

The Rattlin' Bog

The role of cultural values in discourse around peatland use in Ireland

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Lund University Centre for
Sustainability Studies



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Abstract

Ireland is reducing its reliance on turf (peat fuel), as draining peatlands for fuel-harvest impacts biodiversity and global warming. Turf-cutting is a historically important practice in Ireland, with many relying on it for fuel and employment. This study examines the role of cultural values in discourse around peatland use in Ireland, to support a Just Transition away from a reliance on peat. This was done using Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate discourse on a pro-turf cutting Facebook page, and semi-structured interviews with peatland stakeholders. My findings show that turf-cutting is attached to a sense of Irish identity, and economic motivations are masked by more persuasive cultural arguments. Additionally, turf-cutting is linked to a knowledge hierarchy and power division between Dublin and rural Ireland. There is a need for economic support in the transition from peat-reliance, while fostering dialogue between different knowledge holders to support inclusive peatland management.

Keywords: turf-cutting, cultural practice, just transition, peatland conservation, digital ethnography, discourse analysis

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Abbreviations

IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
BNM	Bord na Móna
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
BCBAG	Barroughter and Clonmoylan Bogs Action Group

Níl aon tinteán mar do thinteán féin

There's no hearth like your own hearth

Irish proverb

1 Introduction

The Paris Agreement aims to limit global warming to a temperature increase of 1.5°C since pre-industrial times (van Vuuren et al., 2018). In their Sixth Assessment Report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) announced that every region faces severe impacts with each increment of global warming. Peatlands are carbon rich ecosystems which are at risk of becoming sources of atmospheric carbon, due to the impacts of climate change and drainage for human activity (Limpens et al., 2008). Though peatlands cover only 3% of the Earth's surface, they store approximately one third of the carbon stored globally in soils (Kiely et al., 2018). Almost 20% of the Republic of Ireland (henceforth Ireland) is made up of peatlands (Renou-Wilson & Byrne, 2015) and their restoration is central to Ireland's Climate Action Plan due to their role as carbon sinks and their impact on biodiversity (Department of the Environment Climate and Communications, 2022). However, peat extraction is of unique cultural importance and thus peatland management must be carefully approached by governing bodies (Flood, Mahon, & McDonagh, 2021).

Peatlands in Ireland have been vastly impacted by human activities, with less than 1% currently capable of carbon sequestration (Renou-Wilson et al., 2018). For centuries, Irish peatlands have been drained for agriculture, horticulture and fuel (Andersen et al., 2017). Primarily, peatlands have been extracted for peat: a source of solid fuel known colloquially as *turf* (Crushell, Connolly, Schouten, & Mitchell, 2008). The industrialisation of peat extraction in the 1940s provided rural Ireland with thousands of jobs (Kearns, 1978), and supported rural electrification through peat-fired power plants (Bullock, Collier, & Convery, 2012). Many people in Ireland continue to harvest peat for domestic use and a recent attempt by the government to impose a ban on the sale of turf was retracted due to political outcry (Burns, 2022). Varying policy attempts to reduce reliance on peat have been met with similar debate, and the designation of many peatlands as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) have turned peatlands into a site of conflict (Healy, 2020).

Given the importance of peatlands as ecosystems, and the significance of peat harvest (known as turf-cutting) to Irish culture, the government faces the difficulty of managing peatland conservation while

pursuing a *just transition*. A just transition is a concept receiving increasing global attention (Newell & Mulvaney, 2013), which involves state intervention to ensure “a fair and equitable process of moving towards a post-carbon society” (McCauley & Heffron, 2018, p. 2). At the core of a just transition is the move away from fossil-fuel dependency, while ensuring job security and energy and environmental justice (Healy & Barry, 2017). Ireland’s Climate Action Plan emphasises the need for a just transition, with a fund specifically focused on supporting the Midlands region (counties Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath) to transition away from a reliance on peat (Department of the Environment Climate and Communications, 2022). It is a commitment essential to ensure that individuals and communities do not disproportionately bear the weight of Ireland’s Climate Action Plan (Department of the Environment Climate and Communications, 2022).

1.1 Research aims and objectives

In my thesis, I aim to support Ireland’s pursuit of a just transition away from peat-reliance, by increasing understanding of the role of culture in the use of peatlands. To achieve this research aim, I seek to answer the following research question: *what is the role of cultural values in discourse around peatland use in Ireland?*

Understanding the interactions between nature and society is fundamental to sustainability science (Kates et al., 2001), and hence sustainability science should be transdisciplinary to bridge the gap between different sources of knowledge (Jerneck et al., 2011; Spangenberg, 2011). By engaging with different stakeholders of peatlands in Ireland, I aim to integrate academic and local sources of knowledge to answer my research question. Additionally, sustainability science is normative in that it seeks to achieve an optimal state for the society, economy and planet (Spangenberg, 2011), equally for the current and future generations (Jerneck et al., 2011). This aligns with my aim to increase knowledge in support of a just transition, which is similarly concerned with economic, social and environmental justice (Newell & Mulvaney, 2013).

Though this is not the first study to investigate discourses around peatland use in Ireland, it is the first to analyse the discursive role of culture in peatland use. Peatlands have predominantly been the research focus of ecologists and hydrologists (Evans, 2013). In Ireland, turf-cutting has been studied by occupational scientists who view it as a *wicked problem* due to the complex social issues attached to the practice (McGrath & McGonagle, 2016). In their research, McGrath and McGonagle (2016) found turf-cutting to be a meaningful practice which provides rural people in Ireland with a sense of

identity and improved wellbeing. Valuable research into discourses around peatland governance examines power struggles within participatory governance of peatlands in Ireland (O’Riordan, Mahon, & McDonagh, 2015; O’Riordan, McDonagh, & Mahon, 2019). Through discourse analysis, O’Riordan et al. (2015) demonstrated that the government prioritises science-based knowledge and exerts its policy dominance even in a participatory government forum. In addition, peatland regulation is undermined by local knowledge as a consequence of exclusionary, science-first conservation efforts (O’Riordan, McDonagh, & Mahon, 2016). Furthermore, Flood et al. (2021) have studied peatlands in Ireland as cultural ecosystem services. Through case studies of three conservation sites in Ireland, they found that peatlands serve communities through forming memories, identity, values and place-connections (Flood et al., 2021). I aim to contribute to this body of research by understanding the role of cultural values in discourse around peatland use in Ireland.

2 Background

2.1 Formation of peatlands

Peatlands broadly refer to landscapes made up of peat soils, but it is a term commonly used to refer to wetlands called *mires* (Evans, 2013). Mires can be further categorised into *bogs* (blanket or raised) and *fens* (Evans, 2013). Ireland's peatlands primarily consist of raised and blanket bogs (Bullock et al., 2012), and the term "bog" is often used interchangeably with "peatlands" in the media and literature. The formation of bogs occurs over the course of approximately 9000 years, when partly-decayed vegetation slowly fills post-glacial lakes (Long, Trafford, & Donohue, 2014). After approximately 2000 years, a fen is formed when the lake is almost entirely filled with peat soils fed by nutrient-rich groundwater (Long et al., 2014). Approximately 4000 years later, the fen becomes a bog, which grows upwards above the undecayed plant remains below (Renou-Wilson & Byrne, 2015). As it is now above groundwater, the bog is fed by rainwater and grows through the development of sphagnum mosses (Long et al., 2014). Sphagnum moss is a peat-producing species which is essential for the growth (and hence the restoration) of bogs (Robroek et al., 2009). Whereas raised bogs average about 6-7m deep, blanket bogs are shallower at an average 2.5m depth (Renou-Wilson & Byrne, 2015). Blanket bogs formed at least 4000 years ago (Connolly, Holden, Seaquist, & Ward, 2011), when the climate changed and heavy rainfall flushed nutrients deeper into the earth, creating an impermeable layer (O'Connell, Madigan, Whyte, & Farrell, 2021). This layer blocked access to groundwater and again the bog became fed by rainwater, primarily in areas averaging more than 225 days and 1200mm of rainfall per annum (Renou-Wilson & Byrne, 2015). Blanket bogs are the most common in Ireland and can be further grouped into Atlantic bogs along the West coast, and mountain blanket bogs in the Midlands (Renou-Wilson & Byrne, 2015).

2.2 Importance of bogs for biodiversity and carbon storage

Ireland's peatlands are diverse ecosystems and habitats for rare species. A total of 67 moth species have been identified on just six raised bogs in Ireland (Flynn, Griffin, Coll, & Williams, 2016), and over 130 macroinvertebrate species on three different bogs and fens (Hannigan & Kelly-Quinn, 2012). Additionally, bogs are breeding grounds for red listed bird species, such as curlews, snipe and Red Grouse (Bracken, McMahon, & Whelan, 2008; Gilbert, Stanbury, & Lewis, 2021). Thus, peatland conservation is important for biodiversity, to maintain the habitats of this large range of species.

Peatlands' ability to sequester carbon is of global importance, underlined by the IPCC's (2022) recent focus on restoring drained peatlands, which are natural carbon sinks (Limpens et al., 2008). However, when peatlands are drained for peat extraction or agriculture, they become sources of atmospheric carbon rather than carbon sinks (Holden, 2005). Beyond that burning peat fuel itself releases emissions, the degradation of peatlands can allow their large Carbon deposits, stored over millennia, to be emitted into the atmosphere (Limpens et al., 2008).

2.3 The bog: history, culture and governance

The turf-cutting industry in Ireland has been heralded as “a valuable source of indigenous energy”, by the cultural historian Kevin Kearns (1978, p. 179). Ireland's peatlands have been harvested since the Celtic times to collect turf for burning as fuel (Kearns, 1978) and for building turf-houses (Loveday, 2006). In 1934, the Turf Development Board was established to commercialise turf-cutting, which provided Ireland with fuel during World War II (Kearns, 1978). During this time, workers from across Ireland hand-cut turf to provide Dubliners with fuel, providing Ireland with a fuel sovereignty that helped the country survive “the Emergency” (Gill-Cummins, 2017). In 1946, the board was dissolved and became Bord na Móna (BNM), a semi-state company that further expanded the turf-cutting industry by providing milled peat for electricity generation in peat-burning power plants (Kearns, 1978). Industrialising turf-cutting placed Ireland on the electronic and metaphorical grid, supporting rural electrification and modernising the country (Bullock et al., 2012).

