, and artistic performances which address political and environmental issues[14].

Froxán residents emphasised that the *brigadas* initial success and ongoing momentum were crucial for the longevity of the restoration effort. One resident noted that without the *brigadas*, they would have achieved only a fraction of their goals, and some feared a loss of momentum could have halted the project altogether. *Brigadas* volunteers contribute their labour, tools, chainsaws, and their expertise, but how might roxá's dependence on them be reciprocal? Diego Cidrás (2022b), a geographer and *brigadas* volunteer, conducted a study which found that two-thirds of *brigadas* participants are 'non-rural' in origin, coming from urban or peri-urban areas in Galicia and have diverse degrees of linkages to agrarian and forest spaces (Cidrás, 2022b). Speaking to the volunteers, it is common to hear that despite living in cities or towns, they own parcels of forest or might have a relationship to a *monte*. Volunteers added that the *brigadas* allowed them to learn and practice land management and invasive species removal techniques which they could deploy on their land or translate back into the negotiations with their own communities.

Volunteers enter the *brigadas* in diverse ways. Many said they initially joined out of curiosity after reading an article in a local newspaper, others entered through prior involvement in regional activism or word of mouth. Regardless of their backstory, enough volunteers repeatedly attend the calls for action that lasting social bonds are formed between them. Over the three *brigadas* attended; I observed a core group of 'repeat' participants. Conversations with members of Verdegaia and Fundación Montescola confirmed that many of them are present at multiple actions a year, and many did not know each other before. At a 2024 *brigada*, out of about thirty volunteers less than a third were first time attendees. Several participants said that the *brigadas* led them to create their own environmental initiatives. A group from the province of Ourense started their own *desacaciación* (de-acaciasation) brigade (Asociación Veciñal de Lentille, n.d.). A couple from Santiago de Compostela had recently started a foundation focusing on

rural land restoration. In sum, the *brigadas* not only form meaningful moments of encounter for volunteers but also build horizontal networks of environmental action across Galicia.

Conversations with *brigadas* volunteers highlight the political nature of their participation. Participants expressed their `alignment' with Froxán's struggle against eucalyptus and other invasive species. Participants from different origins and occupation revealed their own lived interactions with the 'forest space' in its plantation or feral form. A worker at a local natural park mentioned they witnessed how a lack of action had led to the spread of acacia. Another said the encroachment of forest fires to urban areas where they lived made them more aware of the risk invasive species posed to the territory. Several volunteers who had been attending since 2018, echoed Cidrás's findings that the physical action of clearing and planting offered a rare opportunity to engage in tangible action where they could 'witness the outcome and change overtime.' As Cidrás (2022b) points out, volunteers are motivated to participate as a response to the political and structural factors that affect the forest space (p. 8) rather than high-level ones like climate change and biodiversity loss. The *brigadas* are embodied, collective and repeated acts of landscape restoration motivated by political action rooted in a shared environmental struggle. During the *brigadas*, Froxán is being-made by the voluntary labour of others and makes a living for other humans (the volunteers) and non-human communities (new ecological communities).

Biodiversity

In making a living through arboreal politics, the community of Froxán is making-others as new animal and floral species find ecological communities, shelter, and sustenance in the transformed landscape. On walks through the commons, my attention is drawn to animals and plants we encounter. An Iberian frog (*Rana Iberica*), listed as Vulnerable, jumps into a pile of recently cut eucalyptus wood. 'Are they rare?' I ask a resident. 'Not in Froxán, but they are on the protected species list,' they reply.

Froxán appears to host variety of rare, mysterious and spectacular biodiversity. Flora, as bio-cultural indicators, mark the perimeter of a recently uncovered Bronze Age dry stone wall (Grove et al., 2020). Luminescent moss *Schistostega pennata* thrives in the troglophilic habitats of caves and abandoned mines tunnels. A report by Fundación Montescola identified two new *Schistostega pennata* locations in Froxán, bringing the total known sites in the Iberian Peninsula to 75. Another report identifies four bat species: *Rhinolophus hipposideros*, *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, *Myotis bechsteinii*, and *Barbastella barbastellus*, with *Myotis bechsteinii* highlighted for special conservation interest. In 2022, Froxán withdrew hunting rights from the hunting society, exercising its right of exclusion. A 2023 wildlife study carried out with trap cameras captured other visitors and dwellers: the Iberian wolf (*Canis lupus signatus*), a breeding pair of roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), an abundant presence of wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), badgers (*Meles meles*), woodpeckers (*Genetta genetta*), weasels (*Mustela nivalis*), ferrets (*Mustela putorius*), foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) and herons (*Martes foina*). According to Fundación Montescola, de-eucalyptisation decreases wildlife on agricultural land by creating habitat and ecological corridors. Throughout the commons, information placards explain the fauna and flora promoted by each restoration effort. An ongoing project to build a community conservation centre plans to engage the broader regional community, linking cultural heritage with education on restoration and biodiversity.

