

# Barriers to Rewilding on Sussex Farmland

– Socio-psychological implications of rewilding on farmers'  
Sense of Place

*Claire Reboah*





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## Abstract

In the wake of the Brexit referendum and the UK's planned subsequent departure from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, rewilding as a land management strategy is gaining significant attention. Despite the ecological and potentially economic advantages attached to rewilding, a great proportion of the farming community is still reluctant to adopt this approach on their land.

By using the concept of Sense of Place, this thesis investigates the socio-psychological elements inherent to farmers' relationship with their land and addresses the ways in which these elements may constitute barriers to rewilding. Using semi-structured interviews with conventional farmers, as well as with the owners of the Knepp Estate rewilding project in Sussex, UK, key patterns of farmers' Sense of Place were identified. This was facilitated by the division of the concept into three key dimensions that are Place identity, Place attachment and Place dependence.

Through the use of these key dimensions of Sense of Place, this thesis has identified three main socio-psychological barriers to rewilding. Firstly, rewilding is perceived as requiring an inevitable sacrifice of the farmers' daily agricultural practices which is key to their identity. Through their practice, farmers develop an intimate knowledge and strong emotional connections to their land which reinforce their identity as farmers. Secondly, rewilding challenges the 'Good Farmer' status crucial to their self-esteem and position in society. The 'Good Farmer' status is maintained by the farmer's dedication to food production and is advertised through visual symbols associated with farm aesthetics, both of which rewilding challenges. Finally, farmers take pride in their role as custodians of rural landscapes and traditions, and thus tend to reject rewilding as a strategy promoted by people from outside of the farming community.

This study's findings offer a farmer-focused contribution to the ongoing discussion surrounding the introduction of rewilding into British farmland. It also demonstrates that the socio-psychological processes guiding farmers' worldviews should not be overlooked by policymakers when pushing for new agri-environmental strategies in rural areas.

*Keywords:* Sense of place, rewilding, farming identity, place attachment

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Problem formulation and research aims

In the wake of the Brexit referendum, the UK will be entering a new phase in its history. Despite the general sense of uncertainty and anxiety surrounding the yet unclear political, economic and social implications of the UK's departure from the EU, Brexit offers a well-timed opportunity for the UK to rethink and improve its policies regarding many national and global issues, in particular the ones surrounding climate change and biodiversity loss (Hepburn & Teytelboym, 2017).

In a recent conference about rewilding, influential environmental activist George Monbiot identified rewilding as a key strategy governments should be promoting when rethinking the agricultural sector (Monbiot, 2019). He therefore proposes that the UK convert large areas of its agricultural land, which accounts for almost 72% of the total of the UK's land coverage (Downing & Coe, 2018), into rewilded areas. This would, he argues, promote the return of species to a currently heavily wildlife-depleted British countryside, reconnect the public to lost natural landscapes and boost the rural areas' economy (Pereira & Navarro, 2015; Monbiot, 2019).

However, a great proportion of the farming community is still reluctant to embrace rewilding and their potential new role as farmers/rewilders. Farmers' willingness to adopt various environmental schemes and conservation strategies on their land has been well documented (Knowler & Bradshaw, 2007; Ahnström *et al.*, 2009). While issues such as the economic viability of converting their land to rewilding are often at the forefront of the rewilding and land management debate. The importance of considering how rewilding, as a new land-management policy, may threaten the farmer's sense of identity, their relationship to their land, as well as their place within society, has largely been overlooked.

By focusing on farming practitioners in the counties of East and West Sussex, UK, and using Sense of Place as theoretical framework, **this thesis aims to understand which key socio-psychological elements influence farmers' perception of both farming and rewilding. This will allow for an understanding of how these elements can become barriers limiting their willingness to engage with rewilding.** The aim is therefore to understand better where farmers' fears and concerns lie and how to address them when pushing for more rewilding on their land.

Given the central role the farming community is expected to play in the future of land management and rewilding in post-Brexit UK (Downing & Coe, 2018), there is currently a clear need for a better integration of farmers at the conversation table. The importance of giving a voice to members of the farming community is therefore central to this thesis, as it hopes to bring in a new, farmer-focused, perspective to the debate.

As such, I will be addressing the following three research questions throughout my work.

- How do farmers' identity, attachment and dependence to their land influence their perception of rewilding on farmland?
- How would rewilding threaten key elements of the farmers' SOP?
- What are the farmers' socio-psychological barriers to rewilding?

## 1.2 Rewilding as a proposed strategy for post-Brexit farming and land-management

Rewilding, a relative newcomer to the field of conservation, has gained significant recognition and following over the last few decades (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015). While there is currently no consensus as to what exactly rewilding should look like, it can be generally defined as a form of conservation which focuses on “letting nature take care of itself, enabling natural processes to shape land and sea, repair damaged ecosystems and restore degraded landscapes” (Rewilding Europe, 2018). The term ‘rewilding’ itself hints at the idea that it is helping ecosystems go back to a ‘wild’ state, stepping away from the manicured ‘unnatural’ human-managed conservation models thus far preferred by conservationists (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015). Aside from the rewilding of nature, rewilding also offers an opportunity for people to ‘rewild themselves’, by allowing them to reconnect with nature in a way that has long been lost in westernized societies (Lorimer *et al.*, 2015).

Over the past few decades, the scientific community and, increasingly, UK citizens have criticised the current food-production system for its devastating impact on the environment, which, amongst other effects, has contributed to habitat and biodiversity loss, soil and water pollution and the release of food-related greenhouse gases into the atmosphere (Rohila *et al.*, 2017). As such, and even more so since Brexit, the government is under pressure to utilise the restructuring of the subsidy schemes as an opportunity to rethink its agricultural sector and gear it towards a more sustainable future (Bateman & Balmford, 2018).

The biggest opportunity for change lies with the upcoming termination of EU subsidy payments to UK farmers. Most UK farmers have relied heavily on EU subsidies (Common Agricultural Policy - CAP) to survive, as they are faced with unbeatable competition from countries such as India, Brazil and China (Bruinsma, 2017; European Commission, 2017). In the wake of Brexit, the government has announced plans to replace the EU’s CAP with the government’s new ‘Agriculture Bill’, proposed by Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Downing & Coe, 2018). Many view the new Agriculture Bill as a net improvement on the EU subsidy system. It proposes that farmers be paid on the basis of protecting ecosystems and wildlife rather than on the amount of land in agricultural condition that they own and exploit (Downing & Coe, 2018). Wildlife and ecosystem recovery would now be put at the forefront and ecosystem services (such as pollination, soil quality regulation, pest-control, flood mitigation, etc.) would be given monetary value. The new policy is therefore advertised as offering ‘public money for public goods’ (Bateman & Balmford, 2018), which is a clear departure from the CAP’s central policy. The government’s intention is therefore no longer to ask farmers to sacrifice wildlife protection over food production when managing their land.