Alongside the economic benefits provided by turf-cutting, the bog provides unique cultural ecosystem services (Flood et al., 2021). Bord na Móna historically supported rural towns by employing young amateur athletes within the Gaelic Athletic Association, helping teams win and preventing the migration of young people in the 1980s (Rouse, 2018). Peatlands have long been written into Irish literature (O'Connor & Gearey, 2020) and history, preserving bog butter and Bog Bodies that provide valuable information to historians (Read & Bryan, 2021).

Turbary rights are traditional rights extending over centuries in Ireland, which allow turf-cutters the right to cut, prepare, store and carry away turf from a bog-land (Turbary Rights Order, 1951). Turbary rights do not imply, nor require, ownership of the land but simply provide the right to cut (but not sell) turf on a particular plot (O'Riordan et al., 2015). Under the EU Habitats Directive, 53 raised bogs have been designated as SACs since the 1990s (Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2018). The right to cut turf on these lands has thus been retracted, though turf-cutting has not stopped on

many SACs (Siggins, 2013). In January 2021, BNM announced the formal end to their peat harvesting, in response to a new regulation requiring planning permission for harvest on bogs over 30 hectares in size (Gleeson, 2021). The most recent attempt to reduce turf-cutting, by banning the sale of turf and allowing only those with turbary rights to continue, was met with public controversy and swiftly cancelled following political debate (Burns, 2022).

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Political ecology and peatland management

Political ecology provides a useful lens through which to understand the complex issue of governing Ireland's peatlands. It is a field which critiques apolitical assumptions about the relationship between society and the natural environment, deconstructing systems of power and knowledge hierarchies (Perreault, Bridge, & McCarthy, 2015). In contrast to (supposedly apolitical) ecology, political ecology views ecological systems as political because they are shaped by political, social and economic processes (Robbins, 2012). Hence it is normative, by aiming to understand the cause of environmental problems with an underlying assumption that there are "less exploitative, and more sustainable ways of doing things" (Robbins, 2012, p. 20).

Political ecology argues that the social impacts of conservation and protected areas must be carefully examined, as our understanding of nature, and thus conservation, is inherently political (Adams & Hutton, 2007). While protected areas are typically presented as the solution to a crisis caused by human excesses, they may impact local livelihoods negatively and serve capitalist purposes elsewhere (Büscher, Sullivan, Neves, Igoe, & Brockington, 2012). The power imbalances evident in such resource conflicts are analysed by political ecologists, who often focus on the relationship between the Global North and South (Ratamäki, Jokinen, Albrecht, & Belinskij, 2019). However, McCarthy (2002) demonstrates that political ecology can also usefully examine resource conflicts in contexts where political power is exerted over largely rural areas, characterising Ireland and the issue of peatland management.

In seeking to understand the political context surrounding environmental issues, political ecology is inherently linked with social constructivism which understands science to be politically and socially constructed through discourse (Forsyth, 2004). Forsyth (2004) emphasises, however, that political ecology does not imply that environmental knowledge is imagined, but rather that it must be understood through an analysis of its political implications and discursive formation. It follows that analysing discourse is central to understanding the hierarchies of power implicated in natural resource management and associated conflicts (Adger, Benjaminsen, Brown, & Svarstad, 2001).

3.2 Just transitions and political ecology

The concept of a just transition is central to Ireland's Climate Action Plan (Department of the Environment Climate and Communications, 2022), and is subsequently an important theoretical framework underlying my analysis of peatland management in Ireland. At its core, a just transition seeks to achieve a post-carbon society, by transitioning away from fossil-fuel use and industry while ensuring social and environmental justice (McCauley & Heffron, 2018). Peat is not a fossil fuel by definition, though it is considered as having fossil-fuel like emissions and qualities (Schilstra, 2001). Nonetheless, the concept of a just transition is important to reduce the social impacts of a transition away from peat-reliance in Ireland. It emphasises the need for sustainable jobs, through job security, retraining and financial support (Stevis & Felli, 2015).

Labour unions can be credited with the development of the concept, though a just transition relies on the state for support and success (Stevis & Felli, 2015). Political ecological critique of the just transition lies in this reliance on state support, as it is easily co-opted by governments that seek to maintain the capitalist political economy through market-based solutions (Bouzarovski, 2022). Despite this critique, political ecology can be an ally for the just transition as it critiques societal power-imbalances which may otherwise prevent a just transition (Stevis & Felli, 2015). Noticeably, Ireland's pursuit of a just-transition adopts what Stevis and Felli (2015) label a *differentiated responsibility approach*, as it emphasises the need for re-training and financial support (Department of the Environment Climate and Communications, 2022). However, as it is committed to using "the structures and responses already in place" (Department of the Environment Climate and Communications, 2022, p. 37), it is decidedly not transformative and thus currently not in accordance with a political ecological just transition (Stevis & Felli, 2015).

4 Methodology

To answer my research question, I used a mixed-methods qualitative approach with an emphasis on Critical Discourse Analysis. I collected *found* data and produced data, through the analysis of a public Facebook page and semi-structured interviews respectively. Found data are materials that already exist (Taylor, 2013). Operating within a social constructivist paradigm, interviewees are referred to as “participants” rather than “subjects”, to reflect that they are participating in the creation of data and are not having research done to them (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

4.1 Critical discourse analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach towards understanding the relationship between discourse and social phenomena (Fairclough, 2013). In this paper, I adopt Fairclough’s multi-dimensional framework, which explains discourse as the “process of social interaction” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 24). This interaction involves text production, interpretation and the social conditions surrounding these processes (Fairclough, 1989). The social context is considered to both shape discourse, and to be shaped by discourse (Fairclough, 1989). Hence, I have chosen to use CDA to understand how cultural values are used in discourse around peatland use in my chosen online and interview contexts. Rather than solely analysing text, CDA is critical by seeking to explore “connections which may be hidden from people – such as the connections between language, power and ideology” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 5). The interrogation of power structures aligns with my theoretical framework in Political Ecology. CDA is normative, by analysing realities according to values considered “fundamental for just or decent societies” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 9).

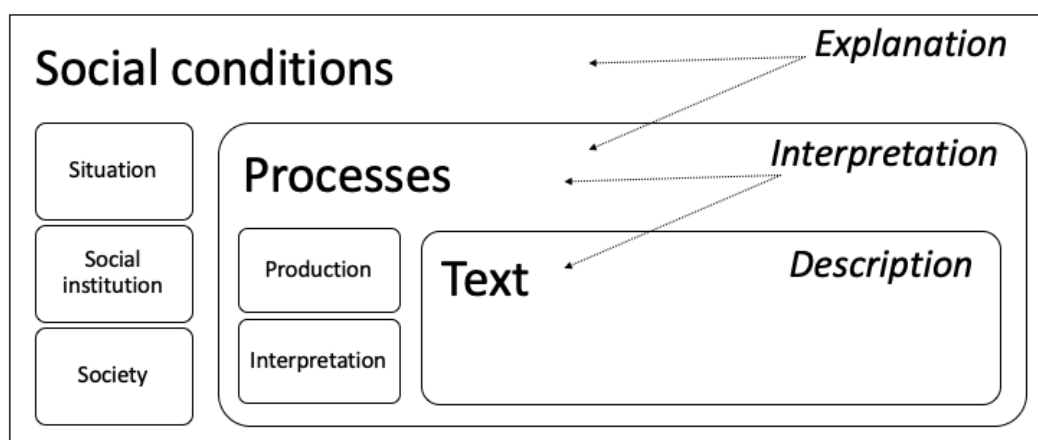


Figure 1. Multi-dimensional framework for CDA. Discourse as a social interaction is explained to the left, through the embedded text, processes, and social conditions. To the right, the italicised terms explain the related stages of CDA: description, interpretation and explanation. (Figure created by author, based on Fairclough, 1989).

Fairclough (1989) identifies three stages of CDA: description, interpretation, explanation (Figure 1). The *description* is the close analysis of the text itself, which is the product of the process of production. The *interpretation* stage involves analysing the text as the product of production and the resource for interpretation. The *explanation* stage analyses the relationship between the interpretation and the levels of social conditions (immediate social situation, social institution and society) (Fairclough, 1989). These three stages are not independent but are interlinked, and Fairclough (2004) emphasises that textual description should occur alongside social analysis and critique.

4.2 Netnography

A *netnography* is a form of ethnographic research carried out in an online space, which seeks to gain an insider's understanding of a culture (Rokka, 2010). Typically, ethnographies are both the research process and the resulting written study (O'Dell, 2017). To answer my research question, I employed netnographic methodologies on a public Facebook page that vocally supports the continued practice of turf-cutting.

4.2.1 Site of study: *Barraughter and Clonmoylan Bogs Action Group*

The *Barraughter and Clonmoylan Bogs Action Group* (BCBAG) (n.d.) is a public Facebook page, which I chose as the locus of my digital ethnographic study. This Facebook page is public, meaning that one does not need group membership to gain access but only a Facebook account. The BCBAG page was created on January 13, 2014 and is run by an administrator (or *admin*) who is unverified by Facebook and subsequently anonymous (as of May 3, 2022). The page has over 21,100 likes (as of May 8, 2022), indicating the number of Facebook users who may see the BCBAG posts on their "news feed" according to their personal algorithm (Dalsgaard, 2016). The page self-describes as follows: "We represent 900 families in the two bogs. We are community [*sic*] and voluntary organisation. Our motto is "Cut your turf and save your private bog"" (as of May 8, 2022). The content of the BCBAG page consists primarily of photographs and *memes* posted by the admin. Internet memes are "units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated and transformed by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience" (Shifman, 2013, p. 367). More than 7496 images have been posted by the admin to the page since its creation in 2014 (as of May 8, 2022). As the page is open to the public, Facebook users can comment on these posts.