Fundación Montescola credits *conservación comunitaria* (community conservation) for promoting and protecting 'high-value biodiversity'[15]. It refers to local, volunteer-driven restoration efforts and advocates for greater community autonomy over the landscape, integrating situated knowledge, cultural values, scientific expertise, and participatory decision-making. Its goal is to safeguard ecological processes and enhance resilience to environmental change for both humans and non-humans. The political basis of community conservation is grounded in a historical connexion to the commons as much as it is in contemporary global biodiversity discourses.

Since 2017, Froxán is listed as Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCA Consortium, 2018) and on the World Database on Protected Areas. While these designations link cultural practices with nature protection and connect Froxán to the global biodiversity network, they do not confer legal protection or benefits. Like other community-led landscape restoration initiatives, Froxán lacks a recognised environmental status that could provide legal protection or access to larger, more stable funding streams[16].

What is important, is that Froxán chooses to make biodiversity visible and known. Building long-term, reciprocal collaborations with scientists has been crucial to translate situated knowledge into scientific research, legitimising their claims of community conservation. Scientists I spoke with shared the politics of Fundación Montescola, offering their time, resources, and assistance in applying for small grants. In exchange, they gain access to the landscape to gather data and educate students. The Froxán Commons and Fundación Montescola are in the process of applying for protected area status under the *Espazo Privado de Interese Natural* (Private Space of Natural Interest) to establish specific land regulations and prevent destructive activities in the protected area. If successful, it would be a powerful example of feedback between the making of habitat for more-than-humans and securing protections and opportunities to sustain the life project of the community.

Conclusion

At a territorial level, developments in Froxán have implications for other communities and local livelihoods. Fundación Montescola, collaborates with surrounding *montes*, is in an ongoing legal battle against the San Fins mine to prevent the illegal contamination of a nearby river. Their efforts have gained support from shellfish gatherers in the productive Noia estuary. Froxán and Fundación Montescola are part of a growing network of *montes* developing ecologically diverse and socially dynamic land management models (Barbanza Ecosocial Lab, 2022; Martínez, 2020).

How might community-led landscape restoration constitute a form of livelihood? In Froxán, it is a place-based strategy to disrupt and rearticulate socio-ecological relations towards other possible futures. As I have shown, restoration starts from a place of pragmatic self-interest to address concrete challenges but extends to the more-than-economic life of the community by embedding social, cultural and political values (Huron, 2018). Doing landscape restoration from a minor position of power is contingent on recognising and cultivating interdependence with diverse communities, human or otherwise. Interdependence is not just an acknowledgement of altruistic reciprocity, but a way of building 'bundles of power' to access the landscape and derive benefits from it (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Expanding the boundary of the community by opening the restoration process to the participation of others sustains this process over time.

Perhaps interdependence relies, in part, on practices which translocalise the transformation of place (Escobar, 2001; Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013). Framing landscape restoration as an act of everyday environmental struggle against the structural causes of degradation builds meaningful urban-agrarian linkages across diverse groups with differential experiences of the same phenomena. Being attentive to more-than-human dwellers of the landscape and enlisting them as biodiversity projects them into global networks, provides fruitful collaborations and opportunities to promote and protect the community.

The existence of commons in Galicia is unique, but the developments in Froxán offer generalisable lessons for landscape restoration elsewhere. It invites us to think about 'community' as an emergent formation entangled with the process and hinging on irreducible differences and intersecting life projects between more-than-human communities. Participatory strategies, like collection action, are transferable but must be grounded in localised socio-spatial politics to avoid being tokenistic and short-lived. Community-led landscape restoration offers a potent counter-narrative in which diverse 'publics' across urban and agrarian spaces become active co-producers of emancipatory landscape futures.