The new Agricultural Bill could allow rewilding to become a governmental agri-environmental policy in its own right, with farmers receiving financial compensation for every hectare of land left untouched as well as financial incentives to develop new economic activities such as eco-tourism (Merckx & Pereira, 2015). While not all farmland is realistically currently suited to rewilding, the subsidy system could financially encourage smaller marginal farmers, livestock owners and any other farm located on under-productive land to implement rewilding on parts or the entirety of their land (Merckx & Pereira, 2015; Monbiot, 2018).

While rewilding might seem like an over-simplified solution to a complicated problem, Knepp Castle Estate in West Sussex, England, offers a prominent example of how rewilding can help farmed land regenerate and bring wildlife back into the countryside. The owners of Knepp have been rewilding their 1,400 hectares of farmed land since 2000, to great environmental and economic success (Tree, 2018b). The owners have introduced old English longhorn cattle (as a proxy for the extinct auroch), Tamworth pigs (proxy for wild boar), Exmore ponies and red and fallow deer, which are allowed to roam freely on the land all year

round. Since the beginning of the project, Knepp has seen many species repopulate the estate, such as various species of fungi, orchids, earthworms, dung beetles and several locally extinct bird, bat and insect species. According to them, these are all indicators of a healthy and stable ecosystem. This is due to the top-down trophic effects of the introduction of the herbivorous species mentioned above and the lack of strict management of the land by the owners (Tree, 2018a). All in all, Knepp estate is a positive example of the impact natural grazing and rewilding on farmed land can have on soil health, biodiversity, water quality and on the reinstatement of an array of ecosystem services. Furthermore, by selling the meat from their cattle, pigs, etc. (roughly 75 tons of organic, pasture-fed meat per year), opening up to eco-touristic activities on their estate and renting their post-agricultural buildings, the owners have seen a net increase in their profit margin compared to when they were farming their land in the more 'conventional' way (Tree, 2018b).

While the example of Knepp Estate shows that rewilding can be done successfully on post-agricultural land, there is still a clear sense of resistance to rewilding from the general farming community in the UK. It is important to consider the historical and cultural context of agricultural practices in the UK in order to understand the stand-point of farmers today (Ahnström *et al.*, 2009). The end of World War II and the advent of chemical fertilisers saw the beginning of an era of prosperity for British farming, as the country's economy thrived and the demand for food increased (Robinson & Sutherland, 2002). As such, farmers were required to adapt to new agricultural policies which were based on heavy land management and extensive farming. The current landscapes of Britain belong, in a very intimate way, to generations of farmers who, through their practice have shaped those landscapes to how they now are (Tokarski & Gammon, 2016). Rewilding now asks them to put aside these tight, quasi-symbiotic relations farmers have with their land and takes away their agency by asking them to let nature take its course without the crucial element of human land management farmers rely on. This is something that they are, maybe understandably, finding hard to accept.

### 1.3 Literature review

It has become apparent over time that many policy-makers often overlook the socio-psychological context of individual farmers when assessing the success or failure of agri-environmental schemes (Ahnström *et al.*, 2009). It is therefore important that farmers should not be viewed as a homogenous group in their decision making processes but rather as a heterogenous community whose decisions will largely be influenced by their socio-psychological and geographical contexts, individual attitudes and norms and unique perceptions of nature and the environment (Siebert *et al.*, 2006; Ahnström *et al.*, 2009).

The growing body of literature investigating farmers' participation in environmental schemes and conservation offers a good basis for understanding the processes behind their willingness to engage with these topics. Examples of these include a study by Burton (2004), which looks into the ways in which such schemes threaten the farmers' sense of identity. Another study by Siebert, Toogood and Knierim (2006) additionally identifies farmer's relations and interactions with their local farming community and neighbours and the importance of presenting such schemes as being voluntary bases as factors influencing their participation. Or also a study by Snoo *et al.* (2013) which offers three key elements influencing a farmer's behavior towards change - attitudes towards a behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

While an increasing amount of research is being dedicated to understanding the socio-psychological factors influencing farmers' choices to manage their land in a more

environmental-focused manner, few studies have been dedicated to the investigation of the impact of rewilding on the farming community. Rewilding focused literature has so far predominantly been dedicated to assessing the practical feasibility, challenges and benefits of rewilding as a conservation strategy (see for example Pereira & Navarro, 2015) regardless of the socio-psychological implications it may have for the people affected.

It is, however, important in the context of rewilding to look deeper into this relationship farmers have with their land, as opposed to their practice alone. Rewilding not only entails great changes in the identity of a farmer within the context of his/her work and lifestyle but will also greatly impact their identity and relationship with the land, as significant changes to it will invariably happen. As such, this thesis will be utilizing the theoretical framework known as 'Sense of Place' as a tool to understand the relationship farmers have with their land and how rewilding might threaten it.

## 2 Theoretical framework – Sense of Place

Sense of Place (SOP), has best been described as 'an overarching concept which subsumes other concepts describing relationships between human beings and spatial setting' (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, p. 233). Heavily situated within the social constructivist worldview, SOP proposes that unexperienced places start out as 'blank spaces' which only develop meaning through people's interactions and experiences of it (Stedman, 2003). It has been noted, though, that physical elements of the land offer a basis for the meaning-making process (Stedman, 2003)

Often anchored within the phenomenological approach, SOP allows the researcher to delve deeper into the socio-psychological relationship between humans and spatial settings by focusing on human interpretations and experiences of a place. This is done by looking beyond the tangible and practical human/environment interactions and more into the symbolic and emotional interactions and meaning-making processes (Davenport & Anderson, 2005).

Davenport and Anderson (2005) argue further that studying place meaning, people's emotional attachments and dependence to a place allows for us to gain insight into behaviours and attitudes towards those settings. By considering the interlinkage of how humans make sense, become emotionally attached, and depend upon their environment, SOP offers allows the researcher to gain insight into how natural resource management and planning is maintained, negotiated and/or challenged (*ibid.*).

Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) place SOP further within the field of environmental psychology and consider it as an 'attitude towards a spatial setting ... shar[ing] strong similarities to the affective, cognitive and conative components of attitude' (*ibid.*). By anchoring SOP within attitude theory, Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) have divided the concept into three key dimensions, namely place identity, place attachment and place dependence. These three dimensions can be summarised as focusing respectively, but not exclusively, on place-specific beliefs, emotions and behavioural commitments in relation to a place. Situating SOP within attitude theory by considering these cognitive, affective and conative structures brings further insights into the development of behaviour change strategies (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006). This aspect of SOP therefore offers a valuable perspective to this thesis. It brings in a multidimensional framework which can enhance our understanding of the effects Sense of Place may have on farmers' willingness to take on rewilding as a natural resource management strategy on their land. As such, the three elements of place identity, place attachment and place dependence will be used as the analytical backbone of this study. While they do offer a clear, multidimensional, starting point for understanding Sense of Place, all three elements are, ultimately, interwoven with one another. This can be challenging as the lines between each element may sometimes become blurred but it offers the potential for understanding SOP by looking at the bigger picture.