4.2.2 Data collection

Digital ethnographic research aims to gain an insider's understanding of a community, thus I began by familiarising myself with the content of the BC BAG page through observation, before collecting data for further analysis. To understand the role of cultural values in discourse around peatland-use on this Facebook page, I chose to analyse the posts and comments made to the BC BAG page between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021. Due to the vast number of posts and comments, I chose this timeline to limit my analysis to a manageable scope. This year-long period was of analytical interest as it marked a change in the use of peatlands in Ireland, as Bord na Móna announced the cessation of their industrial peat harvesting in January 2021 (Gleeson, 2021).

To collect data, I read through every post made by the admin of the BC BAG page during this period, and every comment made by Facebook users on each post. The number of posts read is estimated at over 1000, with over 600 comments written beneath some posts. I saved 163 posts and approximately 690 comments of interest to the research question. Having familiarised myself with the common language and themes through my observations, I selected data referencing the following: identity, culture and tradition, motivations for turf-cutting, and peatland management.

4.2.3 Analytic procedure

I familiarised myself with the data by reading through these saved posts and comments repeatedly. Next, I identified a number of themes of interest to the research question which appeared repeatedly throughout the data. Often, researchers use digital or manual coding techniques to aid their interpretation of text. In their extensive manual for coding processes, Saldaña (2013) explains that coding is a helpful method for qualitative analysis but that its use should depend upon the research project itself. I chose not to use coding due to the extensive familiarisation I had with the data, and thus the relevant themes, following my netnographic observations. Due to the scope of the study, three themes were chosen for further analysis: attaching turf-cutting to an Irish identity; the power imbalance between Dublin and rural Ireland; and the hierarchy between different knowledge sources.

4.3 Semi-structured interviews

4.3.1 Participants

The stakeholders identified as relevant to the research question were turf-cutters, conservationists, Bord na Móna (as an entity) and policymakers. I interviewed nine participants with varying connections to peatlands in Ireland. Participation was voluntary and confidential, and participants were not compensated for their participation. Participants were labelled with a randomised digit (between 01-20 e.g. P16). Due to technical issues, one interview was not recorded and could not be subject to CDA. However, this interview remained relevant as an informal conversation which informed my broader understanding of the issue of peatland management. Unfortunately, I was unable to successfully organise an interview with any political representatives. Unlike quantitative research, no standardised number of participants exists for reliable qualitative interviews. Rather, a saturation point is sought: the point at which no new information is obtained from new interviews (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

To contact participants, I used the snowballing technique, beginning with my personal network (Edwards & Holland, 2013). I recruited participants via Facebook, by posting a request for participants on my personal page and asked the BC BAG admin to share my post, through which I scheduled two interviews with turf-users.

4.3.2 Interview sites

The interviews were carried out in various locations, as I met with participants from around the country. Interviews occurred on the participant's plot of bog, in their home or a café. One interview was carried out on the video conferencing platform Zoom (www.zoom.us).

4.3.3 Data creation

Interviews are a means of creating text for discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013), through the social interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Critical discourse analysis typically focuses its attention on naturally-occurring data. However, Cruickshank (2012) argues that discourse analysis can be applied to naturally-occurring and created text. I carried out semi-structured interviews, by writing a flexible interview guide with questions that could be changed to follow the conversational flow (Edwards & Holland, 2013). To prepare these questions, I chose to vary my guide according to the participants' position as someone who uses turf or is involved in conservation (Appendix A). Though I assumed these identities based on the participants' connection to conservation or turf-cutting, I created space for participants to articulate these identities during the interviews, which guided my

questions. Before the interview, I gave each participant an information leaflet explaining the purpose of the research and their right to stop as they wish. I obtained their informed consent and permission to record interviews anonymously.

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. As no formal notation system exists for CDA, I adapted Fairclough's transcription style of minimal notation (Appendix B). Labelled as denaturalised transcription, this is considered sufficient for CDA as accents and emphasis are typically not relevant to the research question, but primarily the content of the speech itself (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). To maintain participants' anonymity, I excluded any identifying information in the transcripts such as names, places, or their associated organisations. Interviews ranged in length from 22 to 60 minutes.

4.3.4 Data analysis

To analyse the data, I employed Fairclough's (1989) three stages of CDA: description, interpretation and explanation. I began by familiarising myself with the text, by reading through the transcripts repeatedly. Next, I manually coded the transcripts by writing a summative word or phrase for an excerpt of text relevant to the research question (Saldaña, 2013). To understand the role of cultural values, I coded transcripts for excerpts dealing with peatland management, identity, culture, motivations and values. For the interpretation, I categorised these codes into themes which appeared repeatedly throughout the texts. I analysed these themes and examples in relation to the immediate and wider social context, for the explanation. Importantly, these three stages were not sequential but interlinked as the description of text occurs alongside social critique, with each stage informing each other (Fairclough, 2004). I chose three themes for further analysis: turf-cutting as a way of life; turf-cutting as economically motivated; and change as a natural process.

4.4 Observations and secondary sources

My research was also informed by observations and secondary sources. Though less formal in analysis, these were important in broadening my understanding of the issue of peatland conservation in Ireland. Through my recruitment of participants via Facebook, I was referred to a short film titled *Bog Standard* (Anderson, Dino, & O'Callaghan, 2021), through which I learned about community-led organisations involved in peatland conservation.

When arranging to meet with a participant for a recorded interview, I was invited to join their community-based conservation group for an afternoon. I spent the afternoon with this group on their plot of bog, speaking with different group members about their backgrounds and connection to the bog. In addition to broadening my awareness of community-led conservation, I was also able to see a harvested plot of bog, and its remnants of sphagnum moss.

4.5 Limitations and ethical considerations

4.5.1 *Netnography*

Netnographic research is inherently limited due to the digital site of study. Online spaces are “translocal sites of the social” (Rokka, 2010, p. 382), as they are not located in one geographical area. Facebook users commenting on the BC BAG posts may be based outside of the Irish context and are not necessarily users or stakeholders of the bog. This limits the generalisability of the research findings to a wider Irish context. However, this does not infringe upon the research aim, which aimed to understand discourse in a specific online context without assuming to uncover universal truths. Moreover, Social Media allow users to speak more freely than in face-to-face interactions, again limiting the generalisability of findings (Langer & Beckman, 2005). However, it is of interest to understand how this online context fosters discourse which may impact society differently to private discourse. As CDA considers the context imperative (Fairclough, 1989), again this limitation does not impact the aim of the research.

Ethnographies seek to gain an insider’s knowledge, which I did by familiarising myself with the content of the page through observation. Ethical debates persist regarding the need to inform an online community when it is the site of research (Rokka, 2010). However, as the BC BAG page is public, I did not need to acquire membership to access it. I chose not to inform the admin of my observations, given that I simply observed the page and did not engage with it by liking posts or commenting. Langer and Beckman (2005) argue in favour of such covert netnographic research, particularly for public communications and sensitive topics. Additionally, they argue in favour of covert netnography when disclosure of the researcher’s observations may endanger the research project (Langer & Beckman, 2005). The risk of being “blocked” from the page, should the admin disagree with my position as a sustainability science researcher, supported the need for covert netnography. To ensure ethical standards, I protected the anonymity of users by blocking the name and profile picture from all the comments that I saved for analysis.

4.5.2 *Semi-structured interviews*

The use of semi-structured interviews as a means of data collection for CDA is questioned by some theorists, who argue in favour of naturally-occurring data (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). However, as the research aim does not intend to generalise findings, I consider interview data as an appropriate means to gather text data for analysis, in line with Cruickshank (2012).

The use of technology is always risky, and this limitation was evident when one Zoom interview failed to record. As a result, this interview did not provide text data for analysis. However, the interview was a useful source of informal data collection which helped broaden my scope of knowledge about the issue of peatland use in Ireland. Additionally, the number of participants is also a limitation of this study as I was unsuccessful in recruiting more interviewees with a connection to peatlands. However, the eight recorded interviews were of distinct interest and provided ample text data for analysis which were sufficient for the scope of my thesis, due to time and resource limitations.

Furthermore, video interviews can alter interactions by influencing turn-taking and thus the flow of conversation (Fielding, 2010). However, the one video-recorded interview I carried out was with a participant I met previously during informal conversations on a plot of bog. Thus, we had previously established a rapport which reduced this negative impact on conversational flow.

5 Analysis and discussion

In this section, I show how stakeholders use cultural values in discourse around peatland use in Ireland. My analyses of both online and interview contexts have been kept separate as the social context is imperative to Fairclough's multi-dimensional framework for CDA (Fairclough, 1989). My analysis of the BC BAG Facebook page is structured according to three themes: attaching turf-cutting to an Irish identity; power imbalance between Dublin and rural Ireland; and the hierarchy of local and scientific knowledge. My analysis of interview text is structured according to three themes: turf-cutting as a way of life; turf-cutting as economically motivated; and change as a natural process. I use examples of text to explain how the discourses are impacted by, and impact, their wider social context on both the immediate and institutional levels.

5.1 Facebook analysis

5.1.1 *Attaching turf-cutting to an Irish identity*

Turf-cutting is a long-standing cultural practice that has been associated with the Irish identity for over a century (Moran & Rau, 2016). The attachment of turf-cutting to the Irish identity was evident throughout the BC BAG posts and comments. In Figure 2, a user constructs a stereotypical image of an Irish pub, attaching the turf fire to a constructed sense of Irishness.