Notes

1. I define landscape restoration as an expanded view of ecological restoration, recognizing it as a dynamic, landscape-level process shaped by negotiations among diverse groups, competing interests, and multi-scalar institutions (Higgs, 2003; Holl et al., 2003; Mansourian, 2018; SER, n.d.).
2. Community-led landscape restoration is a conceptual framework I propose to analyse bottom-up landscape restoration initiatives led by place-based groups in Europe. Unlike existing designations (Community-Based-Conservation, or Community-Based Natural Resource Management), it is not an expert-driven framework for integrating local communities into external agendas. These insights derive from engagement with four other cases in the United Kingdom, Portugal, and Georgia.
3. There are 2,800 MVMCs in Galicia, covering over 700,000 ha (7,000 km^2)—a quarter of the region's land (Xunta de, 2024). On average, each MVMC is 200 ha with 44 commoners (Galego, 2019).
4. In Galician, the *monte* refers to an elevated space historically planted and cultivated by peasants and integrated in agrarian socio-economic structures. I use the term here as a shorthand for *Monte Vecinal en Mano Común* as it is commonly used in the area.
5. The Liberal State (1812–1873) refers to a period in Spanish history marked by the transition from absolutism to liberalism. Key changes included the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, the dismantling of feudal privileges, and the confiscation of Church and noble lands (*Desamortización*). The liberal state also played a crucial role in the development of industrial forestry by promoting privatization, rational management of woodlands, and policies that facilitated timber production for infrastructure and industry.
6. The Stabilisation Plan of 1959 was a set of economic measures implemented by the Spanish government to shift away from autarky and liberalize the economy by opening the country to international trade and investment (Martínez-Ruiz & Pons, 2020).
7. The debate on eucalyptus as an alien invasive species (AIS) in Galicia is too extensive to discuss here. Diego Cidrás and Marien González-Hidalgo have explored this topic in depth, particularly regarding Froxán and de-eucalyptisation (Cidrás & González-Hidalgo, 2022).
8. In 2018, 'De-eucalyptisation' was voted word of the year by the Real Academia Galega reflecting 'the prominent growth of social concern regarding the management of the Galician *monte*' (Real Academia Galega, 2018). Diego Cidrás and others have written extensively about the different facets of de-eucalyptisation in Froxán, Galicia and the world (Cidrás, 2020; Cidrás et al., 2018; Cidrás & González-Hidalgo, 2022; Cidrás & Paül, 2022; Cidrás & Pauli, 2021).
9. This does not mean people do not rely on forestry for their livelihood. Many own lands dedicated to timber production or work in forestry-related industries.
10. Several factors influence the decision to delegate a *monte's* management, including an aging population, urban employment, time constraints, disinterest, and consensus.
11. According to commoners from different *montes* cost estimates varied from €350 to €1400 per hectare depending on the task and the complexity of the site.
12. A climax forest is a mature, self-sustaining ecosystem at the final stage of succession, dominated by long-lived trees. Dense canopies block sunlight, limiting undergrowth and shaping cooler, moisture conditions below.
13. *Ecological livelihood* comes from the political discourse of community economies by articulating economic interdependence as a basis for counter-hegemonic alternatives (Gibson-Graham, 2007). By resocializing economic relations and emphasizing ethical decision-making, this perspective foregrounds non-capitalist practices alongside wage labour, markets, and capitalist enterprises (Gibson-Graham, 2007, p. 88).
14. The collective actions are framed by residents of Froxán as an adaptation and revival of the ancestral practice of *Roga e Albaroque*, in which an informal feast and festivities are exchanged for voluntary work on the *monte* (Cidrás et al., 2018; Evans Pim, 2020).
15. These policy terms describe areas with high biodiversity, valuable habitats for species, and ecosystems rich in potential for generating ecosystem services.
16. For example, NATURA 2000 site are legally protected by EU Law, such as the Birds Directives and Habitat Directives. These designations limit land use but also provides financial support for conservation efforts through programs like LIFE and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

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Ethical approval

Prior and informed consent was obtained by the author from the research participants during the study. Participants were briefed by the author on the goals, outcomes, and methods of the study; informed that their participation was voluntary; and that their identities will be anonymised.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Generative AI tools disclosure

The author used ChatGPT (GPT-4-turbo) and Microsoft Co-pilot for language improvement.

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Data availability statement

There is no data available.

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