### 2.1 Place Identity

Belonging to the cognitive structure, place identity looks into the 'dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment' (Proshansky, 1978 in Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, p. 234), where a place is regarded as an integral part of an individual's sense of self. As such, Proshansky *et al.* (1983) viewed place identity as following the fundamental concepts of self-theory. The dimensions of self are expressed through complex patterns of values, goals, beliefs, feelings, conscious and unconscious ideas and behavioural tendencies related to the environment (*ibid.*). Two important considerations

should be kept in mind when studying place identity (Proshansky *et al.*, 1983). Firstly, one's self-identity, and consequently place identity, is not solely the result of the individual's own isolated experiences. It is therefore also important to consider the individual's interactions with others as they often influence their interpretation and experiences of the setting (*ibid.* p. 60). Secondly, the cognitive structures and interactions attached to a place will ultimately vary depending on an individual's age, sex, personality and their general context. These cognitive structures are also prone to changing over the course of one's life. As such, sense of place should not be seen as a fixed part of one's self but rather as something that will fluctuate over time (*ibid.*). Additionally, place identity has been identified as a key factor promoting an individual's sense of belongingness to a certain place, thus helping giving meaning to their life (Davenport & Anderson, 2005).

## 2.2 Place attachment

Place attachment consists of 'an interplay of affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviours and actions in reference to a place' (Low and Altman, 1992 *in* Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006, p. 317). However, special attention is dedicated to the (usually positive) emotional ties one has with a spatial setting. Low and Altman (1992) also give particular importance to the social relationships occurring around the spatial setting which they point out as being a more important component of place attachment than the direct relationship with the place itself. Additionally, people form emotional bonds with a place through their memories of it which are even more potent if developed during childhood (Morgan, 2010). Given the affective role of emotions in driving human behaviour, place attachment offers yet another insight into individuals' behaviours, especially in relation to their land (Morgan, 2010).

## 2.3 Place dependence

Place dependence can be defined as reflecting 'the importance of a resource in providing amenities necessary for desired activities' (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001, p. 17), whereby the setting's physical characteristics play a strong role in the creation of this functional attachment. Additionally, the location of the resources in relation to the person utilising them will also impact place dependence, with the closer the resource, the more one will be able to interact with it (*ibid.*). As such, place dependence can be regarded as an ongoing relationship between an individual and a setting. Furthermore, Stokols and Schumaker (1981) identified two factors influencing place dependence. The quality of current place and the its relative quality in comparison to alternative settings. Additionally, they state that it is not uncommon for individuals to become functionally attached to places they have never been to before but which may, in their minds, offer them a better suited alternative for achieving their goals (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981).

## 3 Methods

### 3.1 Study site

This study focuses on farmers from the counties of East and West Sussex in South-East England. We can assume that the presence of Knepp Castle rewilding project has made rewilding a topic of discussion amongst the Sussex farming community and as such, there is a general understanding of what rewilding of farmland might look like.

### 3.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the main source of data in this thesis. The use of qualitative research methods, using semi-structured interviews, was motivated by wanting to investigate farmers' subjective interpretations, experiences and meaning-making processes related to SOP (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This preference was further confirmed by Davenport and Anderson (2005) when they highlighted the benefits of using qualitative methods in SOP studies as opposed to quantitative ones. They stated that 'In other words, measuring [through quantitative methods] the strength of attachment based on identity or dependence does not tell us why identity is important or what it means to depend on a place' (*ibid.* p.629). As such, they underline the importance of using qualitative interviews as a method which 'extends beyond what interviewees would have been willing to express in the context of more traditional public involvement frameworks and quantitative research (*ibid.*).

Prospective interviewees were selected according to the following two criteria: a. the farmers had to be based in East or West Sussex; b. their activity was preferably livestock or mixed-farming (mix of livestock and arable). Limiting the interviewee scope these types of farming activities was mostly motivated by their identification as one of the most suited agricultural practices for rewilding projects on farmlands (*c.f.* Merckx & Pereira (2015) mentioned in the introduction). Prospective interviewees were subsequently contacted either directly by email in the cases where contact details were readily available online (usually on the farm's website) or via various farming groups which shared the request for an interview through their internal channels. It was also important for this study to include the voice of the owners of Knepp Castle Estate as a way to include their point of view as rewilders of farmland to the research.

In preparation for the interviews, an 'interview guide' was drawn up to make sure that the most relevant questions were addressed during the interview. The majority of questions were inspired by concepts presented in the literature surrounding Sense of Place (*c.f.* Theoretical framework section) though special care was given to allow room for the interviewee to interpret the questions in their own way. As such most of the interview was conducted using open-ended questions to facilitate discussion (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The use of four photographs from the Knepp Castle rewilding project was also included as a means to further elicit the discussion about rewilding with the aim of accessing "a different part of human consciousness than do word-alone interviews" (Harper, 2002, p. 23) (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Photographs used during interviews. **A.** 2004 aerial view of fields from Knepp Estate at the start of the rewilding project. **B.** 2017 aerial view of the same fields, 14 years into the project. **C.** Long horn cattle at Knepp Estate. **D.** Long horn cattle and Tamworth pigs at Knepp Estate. Photo sources: A. Knepp archives; B. Charlie Burrell; C. & D. Knepp Wildland Website (<https://knepp.co.uk/longhorn-cattle-1>).

A total of ten interviews were conducted ranging in length from 26 minutes to 1 hour 7 minutes. Four of the interviews had more than one person present and answering questions bringing up the number of participants to fourteen, ten of them men and four women. Most of the interviews where two participants were present saw a more or less equal division of speaking time. All interviews were conducted at the interviewees' homes or offices and were recorded using both a mobile phone and a personal computer as a backup. Nine of the ten interviews were of mixed-farming or livestock farmers, whose farming practice and scale varied. The other interview was of the owners of Knepp Castle Estate. Table 1 offers more information about the interviewees.

During the interviews, special care was given to not revealing my own personal opinions or views on the topics discussed nor sharing what other interviewees may have said in previous interviews. This was done to avoid, as much as possible, biasing the participants' answers, especially when talking about rewilding.