In their comment, the Facebook user draws on the tropes of Guinness and traditional music to construct a stereotypical image of an Irish pub. They create a feeling of shared knowledge in this interaction between the author and reader, by writing of "a pint of the black stuff" without naming the infamous stout by name. Socially shared knowledge is the result of dominant discourses constructed through an individual's model or use of language (van Dijk, 1993). By implying shared knowledge, the author constructs a sense of familiarity with the interpreter, joking about tourists whom they both, as Irish, are not. The comment successfully evokes a comforting feeling, writing wistfully about "the smell of turf" and equating the scene to the Danish concept of *hygge*, a type of cosy interiority (Linnet, 2011). In this example, cultural values play a subtle but important role in attaching turf to Irishness. By creating a comforting (albeit stereotypical) Irish scene, at which the turf fire is at the core, the author questions what is Ireland without turf? How can this cosy, Irish *hygge* exist without the warmth and comfort of a turf fire?



Figure 2. This comment constructs a stereotypical image of an Irish pub, attaching turf to an Irish identity. It was written beneath an edited image of a turf-fire with a background of Guinness cans, and a pint of Guinness in the foreground beside a book titled *Old Ireland in Colour 2* (Appendix C1).

During the interpretation stage of analysis, Fairclough (1989) questions whether the process of interpretation changes for different interpreters. In their comment (Figure 2), the author is working to speak directly towards Irish emigrants by writing about “an Irish person anywhere in the world”. Emigration has always been a central part of Irish history, with millions emigrating during the Famine, and thousands since the 1980s for employment (Hickman, 2002). Though the Irish diaspora is extensive, it is largely ignored in favour of a “territorially bound concept of national identity” (Hickman, 2002, p. 23). Following independence, emigration was blamed on the British but today is accepted as a means to gain experiences which will be brought home and put to good use (Hickman, 2002). This comment (Figure 2) speaks of an “Irish person”, and a tourist, the latter of whom enjoys the spectacle of a fiddle, the former of whom knows that this scene is Irish not for the sound but the smell of turf. The careful construction of an Irish identity, that is attached to its cultural practices, implies more than that turf-cutting must continue. It indicates a desire to maintain a national identity that keeps its youth at home, or brings them back, but does not lose them to the diaspora.

In the second example (Figure 3), the comment again attaches turf to a sense of Irishness, by evoking the collective memory of the Great Famine (Ciosáin, 2004). The Great Famine is a period in Irish history that serves as a reminder of the impact of colonial rule on emigration (Hickman, 2002). In writing “all they had was the turf for the fire”, the comment reminds the interpreter that turf provides Ireland with self-sufficiency and hence independence. The choice of language in this text is important, as the

comment writes of “our ancestors”, speaking to those who identify as Irish and constructing a relationship between the author and interpreter. The author’s claim that “Only God knows [sic] how many the turf fire saved” adds a reverence to turf as it is constructed to be more important than food, the blighted potato, and even foreign aid.

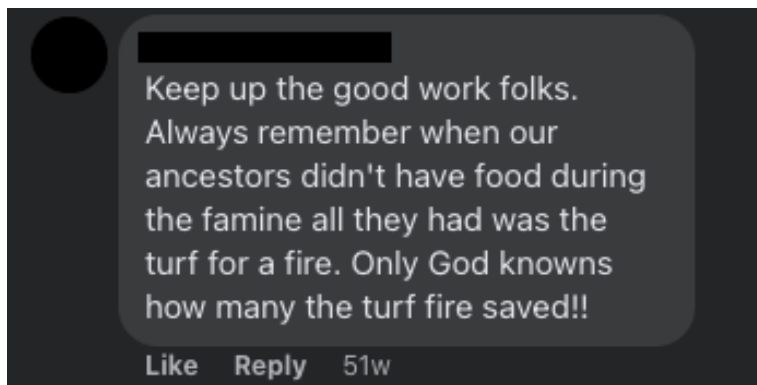


Figure 3. This comment was written beneath an image of a dog lying in front of a turf fire (Appendix C2).

This comment (Figure 3) demonstrates the dual construction of turf as Irish, and turf as essential. This same discourse is one prevalent in Irish media following the government’s attempt to ban the sale of turf during a war-induced rise in energy costs (McQuinn, 2022). By constructing turf as essential to Irish history, the comment constructs turf as essential to the Irish identity. Unlike the previous example (Figure 2), this identity-making is done out of need rather than enjoyment. Interestingly, this comment was written beneath a photo of a dog lying in front of a turf fire (Appendix C2). The image itself is one of comfort, though the comment conveys urgency and need. In this example, turf-cutting is encouraged because of its role in supporting Ireland with fuel sovereignty and for purportedly saving Irish lives. Here, the comment does not draw on tropes of a quintessential Ireland as in Figure 2, but rather draws on Ireland’s history as a colonised country by attaching the freedom to cut-turf to Ireland’s hard-won independence.

In the next example (Figure 4), the comment again attaches turf to the Irish identity by speaking of “our way of life”, the “Irish family” and the “Irish turf fire”. The comment emphasises the historic usefulness of turf, evokes nostalgia and works to make any opposition appear illogical. Claiming that some of the posts “have come from Mars”, the comment begins by constructing their opponents as alien and inherently unreasonable by virtue of not being grounded in reality. The comment details the many practical uses of turf, not in any household but specifically that of the “Irish family”. This emphasis seeks to attach turf to the national identity and again distance their alien opponents from this sense of Irishness. Nostalgic images of their “mothers [sic] time”, with bread cooking on the turf

fire, are used to emphasise the usefulness of turf and the quaintness of the tradition. This comment encourages the continued use of turf because it has been done for centuries, making this seem an obvious conclusion that “you can see” clearly. The use of common sense is a discursive technique analysed extensively by Fairclough (1989), who explains it as both a means to maintain existing power structures and to promote ideology. Such ideological common-sense discourse is evident in this comment (Figure 4), by implying that the usefulness of turf is sufficient reason for the tradition to continue.

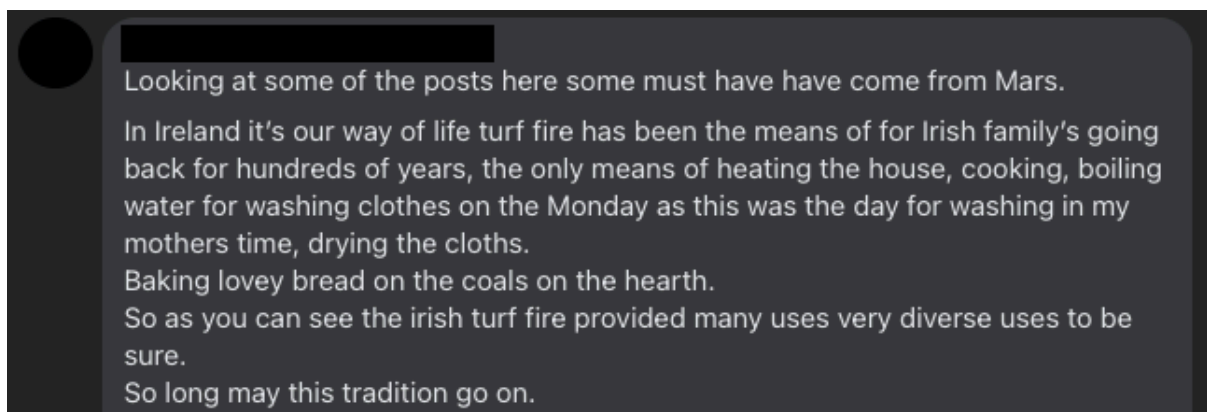


Figure 4. This comment was written beneath an image of a kettle boiling above a turf-fire (see Appendix C3).

These three examples have demonstrated the attachment of turf-cutting to a sense of Irish identity, in the online context of the BC BAG Facebook page. By constructing turf as inherently Irish, this conversely questions the Irishness of any opponents of turf-cutting and thus their participation in what is surely a local issue. Forsyth (2004) explains that politics and environmental realities are influenced by framings, which are the product of discursive constructions. Constructing turf as Irish frames the management of peatlands as an Irish issue, and implicitly questions the participation of those who are, at the very least, non-Irish if not wholly anti-Irish. This is the implicit result of such a framing, constructed without making direct accusations of anti-Irishness. This construction of turf as Irish, and thus peatland management as an Irish issue, suggests a preference for local knowledge. However, this is done in a way that carefully does not question the perceived rationality of scientific knowledge, but rather constructs the issue as a local concern. Knowledge and power are inextricably linked (Forsyth, 2004), and this framing of turf-cutting as an Irish issue seeks to give power to local-knowledge holders.

5.1.2 *Dublin vs the real Ireland: A power imbalance*

In my analysis, I encountered repeated references to a division between urban and rural Ireland on the BC BAG Facebook page. Ireland is not alone in its urban-rural divide; such divisions exist on a

structural level, with rural areas often lacking both access to sufficient infrastructure (Scott, 2006) and access to representation in political debate (Holdo, 2020). In Figure 5, the comment claims that the division between urban and rural Ireland has “never been more obvious than the last decade”, arguing that rural lives are being unfairly dictated by both Dublin and Europe. The urban-rural division is fraught with issues of power, as it suggests that local perspectives are ignored in favour of urban issues. This example (Figure 5) demonstrates the impacts of this division, showing that inclusion and conversation have not been fostered between urban and rural Ireland, and thus different forms of knowledge have not been shared. This comment was written in response to a photograph of a sign stating that “Barroughter bog is not an SAC” (Appendix C4). It has in fact been an SAC (Special Area of Conservation) since 1997, under the EU Habitats Directive (European Environment Agency, 2019). The EU, who impose Ireland’s SACs, have fined the Irish government over €15 million for not meeting environmental legislation (Irish Legal News, 2021). Such protected areas are critiqued extensively by political ecology, particularly when imposed to serve market-expansion and the same capitalist system that caused environmental crises (Büscher et al., 2012).

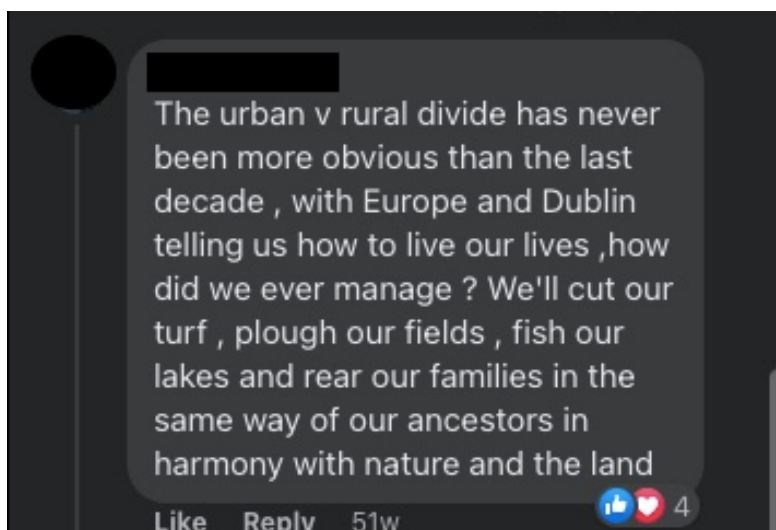


Figure 5. This comment was written beneath a photo of a sign reading “It’s official/ Barroughter bog is not an S.A.C./ Cut your turf this year” (Appendix C4).

The pushback against EU management in this example (and against SACs in Figure C4) indicates a wider power imbalance, seemingly linked to the fear of a lost sense of Irishness and the “way of our ancestors”. The attachment between national identity and cultural practices is demonstrated again, with the announcement that “we’ll cut our turf...in harmony with nature and the land”. Similar to previous examples, this comment again speaks of an Irish identity, with a shared ancestry and a history rooted in tradition. However, the particularity of Irish identity is problematised here, by indicating a division between Dublin and the rest of Ireland. The freedom to cut turf is interestingly placed within

Ireland's historical context of British foreign rule. In arguing that some "other", be it Dublin or Europe, is trying to dictate rural Ireland's actions, the fight to cut turf is again linked to the fight for independence. This portrays those in favour of turf-cutting as defenders of independence and conflates those against turf-cutting with foreign rule.



Figure 6. This post was made by the BCBAG admin and shows a photo of a stove with a kettle, towels drying and a pile of turf, reading "No T.D. or other Office Boy will take this Tradition & comfort from any Irish Home".

The urban-rural divide in Ireland is again related to peatland use in Figure 6. This post was made by the BCBAG admin and reads: "No T.D. or other Office Boy will take this Tradition & comfort from any Irish Home". In this example, the admin has drawn on both the urban-rural divide and the construction of an Irish identity to support their argument in favour of continued turf-cutting. This comment conflates T.D.s (members of Ireland's lower house of parliament) with office workers, indicating that politicians are viewed as supporting primarily urban issues. In the caption of the post, the admin has written that such politicians will face "opposition from the Irish people", drawing on previous constructions of opponents as non-Irish. The division between urban and rural Ireland is hence an issue of power imbalance, as rural Ireland is constructed as politically underrepresented. Though "sheer comfort and practicality" are claimed to be the motivation behind turf-cutting, this post suggests that maintaining this cultural practice is a means to maintain both a sense of Irish identity and to fight for representation in rural Ireland.

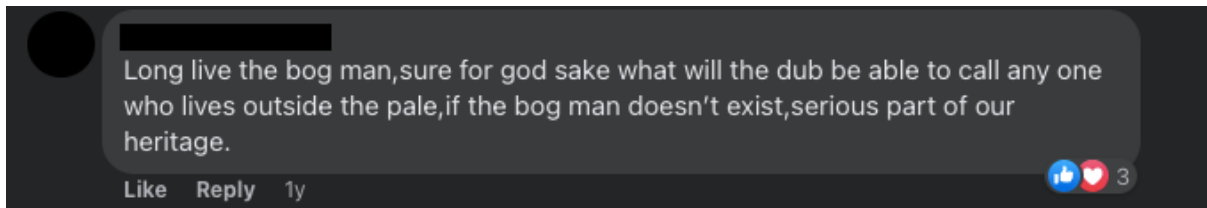


Figure 7. This comment was written beneath a photo showing rows of cut turf, beside a hopper (a turf-cutting machine) (Appendix C5). The photograph reads “Welcome 2021. A new dawn for Turf Cutting in our bogs”.

The division between Dublin and the rest of Ireland is more than a discursive tool used to support arguments but is the legacy of centuries of foreign rule. During the 15th century, Dublin and its surrounding areas were labelled *the Pale*; a fortified area subject to direct English rule (Cosgrove, 1987). Today, the Pale is a term used mockingly to speak of the division between Dublin and the rest of Ireland. In Figure 7, a Facebook user jokes that the bog must remain open for turf-cutting so that Dubliners can maintain separation from those outside the Pale. The term “bog man” is a slang word in Ireland used to label those living in rural areas, though it is used here to call out Dubliners for being more English than Irish, as the bog is a “serious part of our heritage”. Once again, turf-cutting is a practice constructed as essential to the Irish identity, to maintain our cultural and political independence. The historical context of colonial rule in Ireland is continuously threaded back to the cultural significance of turf-cutting to people in Ireland, and the perceived power division between urban and rural Ireland.

5.1.3 “You are a typical Enviro Creep”: The issue of knowledge hierarchies

The final theme selected for further analysis from the BC BAG Facebook page is that of a knowledge hierarchy, which is closely linked to the power imbalance between urban and rural Ireland. In Figure 8, the BC BAG admin questions the legitimacy of different knowledge sources, by questioning their opponents’ access to knowledge about the bog.

This comment thread (Figure 8), was written in response to a post made by the admin claiming that peat is “Not a Fossil Fuel” (Appendix C6). In response to this claim, a Facebook user posits that the status of turf as a fossil fuel is irrelevant, but rather the fact that “peat bogs draw carbon out of the atmosphere” should be the focus of attention. The admin’s immediate response was to question whether the user owned a bog, and to continue by arguing that until the author can “put in a bit of hard graft into looking after even one acre of bog”, then their opinion is not of value. By arguing that only bog owners should have a say in peatland management, the BC BAG admin demonstrates a preference for local knowledge over scientific knowledge. Interestingly, turbarry rights do not give

ownership of the bog to individuals but rather the right to cut turf on a specific plot of bog-land (Turbarry Rights Order, 1951). Despite this, the admin constructs the bog as privately owned, drawing on a neoliberal discourse that favours privatisation of land for natural resource management (Robbins, 2012).

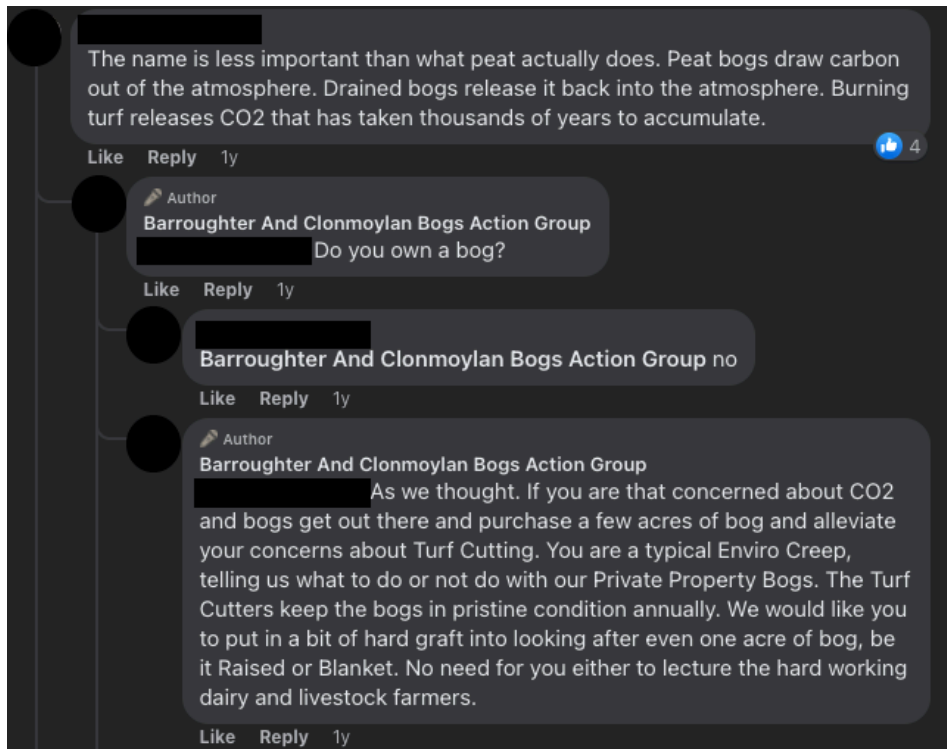


Figure 8. This comment thread appeared under an image posted by the BC BAG admin (Appendix C6), showing two packs of peat briquettes reading “Not a Fossil Fuel/ Peat Briquettes are a Zero Emissions Fuel”.

Disregarding local knowledge in favour of apolitical, scientific knowledge is a structural issue inherent in both politics and academia, and one which the recent report by the IPCC (2022) attempts to overcome by recommending collaboration with local and Indigenous knowledge holders (p.44). However, by accusing the Facebook user of being an “Enviro Creep”, the admin seeks to delegitimise the concerns of scientific knowledge holders through their construction of local knowledge and land ownership as superior. The choice of language is important, as the term “creep” conflates the user with something disturbing and is a means through which debate can be easily shut down by delegitimising their opponent. Despite delegitimising their opponent’s claim to environmental knowledge, the admin claims that “the Turf Cutters keep the bogs in pristine condition annually”. In doing so, they indicate a support for responsible land management though they disregard scientific knowledge claims.