Table 1. Information about interviews

Interview code	Type of farming practice	Landowner or tenant* farmer	Land area (in acres)
<b>Farm 1.</b>	Mixed-farm (beef and arable)	Landowner	250 acres
<b>Farm 2.</b>	Mostly dairy (but also mixed with arable) – farm shop is the biggest part of their business / farming is secondary	Tenant farmer	625 acres
<b>Farm 3.</b>	Permanent pasture livestock farm (raising heifers for large dairy units)	Landowner	800 acres
<b>Farm 4.</b>	Mixed-farm (beef and arable)	Landowner	350 acres
<b>Farm 5.</b>	Small holding** (traditional mixed-farm sheep and arable)	Land owner	7 acres
<b>Farm 6.</b>	Mixed-farm (dairy and arable)	Tenant farmer	820 acres (+ 800 acres contract farming)
<b>Farm 7.</b>	Mixed farm (pigs and sheep + arable on the remainder of the estate)	Farm manager on private estate	Primarily 75 acres (of a 500-acre estate)
<b>Farm 8.</b>	Small holding** (sheep)	Landowner	Not disclosed - < 10 acres
<b>Farm 9.</b>	Dairy farm	Landowner	500 acres
<b>Knepp</b>	Rewilding	Landowner	3,500 acres (used to farm 800 acres)

\* Tenant farmer: a farmer who farms rented land

\*\* Small holding: a small-scale farm (usually <50 acres) with attached living quarters

### 3.3 Transcribing of interviews

All interviews were transcribed using the recordings made during the interviews. It was agreed with the interviewees that the transcripts would be shared with them on a one-to-one basis, with particular attention to any quotes used in this thesis. This would allow for more transparency regarding the data used in this study and gave an opportunity for the participants to check that quotes were not being used out of context.

### 3.4 Anonymity

All interviews except for the one at Knepp have been anonymised. This was decided to promote openness and honesty from the interviewees. However, given the central position of Knepp Estate to this thesis, the owners of the estate will not be anonymised. Formal agreement to this was given at the start of the interview.

### 3.5 Interview coding for analysis

For the purpose of the analysis, each interview transcript was coded using the three dimensions of SOP mentioned previously, i.e. place identity, place attachment and place dependence which reflect the interviewees' cognitive (place-specific beliefs), affective (emotions) and conative (behavioural commitments) tendencies expressed during the interviews. It became apparent, however, that to facilitate the analysis, each category should be divided into several, more precise, subcategories.

Place identity and attachment were subsequently divided into smaller emerging sub-categories, whereas place dependence, which was less reflected upon during the interviews, was not divided. The ordering of the data into these different categories permitted the drawing out of clearer themes within SOP.

## 4 Analysis and Results

This chapter presents the results taken out of the data. The term ‘interviewees’ refers to all of the participants in this study whereas ‘farmers’ is used to differentiate those who identified as farmers by excluding the owners of Knepp. Consequently, ‘Knepp’ refers to both the owners of Knepp estate, as they did not identify as farmers. These distinctions will also be used for any subsequent chapters. Table 2 presents these subcategories constituting each dimension of SOP.

Table 2. Coding categories and their respective meaning

Dimension of SOP	Subcategory within each dimension	Description of subcategory
Place identity = Cognitive	<u>Farming as an extension of self</u>	Identity interviewees give to themselves through their interaction with their land
	<u>Society and community given identity</u>	Identity given to farmers by society and their local community(ies)
Place attachment = Affective	<u>Attachment to aesthetic features and historical value of their land</u>	Attachment to aesthetic features on the land and its history
	<u>Attachment to farming</u>	Emotional attachment to farming and its associated lifestyle
Place dependence = Conative	<u>Place dependence</u>	Perceived advantages and disadvantages of the land in comparison to other spatial settings

### 4.1 Place identity

This section focuses on the instances where the interviewees reflected upon the ways in which their relationship to their land feeds into their identity. This section is divided into two subsections. The first section focuses on the ways in which the interviewees spoke about how their interactions with their land has shaped their identity as farmers or rewilders. The second section looks into how society influences their identity from the outside.

#### 4.1.1 *Farming as an extension of farmers’ sense of self*

All of the interviewees, except for Knepp, identified themselves as farmers and as such placed themselves within the farming community. However, how they viewed themselves within this farming identity varied significantly between them. Several interviewees stated

that while they do identify as farmers, they also identify as something else such as ‘retailers’ (Farm 2), ‘entrepreneur’ (Farm 1), a ‘geologist’ (Farm 5) or a ‘company director’ (Farm 4) which have permitted them to bring in another source of income to support their farming. As such, their primary identity as farmers is often facilitated by secondary professional identities outside of farming.

On the other hand, the owners of Knepp viewed farming as a peripheral activity to their main enterprise which is conservation. As such conservationist or rewilder took over as their main identity.

This is further supported by the contrast between the average amount of time dedicated to agricultural work by the farmers compared to Knepp. For the majority of the farmers, farming is a “seven days a week” job (Farm 1,2,3,4,7) whereas Knepp dedicate on average “one day a month” (Knepp) to agricultural work on their estate.

Additionally, Knepp dissociated the roles of conservationist and farmers when they described their enterprise as being “all about conservation, [which is] a far cry from being agricultural production. Which is what farming is mostly about.” (Knepp).

Interestingly, many of the farmers spoke about the fact that to be a farmer, you have to “care for the environment” (Farm 2). All of the farmers were aware of the ecological impact of their farming on their land. They have all joined various environmental schemes to help mitigate these impacts and preserve wildlife and soil health on their land. One farmer valued the importance of caring for the environment in the following way:

“Agri-environment is the most important factor in farmland [...] I know a lot of people now who genuinely want to do the right work and who make small sacrifices on their farms for agri-environment and lost a bit of cash for the right reasons” (Farm 7)

The idea that one’s identity is linked to the main enterprise conducted on the land was consistent with the interviewees’ respective positions on whether a farmer can be a rewilder. In most cases, farmers stated that they would not retain their status as farmers if they turned to rewilding. Instead they would call themselves a ‘land owner’ (Farm 4 and 3), ‘estate owner’ (Farm 1), ‘guardian of the land’ (Farm 4) or ‘wildlife park manager’/‘keeper’ (Farm 2 and 6).

When discussing whether farmers can be rewilders with Knepp, both owners took slightly different positions on the topic. While both agreed that a person could be both a rewilder and a farmer, their views on how both identities may interact differed. For one of them, it would create a duality in their identity, with little room for interaction between both facets.

“if you had a hundred thousand hectares, you could be a rewilder on part of it and a heavy producer on the other part. It wouldn’t conflict in that it’s different land use” (Knepp)

The identities of rewilder and farmer were therefore seen as being independent from one another, as they can co-exist but do not influenced or define each other.

On the other hand, the other owner challenged the idea that both identities are incompatible by pointing out that even though farming is a secondary to their enterprise, they still have to think in “farmingly terms” when considering which livestock breeds are most suitable for rewilding.