In Figure 9, the admin employs this same discursive technique while engaging in a debate about the regenerative abilities of bogs. Having asked the Facebook user to explain the growth of peatlands, the admin responds to their choice of language as “Enviro Creep speak”. In this comment exchange, the admin distinguishes between what they consider to be valuable knowledge, and what is politically considered to be valuable knowledge. These competing knowledge hierarchies are the locus of conflict, as neither those in favour of-turf-cutting nor those in favour of peatland conservation can engage in meaningful discussion if neither source of knowledge is respected. This label of “Enviro Creep” suggests a disregard for academic knowledge in favour of other forms of knowledge, and again indicates an aversion to the political classification of SACs. Moreover, the admin indicates the implications of this knowledge hierarchy, as they question the authority of the Irish government to label a raised bog as an SAC. The discursive technique of labelling opponents as “Enviro Creeps” is a means through which the admin can refuse to engage with opponents who do not show respect for their local knowledge, or for the cultural values attached to such knowledge. The role of cultural values is evident in this issue of knowledge hierarchies, as cultural knowledge is shown to be valued by the turf-cutting community on this Facebook page, and purportedly ignored by the political system and environmentalists.

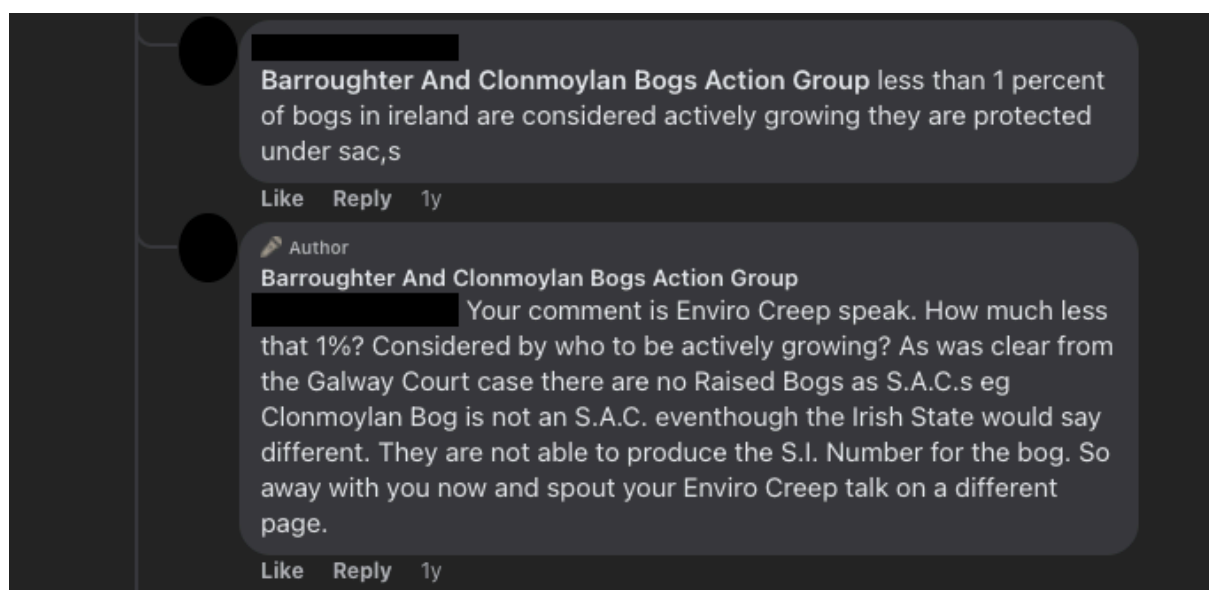


Figure 9. In this comment thread, a Facebook user recommends alternative fuels as they claimed that the bog won't be around forever due to industrialised turf-cutting. The comment was written beneath a photograph of a tractor with a trailer full of turf (Appendix C7). In response, the admin has questioned the user about the regeneration of bogs and accused them of spouting “Enviro Creep speak”.

5.2 Interview analysis

In the following analysis, I detail the role of cultural values in discourse around peatland use, drawing

on my semi-structured interviews with stakeholders. Regardless of their connection to the bog, be it through a conservationist organisation or turf-cutting, participants repeatedly demonstrated an appreciation for the cultural significance of turf-cutting. Though participants were not formally labelled according to a predetermined stance in favour or against turf-cutting, their stance on the management of Ireland's peatlands became evident through interviews. Hence, in the below examples I refer to the participants' connection to the bog to contextualise the text in wider discourse.

5.2.1 *Turf-cutting as a way of life*

Example 1

- P16 ...ehm we cut turf- my father cut turf- he had motor neuron disease (.) and he was on his hands and knees out on the bog. He wasn't able to walk and he was out footing-
- Researcher Wow.
- P16 - like he died on the 5th April and he was out there in March. Unable, but it was just this *grá* for- it was just his way of life, you know? It was what he done and the turf had to be got and he could never have enough as well.

The cultural value of turf-cutting was evident throughout interviews with participants from varying backgrounds or stakeholder positions. In Example 1, the participant (P16) spoke of their father's *grá* (translated as "love" in the Irish language) for turf-cutting. The participant's use of the Irish word "*grá*" provides a distinct emphasis on their father's connection to the bog. In this example, the participant provides a personal anecdote to emphasise this love, explaining that their father continued cutting turf even when ill with motor neuron disease. The participant explains that this dedication was the result of turf-cutting being a "way of life", which meant that "the turf had to be got". Through this anecdote, the participant explains the deep need to cut as much turf as possible, in those for whom turf-cutting is a way of life. Interestingly, this particular participant is involved in conservation, and thus no longer cuts turf despite their family connection to turf-cutting. Though the participant does not speak, in this example, of their position as a conservationist, they emphasise here that they can relate to this deep desire to cut turf. In constructing their family as tied to this way of life, this participant legitimises their position as a conservationist by claiming access to local knowledge. This allows the participant to overcome the knowledge hierarchy, which may prioritise local knowledge for seemingly local issues. Additionally, claiming access to such knowledge distances the participant from any binary construction of people who are either pro- or anti- turf cutting.

In Example 2, cultural values are used discursively to construct turf-cutting as more than an economic practicality, but as a way of life central to a small town in Ireland. In this text, the participant (P10) responds to my question which asked if they would get rid of turf if money weren't an issue. The

participant constructs turf-cutting as an important social element in the village, which brings interest and excitement to inhabitants. The participant roleplays a conversation between neighbours, chatting about the new turf-cutting season. They construct such conversations as a necessary “diversion” for rural people who may have fewer social amenities in their village than those in Dublin. The participant is pointing to the division between Dublin and the rest of Ireland, without arguing about inequalities. Rather, they suggest that financial incentives from the government are an insufficient motivation to stop turf-cutting when it is a cultural practice that provides social interest in the village. Though the cheap cost of turf is evidently a motivation behind turf-cutting (see Section 5.2.2), this participant suggests that replacing turf with a cheap fuel-alternative is an ineffective means to govern the transition, as it ignores the social and cultural provision of turf in a rural community in Ireland.

Example 2

- Researcher Because like I-I-I-I don't expect people to stop cutting turf if you know they're given like all the money in the world to change their house you know? If- if- if the government paid for you to change your s- like fireplace you know?
- P10 Yeah, I know what you mean.
- Researcher Would you want to get rid of it you know?
- P10 Mhm no. I don't think I would because it does have a social-
- Researcher Yeah.
- P10 -aspect to it.
- Researcher Mhm.
- P10 You know, turf cutting, it definitely does.
- Researcher Mhm.
- P10 And people look forward to it.
- Researcher Yeah.
- P10 You know to- to- and you know I mean this is, I suppose – fair enough, you have to remember we're living in the country. We don't have that many diversions.
- Researcher (Laughs).
- P10 We don't have the Bord Gáis theatre around the corner.
- Researcher Yeah (laughs).
- P10 Ehm but I mean- or, you know, has [REDACTED] cut yet you know, down on [REDACTED]? Ehm no, no, no. [REDACTED] he's- he's cut already. Now it's a bit risky because there- there could be a frost yet, you know.
- Researcher (Laughs).
- P10 Ehm it ehm it creates an interest.
- Researcher Yeah.
- P10 And ehm you know, I mean I- I would miss that.

5.2.2 *Turf-cutting as economically motivated*

Cultural values play a distinct role in the discourse surrounding peatland use and management. In Example 3, a participant (P10) who buys turf from a local turf-cutter explains that they will continue to burn turf for as long as they legally and physically can because they “enjoy doing it”, and because “it makes economic sense”. As shown in my analysis of the BC BAG Facebook page, the cultural and traditional significance of turf-cutting is used discursively to argue in favour of continued turf-cutting.

By emphasising that they will continue to cut turf because it is enjoyable, this participant draws on the use of culture as an argument in favour of turf-cutting, as it is more easily defended than their economic motivations.

Example 3

P10 ...I will be cutting turf as- as long as I'm let and as long as obviously- as long as I'm able ehm because- because I enjoy doing it.
Researcher Yeah.
P10 As- as well as it makes economic sense for me.
Researcher Mhm.
P10 While I can do it.
Researcher Mhm.
P10 You know otherwise you know- otherwise I'll just have to make a decision.
Researcher Mhm.
P10 Ehm and wear more clothes (laughs).

In Example 3, the participant also posits that, should the government make turf illegal, they would have to “wear more clothes”, indicating that turf is ultimately a financial and practical necessity. Of course, alternative fuels exist, but the participant is emphasising the practical need for buying and cutting turf as it is the cheapest available fuel for many whose homes are heated by solid fuels. Their economic motivation to burn turf may be strong, but it is more easily deconstructed with the availability of grants for retrofitting homes reliant on solid fuels and financial support from the government (Department of the Environment Climate and Communications, 2022). This participant prefaces the economic motivation for turf-burning by emphasising first that they enjoy using it. This serves to construct turf as more than just a financially sound choice, while still focusing their response around their need for an affordable fuel.

Example 4

P06 ...they were supposed to get compensated from the government, but I don't think any of them have, like you know.
Researcher Really?
P06 This is the thing like cause (.) like a bank is worth money you know what I mean it's.
Researcher Yeah.
P06 It's- it's- it's a bank at the end of the day (laughs).

This economic motivation is echoed by another participant (P06), who cuts turf annually on a family-owned plot of bog. In Example 4, they reference a wider environmental discourse that perceives the value of nature as almost exclusively monetary. This participant refers to a plot of bog as financially valuable, joking that it is worth money because “it's a bank at the end of the day”. Additionally, they display a distrust for the government as they assume that turf cutters did not receive adequate compensation for the closure of some SACs. In this example, the participant draws on the

environmental discourse of economic rationalism, which views nature as existing only to benefit the socioeconomic machine: “to satisfy human wants and needs” (Dryzek, 2013, p. 135). This anthropocentric discourse impacts the use of peatlands, as it permits the extractive dominance of humans over nature and thus the degradation of peatlands. However, this discourse also serves to minimise the coexisting construction of turf-cutting as culturally valuable as the cultural benefits of the bog are ignored by this view of the bog as a bank.

Example 5

Researcher But like if- if- I don't know if the government came in and gave you all the money in the world do you think you'd want to stop or is it also just the fact that you've-

P06 But sure what are they gonna give like.

Researcher Yeah, I know.

P06 You know?

Researcher Hypothetically (laughs), yeah.

P06 You know.

Researcher Mhm.

P06 It's ehm culture as well like I mean.

Researcher Yeah.

P06 It's- it's heritage.

In Example 5, the same participant (P06) emphasised the cultural significance of turf-cutting as a motivation to continue the practice, when asked if they would stop if offered all the money in the world. Interestingly, the participant does not engage with the hypothetical scenario as they indicate it is too unlikely, and instead redirects the conversation towards the cultural values attached to turf-cutting. This mirrors the same discursive strategy shown by the BC BAG Facebook page, who emphasise the cultural significance of the bog to promote turf-cutting despite that the economic motivations seemingly encourage the use of turf. The practice of turf-cutting is better defended with cultural values at the centre of the discourse, as economic motivations can be more easily targeted through financial compensation and government-funded economic incentives.

Example 6

P17 ...as you probably know so that's- that's a ch- now some- you know I mean it's not- it's not off the agenda but it's- it is- I think for them it's just because they have such a strategic land bank and they have so much land.

Researcher Yeah.

P17 It's how do you repurpose this land-

Researcher Yeah.

P17 - you know ehm for- for maximum use and clearly you know...

The view of a bog as a “bank” appeared again in conversation with a participant (P17) connected to Bord na Móna. In Example 6, the participant refers to BNM’s “strategic land bank”, constructing the bog as a financial asset with business potential. This furthers exemplifies the environmental discourse of economic rationalism, as the participant also posits that BNM must consider how to repurpose the

land that they own “for maximum use”. Here, the purpose of the bog is constructed as exclusively economic, as BNM seek to find new ways of extracting financial value from their peatlands now that they will no longer extract peat. Within BNM’s Peatlands Climate Action Scheme, they state their goal to restore¹ over 8,000 hectares of their 80,000+ hectares of peatlands, and to rehabilitate² 79,300 hectares (Bord na Móna, 2021a). Additionally, BNM intend to dedicate over 3,000 hectares of peatlands for an Energy Park, which will include data centres on two planned peatland sites in Counties Laois and Westmeath (Bord na Móna, 2021b). As BNM (2016) define rehabilitation to be inclusive of reclamation for agriculture and amenity uses, it is unlikely though unclear whether the planned energy sites will be developed on peatlands set aside for rehabilitation. Given the drainage necessary for infrastructure development on peatlands, research demonstrates that sites for wind farms must be carefully managed to ensure net carbon savings (Nayak, Miller, Nolan, Smith, & Smith, 2010). Additionally, windfarms are not recommended to be built on undegraded peatlands due to the impact of drainage (Smith, Nayak, & Smith, 2014). Though BNM’s use of peatlands for windfarms is beyond the scope of my thesis, the impact of their development of data centres can justifiably be questioned.

5.2.3 *Change is not a bad thing*

The final role of cultural values in discourse around peatland use and management was in navigating the issue of change and transition. In addition to discourses of economic rationalism and turf-cutting as a way of life, conservationists commonly constructed change as a natural part of life.

Example 7

P20 Yeah I mean I was in the pub last night and- burning turf and I’d hate to see it disappear.
 Researcher Mhm.
 P20 But (.) you have to move on as well.
 Researcher Yeah.
 P20 You know- you know- you can burn tu- timber in- in- in the fireplace-
 Researcher Mhm.
 P20 - in the pub -
 Researcher Mhm.
 P20 - you can- they- you can- you know ehm there’s other things that can be done to make it and celebrate what- what- and how it was-
 Researcher Mhm.
 P20 - it doesn’t have to be ehm you don’t- we don’t- we don’t have to not change because we’re so (.) teary eyed-

¹ BNM (2016) define restoration as “the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed” (p.50).

² BNM (2016) define rehabilitation as “the primary objective of environmental stabilisation of the former peat production areas or cutaway bogs...It may also include reclamation for agriculture and/or forestry, and/or amenity use” (p.50).

In Example 7, the participant (P20) constructs change as a necessary and acceptable part of life. The participant, who is connected with a conservation organisation, begins by legitimising their opinion by disclaiming that they would “hate to see it [turf] disappear”. Similar to Example 1, this serves to remove the participant from a binary view of turf lovers and turf haters. In doing so, they are trying again to overcome the knowledge hierarchy promoted by turf-cutters which prioritises local knowledge for local issues. The participant continues by elaborating that “we don’t have to not change because we’re so teary eyed”. This particular choice of language constructs change as something inevitable, while constructing the nostalgic commitment to turf-cutting as emotional, if even weak. In this example, the participant works to deconstruct the cultural arguments in favour of turf-cutting, by suggesting that it can be celebrated without being continued.

Example 8

P03 I'm sorry like. Everything is a culture until- everything is cultural until it stops happening because it can't happen anymore.

Researcher Yeah.

P03 I mean, like- you can go really extreme and I probably won't but you can go really- there are really extreme examples-

Researcher Mhm.

P03 - of things that were cultural-

Researcher Yeah.

P03 - that are absolutely not done anymore because it clearly wasn't right.

Researcher Yeah, yeah.

P03 So.

Researcher Yeah.

P03 Ehm- no I mean we can still- still have the photos.

Researcher Mhm.

P03 You can still have the talk.

Researcher Yeah.

P03 You'll still have (.) the songs.

Researcher Yeah.

P03 But like if you're not out with a sleán yourself, go away out of it.

In Example 8, the participant (P03) offers a perspective shared by other participants attached to conservation organisations. This participant held an interesting position as an ecologist who spoke with me as someone who still uses turf. In this example, they argue that cultures change when societies progress. Here, the participant works to deconstruct the role of cultural values in turf-cutting, by arguing that turf-cutting is not cultural when one does not use traditional methods: “if you’re not out with a sleán yourself, go away out of it”. Additionally, the participant indirectly references extreme examples of cultural practices that are no longer socially accepted. In doing so, the participant is using the premise of cultural values to argue that change is a common occurrence, and that culture does not excuse harmful practices. This perspective is an interesting critique of political ecology, which typically argues that local people should be given the right to continue traditional practices,

particularly when government authorities attempt to implement political boundaries around protected areas (Robbins, 2012). SACs, for example, are some such boundaries that forbid turf-cutters from continuing the practice. However, this participant uses the same cultural values that many turf-cutters evoke to favour their own argument, by demonstrating that culture need not excuse harm nor imply permanence.

In a personal anecdote, another participant associated with conservation (P16) shared that they had recently taken turf off their plot of bog for the last time. Though they had not cut turf for nine years, they removed the last remaining sods of turf from the plot and reflected on this moment in Example 9. The participant explains that this was “a nice feeling” because the bog is in transition, reflecting that change is something that constantly occurs in nature. Through this construction of change as a natural process, the participant implies that it is a positive thing.

Example 9

- P16 ...I was out there the other day and I was picking up some of the turf that has lain there for nine years that has been cut and- and we're starting to do outreach and we're going into schools so I picked up that turf off the bog and I was thinking that's the last turf I'm ever going to take off this bog.
- Researcher Mhm.
- P16 And you know it was a nice- it was a nice feeling as well because it's- it's in transition and everything is like. The world is in transition. Nature is always changing and you know it's wonderful that that bog is- is going to be allowed to just gather itself now again. But it- it is very much the end of an era...

The participant continues by explaining that the bog is now “going to be allowed to just gather itself now again”. In using the word “allowed”, they construct the relationship between the bog and people as hierarchical. Unlike the construction of the bog as a bank, this relationship is no longer transactional as the bog is being left to itself. The participant also reflects that “it is very much the end of an era”, showing that the transition away from the cultural practice is emotional despite that it is natural. They demonstrate that a love of the bog, and a love of turf-cutting, does not need to result in the continued extraction of peat.

6 Conclusion

Peatland use and management in Ireland is a complex issue which requires careful consideration of the social impacts of conservation on turf-cutters. This thesis is the first to investigate the role of cultural values in discourse around peatland use in Ireland. My findings have indicated that culture is used discursively by stakeholders of the bog to support their perspectives, for both conservationists and turf-cutters alike. Turf-cutting was constructed in both the online and interview contexts as a way of life that is attached to Irish identity. Interestingly, the cultural significance of turf-cutting was seemingly emphasised by turf-cutters as it is more difficult for opponents to deconstruct than their economic motivations. In line with theories of political ecology, my use of critical discourse analysis underlined that this issue is inherently tied to perceived knowledge hierarchies and power struggles. The power imbalance between Dublin and the rest of Ireland, and between scientific and local knowledge, suggests a wider socio-economic division in Ireland stirring conflict on the bog.