However, both owners acknowledged that generally speaking, they have had to dissociate themselves from the traditional farming way of thinking, which was strange to them at first. They illustrated this idea by recounting how uneasy they felt during the first years when they stopped assisting calves and separating them from their mothers, as is usually done in tradition farming. However, this practice has since become “perfectly natural” to them:

“I remember how uneasy that first year that we had the heard in the middle block and how weird it was when we came across a calf a day old, hidden in a ditch or a bit of scrub and thinking ‘oh my god! What’s happening here? We should be doing something’ and that was really odd that first year.” (Knepp)

The farming identity amongst the farmers, is also, to a certain extent, impacted by their land ownership status. It influences their farming identity by defining them as a tenant farmer, farm manager or landowner farmer. However, even though the tenant farmers and farm manager do not have official ownership of the land, they still regarded it as their own because of their embodied and continuous interaction with it. This was apparent when they spoke of the land using terms such as “*my land*”, “*my home*” and “*we’ve got*” (Farm 2 and 6). Farm 7 summarised this idea by saying

“ if you really like working somewhere and running a farm whether you own it, manage it or whatever, it becomes part of your life. It’s not just a job. It’s you. It’s part of you.” (Farm 7)

The same farmer explained the importance of the land he farms in the following way:

“It’s almost kind of like being in a relationship with what you are looking after. You kind of have an attachment to it. It’s kind of part of you. If that makes sense.” (Farm 7)

The importance of their knowledge of the land was also addressed by the farmers. In most cases, they viewed their daily interactions with their land as the building block behind their intimate knowledge of what is best for their land, as explained by one farmers, they get to know “*where the soil changes and where the vegetation grows, where nettles tend to spring up and where thistles spring up, what gets boggy in the winter and why*” (Farm 5) which feeds into their deep connection to the land.

This idea that knowledge defines them as custodian of their land was expanded by one farmer in particular as he compared his own knowledge to that of the environmentalists designing environmental schemes.

“they’re coming out of universities which is great but everyone is trying to miss the practical bit [i.e. farming] that you’ve got to do to get the knowledge. It might not be incredibly technical knowledge, but you do need to go through a certain amount of the practical’s and they’re missing that...” (Farm 3)

#### 4.1.2 Society and community given identity

The most significant societal role the farmers identified is that of producing food for the country. Several of them, however, highlighted that while this is still very much a central aspect of their work and land use, they are now faced with the challenge of maximizing food production while minimizing its environmental impact. As such, “*a productive farm should have room for environmental benefits but equally produce food, because that’s what we’re here for*” (Farm 6). Talking about the food production policy of the 70s, the same interviewee said “*it was all about food, wasn’t it, all about producing mountains of grains and all that stuff and it was all about that with no thought given to soil erosion for example*” (Farm 6), highlighting the shift that has happened between then and now.

When asked about their role as a food producer in the context of rewilding, their main concern was the idea that food production on their land will inevitably have to be sacrificed for the benefit of the environment. As such the owners of Knepp were not seen as farmers because ‘*a farmer is defined as somebody who produces food*’ (Farm 6). One farmer spoke about the problems of rewilding, here represented by the idea of bringing large herbivores (i.e. elephants in this case) to the land, in the context of food production:

“but that’s one thing I can’t get my head round with rewilding. I think it’s a bit of an abjuration of responsibility really because you just cannot (...) hope to feed the number of people that we’ve got and have elephants wandering around.” (Farm 5)

Another recurring theme within the interviews is that the British public wants rural landscapes to be enjoyable, safe and easily accessible. The interviewees therefore acknowledged their role as custodians of rural landscapes as people know them. Talking about his farm, one farmer states:

“that is a landscape people like, there’s no questions about that. It’s a funny thing but we like a bit of order and tidiness, they quite like the tidiness of grazed grassland, trimmed hedges and good fences and that’s what they get here” (Farm 4)

As such, a majority of the interviewees viewed the maintenance of these standards as one of their key responsibilities towards the public. Talking about the reaction of the public to rewilding and its impact on the landscape, one farmer said:

“I think they’d be horrified if you removed the farming. In 200 years’ time it would be... there wouldn’t be nice, easy footpaths, well mended gates and footpaths and steps and things. They would be horrified because I think people think ‘oh it’s natural!’” (Farm 2)

However, all interviewees agreed that most of the general public do not understand the extent to which farming has shaped local landscapes. Farmed landscapes are therefore often thought of as being ‘natural’ which feeds into this idea the public has that farmers are custodians of British landscapes. Knepp identified this as “*the biggest hurdle*” for people going into rewilding because despite the fact that the public appreciates the rationale for rewilding, their “*hearts are telling them is ‘well this is not a landscape I’ve grown up with and feel comfortable with’*”. As such their focus lies rather on what “*they consider beautiful and livable with, what makes them feel safe and secure*” (Knepp).

## 4.2 Place attachment

In this section, the interviewees’ expressed emotional connections towards their land and farming are presented.

### 4.2.1 Attachment to aesthetic features and historical value of their land

All of the interviewees highlighted how attached they are to various aesthetic features on their land and the area they live in. In most cases, these qualities are the result of farming activities on the land, thus suggesting that rewilding would significantly impact this aesthetic value. Describing the current landscapes, the farmers used words such as ‘*tidy*’ (Farm 4), ‘*nice*’ (Farm 3), ‘*beautiful*’ (Farm 1) and ‘*orderly*’ (Farm 6 and 4) whereas they described rewilded landscapes as being ‘*messy*’ (Farm 6) ‘*unkept*’ (Farm 4) and ‘*scrubby*’ (Farm 6 and 3) which they attributed to negative connotations in agrarian societies.

The maintenance of hedgerows and tidy fields was seen as something most of the farmers take pride in. Talking about why it would be difficult for him to let his land go wild, one farmer said:

“so to let this farm which looks beautiful, in my mind visually is a farm, to let it go back to that [i.e. being wild] hmmm.. I think I would feel, I would struggle with it”

He went on to add that such as discontinuity in aesthetics would lead to his “*father to go absolutely berserk! He’d tell me I’d let the farm go derelict, like what the hell have you done to our land?!*” (Farm 1)

On the other hand, the owners of Knepp spoke of a vista that is particularly important to them which has always been a prominent feature on their land and has consequently always been left open. They went on by adding that this vista has been enhanced by the presence of deer from the rewilding project.

“you know, to begin with, when we moved here, it was just a lovely vista onto an archeological feature (...) but now, I look at it and think of an ancient deer park and what the land would have been in the 11<sup>th</sup> century which would have been a Norman deer and boar forest.” (Knepp)

Just as Farm 1 expressed concern about his father's expectations of the future of his farming, attachment to the land is also influenced, for some interviewees, by the value they give to the previous generations' accumulated interactions with it. As such, they feel a certain duty to uphold their land's heritage.

When talking about why they chose to remain at Knepp even though the farming was unprofitable, the owners stated:

“this has been in the family for 220 years and it ain't going to be your option of 15<sup>th</sup> choice, let alone 1<sup>st</sup> choice. You know this isn't about as asset that you can buy and sell, this is asset that has been handed down generation after generation after generation, it doesn't work like that” (Knepp)

Therefore, it can be said that their attachment to their land comes from an emotional connection to the family's history as owners of the land regardless of the farming heritage.

One of the farmers, who farms his land following traditional farming techniques said he *“ha[s] in mind all the work that has been put into this land going back through the generations in farming and all the hard work that has had to go into it and that's a significant thing”* (Farm 5). There is therefore a sense of responsibility to maintain the farming traditions of the land.

#### 4.2.2 Attachment to farming

It is apparent that the farmers presented a strong multifaceted attachment to their work and the lifestyle attached to it. In many cases, this attachment justified their choice to remain within farming despite the challenges that come with the work.

Speaking about what makes them happy on their land the interviewees mostly identified farming-related aspects first. Several stated that they get great pleasure out of seeing their crops grow and their livestock thriving. One of the smallholders also spoke of the *“satisfaction of eating my own meat”* (Farm 5). These are elements of their day to day life that they would miss if they had to give up farming. The same farmer went on by stating that he would *“miss the work. (...) it's good work, it keeps you fit and hopefully it produces good quality food as well so I'd miss all that”* (Farm 5).

It is also apparent that the farmers' attachment to their land shapes the way they farm. One farmer, who manages someone else's farm, highlighted the importance of this attachment by saying *“although it's not my land I have to treat it as my land. If I don't, I can't do my job”* before concluding that *“if I'm not attached to it, then I've got no feeling for it”* (Farm 7). This strong emotional connection with their land, for many, motivated them to make sure that they leave the land in a better condition than when they got it.

The farmers also showed great attachment to additional activities, outside of farming, they take part in on their land. For example, two farmers identified themselves as *“shooting man”* (Farm 1 and 6). All of the farmers expressed the feeling of happiness attached to going for walks around their farms, especially with their family.

“We go out on walk around the farm with the children more and at different times of the year the farm looks different. When we get some snow, it's just amazing so we normally go for a little walk then. And in the summer too, we also go out for walks.” (Farm 1)

This feeds into their perception of their farm as not only their workplace. Farm 7 illustrated this nicely when he said:

“Farming isn't just crops. It's livestock, it's gamekeeping, it's shooting, it's the whole agri-environmental factor. There's a very big misconception view of what is farmland, what isn't farmland and how it all works.”

### 4.3 Place dependence

The suitability of the land for farming was a recurrent topic within each interview. Most farmers acknowledged that their land is not as fertile and 'farmable' as other places in the UK, with one farmer even referring to his land as "*the bog at the bottom of the Downs*" because "*everything drains off the downs and you literally can't walk on most of the land for 6 months of the year*" (Farm 2). As such, they talked about the ways in which they have had to adapt their farming practice in order to maximise productivity on their land while making sure that they do not destroy it for future generations. For many, their key concern is the maintenance of their soils which are particularly prone to run offs or becoming waterlogged in winter. Interestingly, several have acknowledged that the land Knepp is situated on is even harder to farm than their own. They used this to a certain extent as a justification for Knepp's choice to abandon farming.

"As I understand Knepp, [...] a lot of farmer's views is that what they have done there is not right, it took a lot of work to get this land back to food production land, but what I also recognize is that when they interviewed the owner of Knepp estate, he clearly stated that it was very very wet land, it was very unviable from a farming point of view" (Farm 1)

Additionally, the recurring theme amongst all interviewees was that farming alone rarely sustains them on a financial level. The importance of additional sources of income to maintain farming practices was highlighted by one farmer who said, "*I think the future of farming in England is definitely going to be a mixture of rural enterprises, diversification and stewardship schemes and environmental scheme*" (Farm 1).

As such the ability to diversify their business was identified as a key element allowing them to maintain their farm. The types of diversification described during the interviews include leasing post-agricultural buildings (e.g. barns) to visitors (Farm 1, 6), running a farm-shop (Farm 2) and dedicating parts of the land to horse liveryes (Farm 1, 4), which are all directly attached to the land. This is, in many ways, similar to the manner in which Knepp has diversified its business in order to become economically viable. However, the key difference is that farming remains the main enterprise for the farmers whereas Knepp saw their agricultural activity only as a "*a very small part of the overall enterprise on the land*" (Knepp).



## 5 Discussion

It is apparent from the data, that the farmers' reservations regarding the implementation of rewilding on their land stems from a complex interplay of conscious and unconscious ideas, thoughts and beliefs as well as emotional connections, attachments to their farm and their dependence on their land.

In this chapter, I will therefore delve deeper into how farmers' place identity, attachment and dependence offer a good basis for understanding farmers' relationship with their land as suggested in previous literature (see for example Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, 2006; Cheshire *et al.*, 2013). It is, however, worth noting that the use of Sense of Place (SOP) as a theoretical framework has previously been used more as a means of understanding farmers' SOP in itself (e.g. Quinn & Halfacre, 2014), rather than as a means of understanding why farmers may be reluctant towards rewilding. As such, this thesis uses SOP as a general structural guidance motivating the analysis, while leaving space for a broader interpretation of the results by bringing in new elements from literature that is not related to SOP. Additionally, the inclusion of Knepp in this thesis should be seen as a control case supporting or challenging how farmers view rewilding and its implementation. I will therefore conclude this discussion by addressing the ways in which several key elements of farmers' SOP may constitute barriers to rewilding.

### 5.1 Discussion of results - SOP in farmers

This research uses the three dimensions of Sense of Place (SOP) to gain an overview of how a farmer's SOP may shape their willingness to engage with rewilding or not. Because "the practice of agriculture [is] inherently grounded in places" (Ngo & Brklacich, 2014, p. 54), SOP offers a valuable tool to understanding farmers' relationship with their land (*ibid.*). The division of SOP into the three dimensions that are place identity, place attachment and place dependence, as presented in Jorgensen and Stedman's body of work (2001, 2006), allows for a more guided and structured study of their socio-psychological relationship with their land and consequently, their attitude towards it (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). The division of SOP for analysis has facilitated the identification of several emerging patterns across the data, which constitute the subdivisions of each dimension in the results section.

In their own study on farmers' SOP, Ngo and Brklacich (2014) think of Place Identity in terms of "what does this place mean to the individual" (*ibid.* p.55). In many ways, place identity offers the most significant findings surrounding farmers' Sense of Place. The identity farmers create and relate to stems from a complex interplay of factors linked to their land use. It is apparent from the results that farmers' identity in relation to their land is created both through their own experiences, beliefs and direct interactions with their spatial setting, as well as from external influences and expectation imposed on them by external sources (e.g. society, local community, etc.).

The farmer's place identity, and SOP in general, not only define their relationship with their land but also hold a key role in reinforcing their ties to the farming and local communities. Place identity is particularly prevalent in farmers because of their close relationship to their land through their work and lifestyle. Their perception of their farms as being an extension of their selves was clearly expressed by one farmer when stating that his farm is "*kind of part of [him]*" (Farm 7). As such, farming is not only seen as a professional occupation but also as a lifestyle which defines their position in society.

Several factors common to most of the farmers interviewed were found to influence their place identity, with two dominant dimensions emerging from the data. Firstly, farmers' place identity is strongly influenced by their own interpretations of what interactions they need to have with their land to make them farmers. In their view, a farmer is someone who makes

farming their primary activity on their land. The intimate knowledge of their land that they develop through carrying out their daily agricultural work also allows them to position themselves as its primary caretaker. Secondly, farmer identity and therefore place identity is also influenced by societal pressures and expectation imposed on farmers regarding what they should represent and how they should manage their land. According to the interviewees, the main role of farmers within society is that of food producer. As such, they view their farm as a productive unit above anything else. Secondary to this, farmers are also expected to maintain rural landscapes as they are at present; that is to say, enjoyable, recognisable and safe for the public.