Political ecology problematises conservation, due to the impact it can have on local landowners (Robbins, 2012). The competing discourses that view peatlands as either inherently or monetarily valuable are important to understand, to support Ireland's commitment to a just transition. My findings suggest that cultural values are used discursively to diminish the construction of peatlands as a bank, to allow the practice to continue without the need to change. The issue of peatland conservation in Ireland is evidently a wicked problem (McGrath & McGonagle, 2016), which cannot be overcome by simply forbidding the practice of turf-cutting or compensating for the financial losses of turf-cutters. On a financial level, grants and compensation are important to account for the economic motivations behind turf-cutting. However, the identity-making attached to turf-cutting, and the underlying issues of power and knowledge, demonstrate that a deeper systemic change is likely required to successfully transition away from peat-reliance in a manner that is inclusive and sustainable.

The government of Ireland's commitment to a just transition, and the funds dedicated to supporting rural areas to transition away from a peat-reliance, is an important move. However, the controversy surrounding attempts to ban the sale of turf supports previous research findings which emphasise the need to include local people and local knowledge in peatland management (Flood et al., 2021). My findings further support such research by indicating that turf-cutters, in an online context, disregard scientific knowledge in favour of local knowledge as a means to overcome a power struggle between urban and rural voices. As peatland restoration is essential to Ireland's Climate Action Plan, the

cultural importance of peatlands must be carefully managed by governing bodies in Ireland moving forwards. The change in land use from peat-mining to energy centres by BNM (a semi-state company) surely defies the objective of a just transition, when the traditional rights to cut turf are diminished (McCormack, 2021) yet the land continues to be negatively impacted to extract financial profit.

Peatland restoration is a local issue with profound global implications for planetary warming and climate change (IPCC, 2022). Cultural values play an important role in maintaining the practice of turf-cutting, both as a motivation and as a tool for persuasive argument. Evidently, economic motivations are equally important, shown through the refusal to accept a ban on the sale of turf despite that turbary rights would be maintained (Burns, 2022). However, my findings also indicate that, though “enviro creep speak” was minimised, turf-cutters strive to live “in harmony with nature” (Figure 5). The management of Ireland’s peatlands requires careful consideration of the identity attached to turf-cutting while also providing sustained economic support to reduce the impact on local communities currently reliant on peat for fuel and industry. To maintain the sense of identity connected to turf-cutting, future research could explore ways to maintain a connection to the bog-land through non-extractive practices. Ultimately, my findings emphasise the need to overcome power imbalances in Ireland that have turned the bog into a site of conflict, by fostering dialogue between different knowledge holders to support Ireland’s pursuit of a just transition.

7 References

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8 Appendices

Appendix A

Interview questions (for turf-cutters)

1. Tell me a bit about yourself and how long you've been cutting turf-for.
 - a. How early is your first memory of the bog?
 - b. How has the method changed a lot since you started?
2. What use do you have for turf? Heating or just cosy fires?
 - a. Tell me more about the turf fire.
3. What about the practical side of turf? Do fuel costs play into it?
4. Have you noticed any changes over the past few years that are impacting your ability to cut/buy turf? I'm thinking about policies for example, planning permission and these things that make it logistically difficult.
5. Have you been offered any of the grants for conservation or anything?
6. What do you make of the fact that turf is being imported for horticulture?
7. Have you chatted to anyone about how turf is changing, or noticed any wider conversation?
8. Do you have any thoughts about what the government should be doing or if you think there's a better way to protect the bogs than stopping turf cutting?
9. What do you see for the future of turf-cutting?
10. Do you have anything else you want to add, that you think I've maybe missed in my questions?

Interview Questions (for conservationists)

1. Please explain about the organisation and how you go about conservation.
2. How do you choose areas of focus and how do you gain access to them?
 - a. Who do you buy the land from? Is there interest from the public?
 - b. Do you know why this is the focus instead of, for example, promoting policy changes or supporting individual conservation?
 - c. In what way do you work with the landowners?
3. In what capacity do you work with the government?
 - a. Have there been any political decisions or changes recently that have impacted the work you are doing? Either making it easier or more difficult?
4. Can I ask how you as an individual became involved with peatlands?
 - o Do you have any family ties to the bog or what connects you to it?
 - o How do you feel when you're on the bog? How do you use it or connect with it? Do you notice any particular feelings that come up when you're in the bog? Does that differ to how you feel in other areas (of nature)?
5. I understand that conservation is a controversial topic when one considers the sort of independence and feeling of Irishness attached to turf-cutting. Do you as an organisation get any push-back or do you find that there is any curiosity or frustration on the side of people who have historically cut turf?
 - o Have you worked with people who traditionally cut turf and are switching over to conservation, or is there a way that you are trying to open up these conversations?
 - Have any challenges come up when opening up these conversations or working with people who value turf-cutting?
 - I'm wondering what you make of the claim that turf-cutters are the only people who have historically protected the bog?
6. What do you think we should be working towards? Is there a happy medium to be found that allows small-scale turf-cutting or does it need to be stopped entirely?
 - o What do you see as the future for Ireland's peatlands?
7. Can I ask if you've maybe noticed any changes in your own perspective about the use or management of peatlands in Ireland since working with them? Or since working with different stakeholders?
 - o How do you think we can encourage conservation of bogs in Ireland?
8. Do you have anything else that you want to add or think I should know?

Appendix B

Table 1. Modified transcription notation (Fairclough, 2004; Jefferson, 2004).

Symbol	Use
(.)	Short pause
-	Abrupt pause or interruption in speech
(unclear)	Unclear words on audio recording
[interruption]	Conversation was interrupted e.g. by barista in café

Appendix C



Figure C1. Digitally edited image of a turf-fire with a background of Guinness cans, and a pint of Guinness in the foreground beside a book titled “Old Ireland in Colour 2”.



Figure C2. Image of a dog lying in front of a turf fire.



Figure C3. Image of a kettle in a turf fire.



Figure C4. Image showing a sign reading "It's official/ Barroughter bog is not an S.A.C./ Cut your turf this year".



Figure C5. Image showing a post made by the BC BAG admin, with a photo of rows of cut turf, beside a hopper (a turf-cutting machine). The photograph reads “Welcome 2021. A new dawn for Turf Cutting in our bogs”.



Figure C6. An image posted by the BC BAG admin showing two packs of peat briquettes reading “Not a Fossil Fuel/ Peat Briquettes are a Zero Emissions Fuel”.

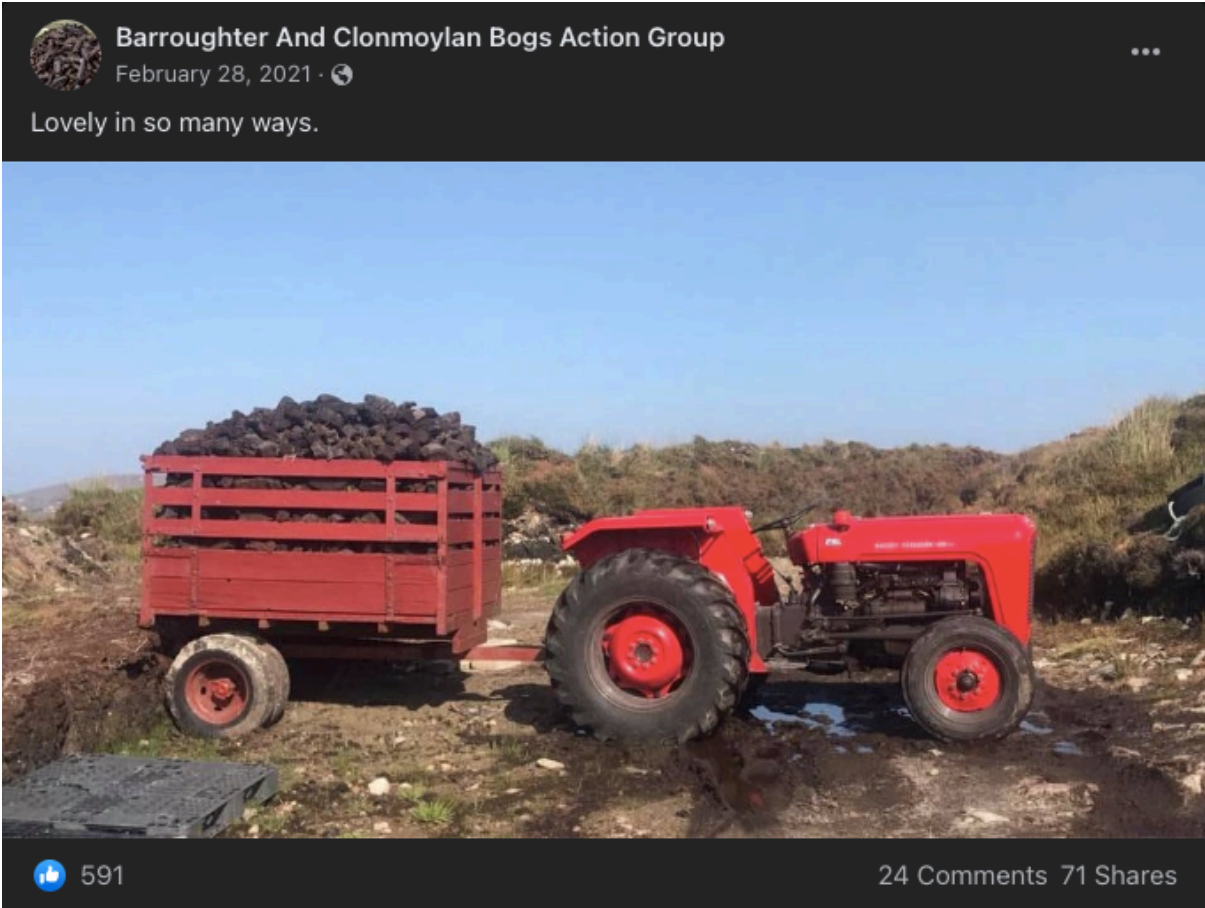


Figure C7. A post by the BCBAG admin showing a photograph of a tractor on a bog, with a trailer full of cut turf.