It is not surprising that given the importance of their land to personal identity, the emotional attachments farmers develop towards their land are numerous and deeply rooted, especially compared to the non-agricultural population (Cheshire *et al.*, 2013; Quinn & Halfacre, 2014).

Place attachment therefore offers a valuable insight into which aspects of their land and its history they are most connected to on an affective level. Several factors have been found to constitute place attachment in the data. Farmers expressed emotional connections towards both physical and intangible features of their land. They reported feeling attached to certain physical features on their land, such as specific vistas, fields or buildings but also many showed a level of attachment towards their livestock. Additionally, many farmers showed great attachment to the lifestyle related to farming. Examples of these include the expressed happiness at being able to go on walks on their land (Farm 1, 2 and 4), the comfort of living in a relatively isolated place (Farm 2, 4, 6) and also the satisfaction of being able to eat the food they produced themselves.

Place dependence focuses on the ways in which people view their land in comparison to other spatial settings (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006). Therefore, it can offer valuable insights into which practical elements they prioritise over others when choosing which land to settle on (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). All of the interviewees acknowledged the fact that farming on Sussex soil (which is predominantly constituted of clay and chalk) limits the possibilities for the maximisation of production because of the limited fertility of the soil in comparison to other areas in the UK. The land also tends to get easily waterlogged and/or experiences extensive top-soil run-offs due to the underlying chalk layers. They identified other regions across the UK as being easier to farm and therefore, as being more economically viable.

It becomes apparent from the interviews, that the farmers, while aware of the challenges presented by their land, value their attachment to their farm's history and their family's heritage. Also important are their personal social connections and general attachment to Sussex as a region to live in. These are all considerable factors influencing their choice to remain, despite the non-optimal conditions attached to the land. These findings are interesting because they point towards the importance of place identity and attachment in defining the behavioural outcomes of place dependence. All of the interviewed farmers have resorted to various levels of business diversification, for example by renting out cottages (Farm 1), dedicating part of their land to horse liverys (Farm 1 and 4), and by opening their farm to the public (Farm 2 and 4). Some have even relied on off-farm employment (Farm 3,5 and 9) as a means of sustaining their farming practice and making ends meet.

Cheshire *et al.* (2013) identify a conflict between place attachment and dependence whereby some farmers choose to prioritise their emotional attachments by remaining on their land instead of seeking better farming conditions elsewhere which correlates with the situation presented by this study's interviewees.

Knepp, on the other hand, chose to remain on their land not because of the farming heritage on it but rather the family's heritage as landowners regardless of farming.

## 5.2 Socio-psychological barriers to rewilding

While understanding how Sense of Place (SOP) of farmers resulted from the interactions of these dimensions is an important aspect of this research, the main aim of this study is geared more towards understanding how rewilding may compromise these various constituting elements of farmer' SOP. As such, the following sections address three main socio-psychological 'barriers' to rewilding. Barriers should be understood as conflicts between the farmers' established place identity, attachment and dependence and the inevitable and compromising changes rewilding would impose if implemented.

### 5.2.1 *The inevitable sacrifice of agricultural practices on the land*

The sacrifice of agricultural practices on the land to make room for rewilding as a management strategy constitutes the first barrier to rewilding. According to the interviewees, in order to identify as a farmer, one has to farm one's land. However, whether farming practitioners identify as farmers or not depends on whether they view farming as their primary activity or rather as a peripheral enterprise.

This is clearly illustrated by the example of Knepp who stated that while they conduct some farming activities on their estate (e.g. owning livestock and selling the meat), they do not identify as farmers. To them, farming is just a part of a bigger enterprise which is rewilding. The idea that a landowner is defined by the main activity conducted on their land was also consistent throughout the farmers interviewed for this study. They expressed the view that the owners of Knepp are seen as "*park keepers*" (Farm 2, 6) or simply "*landowners*" (Farm 3,4) rather than as farmers because they do not dedicate their life to the practice of farming.

A farmer's place identity is therefore strongly reinforced by the farmers' daily engagement in agricultural practices on their land. This was reflected further in the interviews as most of the farmers claimed to spend seven days a week working the land as opposed to only one day a month for Knepp. In their study on place identity in farmers, Wilson *et al.* (2003) come to a similar conclusion when they state that "identities are connected to daily agricultural practices" (p.22).

Rewilding asks farmers to minimise their management of the land, thus allowing it to go wild. Because of the importance of everyday participation in agricultural practices in the creation of farmer identity, the implications of rewilding on this aspect of their identity are considerable.

Furthermore, the attachment many of the farmers have towards their livestock and crops further cements their position against rewilding. While Knepp still deeply care about the animals on their estate, they have had to learn to detach themselves from the animal husbandry aspect of farming, in order to try and reproduce the natural conditions their animals would encounter in a wild landscape.

For example, they have, since starting the project, let go of the traditional role farmers have in assisting their cows during calving season. Knepp described letting go of this traditional farmer-animal interaction as making them feel "*uneasy*" and "*really odd*" at first. However, it very quickly became "*perfectly natural*" as time went by and the animals were doing fine without their input.

In contrast, for a majority of the farmers, even though the calving season brings them a lot of stress because of the long and unpredictable hours spent assisting the heifers in giving birth, they are ultimately rewarded by the arrival of a healthy calf which they actively helped bring into the world. Calving (and lambing) is therefore an important step in the creation of strong emotional bonds between farmers and their animals, which in turn feeds into their identity as farmers (Riley, 2011). Additionally, for many farmers, taking good care of their livestock through their extensive involvement with their animals promotes their sense of

being a ‘good farmer’, who cares well for their animal’s welfare and subsequently, the quality of their meat (Riley, 2011).

### 5.2.2 *The loss of the ‘Good Farmer’ status*

The loss of the ‘Good Farmer’ status constitutes the second barrier to rewilding. Burton (2004) illustrates the idea of the ‘Good Farmer’ identity which he presents as being a key feature within the contemporary farming culture. In essence, to be a ‘Good Farmer’, farmers have to commit to being ‘productivists’, i.e. a farmer who complies with “the practice of using the land to its full potential” (*ibid.* p.198). Food production therefore becomes the main purpose of farming and ‘food-producer’ becomes an integral part of the farmer’s identity.

The importance of maintaining their land as a productive unit was addressed in the interviews, especially as a criticism for rewilding. The farmers acknowledged that the drive for food production has, in the past, been detrimental to their land. They therefore recognised the importance of maximising food production only as far as their land’s environmental health will allow it. This has motivated many of them to join various agri-environmental schemes to help mitigate the impact of farming on their land. However, dedicating the land to rewilding compromises food production to a level that the farmers were not comfortable with. This became apparent in the interviews as many of the farmers expressed their frustration at the fact that Knepp was using land that could be dedicated to more intensive food production than as it currently is for rewilding.

Another way in which rewilding compromises the ‘Good Farmer’ identity is through its impact on the land’s visual integrity, as rewilded land is often seen as looking unmanaged and messy. One of the main ways farmers can advertise their status as a ‘Good Farmer’ to others (especially to other farmers) is by making sure that their land retains the visual clues which distinguish a productive farm from an unproductive one.

Burton (2004) follows a similar logic when he writes about ‘hedgerow farming’ which he bases on the idea that “farmers observe symbols of farming status from the roadside [which farmers maintain] as a means of obtaining status within the farming community” (*ibid.* p.203). The ‘symbols’ include the maintenance of tidy hedgerows, clean and well managed fields, good-quality looking crops and healthy livestock (Burton, 2004; Ahnström *et al.*, 2009).

These have all been mentioned by farmers who have expressed that they feel a lot of pride and attachment to their farm and enjoy sharing it with the public. This idea is also reinforced by their often strong criticism of Knepp’s physical appearance which they described as “*unkept*” (Farm 4), “*messy*” (Farm 6) and “*scrubby*” (Farm 2 and 6). As such, a lot of work is put into making sure their own farms retain the elements defining them visually as a farm. The maintenance of these symbols is therefore not only sustained because of their practical utility for food production but also as a way to cement the farmer’s self-esteem by giving them status within the farming community (Burton, 2004).

Consequently, the certain loss of the ‘Good Farmer’ image accompanying a conversion to rewilding would alienate farmers from the rest of the farming community as they lose their identity as ‘productivists’. This is certainly true to a certain extent for Knepp, as they have spoken about having distanced themselves from the farming community altogether as, in part, they are not considered by them as one of their own.

### 5.2.3 Rewilding supporters reinforcing the sense of 'them' and 'us'

Through their embodied and routinised management of their farm, farmers develop a strong knowledge of their land which feeds into their self-given, and to a certain extent, society-given identity as custodians of rural landscapes (Ahnström *et al.*, 2009). This unique local knowledge is built over generations of farmers and allows them to develop “a good understanding of how to care for and conserve land for future generations” (*ibid.* p.40). As a consequence, many of the farmers view themselves as best suited to decide what is good for their land. This is additionally supported by their self-identification as people who “*care for the environment*” (Farm 2), with one farmer who stated that farmers care more for the environment than the people who criticise the environmental impact and animal ethics attached to farming (Farm 3).

As such many of the farmers viewed their care for nature as being an integral part of their identity. Not surprisingly, several farmers expressed their frustration at being undermined by people who are not in farming, specifically conservationists, academics and policy-makers who usually come from cities, as they tell them what measures, especially environmental ones, should be put in place on their land. Farmers therefore often felt neglected and their knowledge undervalued when new schemes are being drawn up (Ahnström *et al.*, 2009). Wilson *et al.* (2003) propose that this common knowledge amongst farmers facilitates the creation of a “farmer cohesiveness” (*ibid.* p.27), which is created through these common thoughts and understandings farmers have of what they are expected to do on their land. This in turn may lead to a community-led dissent against outside pressures. This third barrier to rewilding therefore rests on the fact that the vast majority of the people promoting the rewilding of British farmlands come from outside of the farming community, thus amplifying the feeling of ‘them’ and ‘us’.

## 6 Conclusion and critical reflection

### 6.1 Conclusion

As the discussion surrounding the place of rewilding in the future of agricultural land in the UK continues to grow, the importance of considering the farming community's views and positions regarding the topic should not be overlooked.

This thesis therefore offers an insight into which aspects of the farmers' Sense of Place (SOP) are seen to limit their willingness to engage with rewilding on their land. The use of place identity, place attachment and place dependence allows for the consideration of the cognitive, affective and conative components of farmers' relationship to their land. This has, in turn, facilitated the identification of patterns common to the interviewees. As such, three main socio-psychological 'barriers to rewilding' have emerged from the data.

Firstly, the inevitable sacrifice of traditional daily agricultural practices on the land imposed by rewilding poses a threat to several key factors defining farmers' SOP. Farmer's SOP is, essentially, constructed through their embodied and continuous interactions with their land. Therefore, by limiting this intimate and repetitive connection to their farm, key elements defining their attachment, identity and dependence to their land are lost.

Secondly, rewilding compromises the 'Good Farmer' status that farmers strive for. Through their practice, farmers situate themselves within society, but also more importantly, within the farming community. Their attachment and dependence on their status as good farmers is regarded as a means to promote their self-esteem and cement their position in relation to others. Rewilding would therefore require them to rethink this entire concept as both the maximization of food-production and traditional farm aesthetics would have to be sacrificed.

Finally, rewilding is predominantly supported by conservationists and city-dwellers who do not belong to the farming community. This challenges the farmers' perception of being the better suited party for taking care of the rural environment. Most of the farmers take pride in their self- and society-given role as custodians of rural landscapes and traditions, which are primarily constructed through their intimate knowledge of the land. Engagement in rewilding therefore entails the loss of some of the key elements of their identity which have always placed them in the role of custodian. It also fails to consider the importance of gaining support from within the community.

The willingness of Knepp Estate's owners to embrace rewilding as a new land management strategy has been, in part, reliant on the fact that their attachment to farming does not appear to be as deeply rooted as it currently is for many farmers in Sussex. Knepp Estate's rewilding project clearly shows that many key elements of Sense of Place do not have to be set in stone but can rather shift in order to adapt to new ways of thinking about land management.

The study's findings therefore offer a farmer-focused contribution to the ongoing discussion surrounding the introduction of rewilding into British farmland. Additionally, the identification of key elements challenging farmers' SOP presented in this thesis can contribute to the development of farmer-targeted communication strategies around rewilding (Cantrill, 1998). Consequently, the importance of considering the socio-psychological processes guiding farmers' worldviews should not be overlooked by policymakers when pushing for new agri-environmental strategies in rural areas.

## 6.2 Critical reflection and openings for further research

SOP is a complex, context-specific and often evasive construct to assess. While this study offers an overview of the ways in which rewilding may challenge key elements of farmers' SOP, further research into rewilding as an issue of concern to farmers' SOP is still needed to understand fully the question at hand.

As this study focuses on relatively small-scale farmers from the regions of East and West Sussex, it has relied on the fact that all of the interviewees had a common understanding of rewilding because of the strong presence of Knepp Estate in the region. It would therefore be beneficial to expand this research to include different types of farmers from the wider farming community across the UK.

Additionally, because SOP is constructed both consciously and unconsciously by individuals, the use of a mixed methods research design, combining interviews with other methods is crucial. The use of photographs in this study as a means to elicit new discussion points during the interviews offered a good basis towards this.

Finally, a deeper study of the particular case of Knepp in order to examine how the owners' Sense of Place has been affected by their shift to rewilding as a land management strategy would be greatly beneficial. This would allow for a better understanding of which socio-psychological barriers have presented the greatest obstacles, as well as the ways in which they have overcome them.

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