

# Exploring Governance for Rural Community Empowerment: Ayrshire 21

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## Introduction

- Within the context of public service reform, and the increasing emphasis on 'localism', **communities are becoming more central in the co-production of services at a local level.** There is also **increasing attention being given to how rural communities might be empowered through new decision making approaches.**
- However, **little is known – systematically - about the existing landscape of governance for rural community empowerment** that these developments are taking place within.
- The approach taken for this study also recognises that:
  - **The concept of empowerment** applies at individual, community, local, regional and national levels.
  - **The practices and institutions of governance** - the ways that actors, including governments, other public bodies, private sector and civil society come together to solve societal problems or create opportunities – also operate at different scales, and influence the nature and extent of empowerment.



## Methods

- This study therefore has four key aims:
  1. **'Context map' governance** in existence to support rural community empowerment and decision making within rural Ayrshire across the public, private and third sectors at multiple scales.
  2. Examine – through mixed methods case study work – **examples of the processes of decision making and empowerment taking place** and the **nature of the linkages** between modes of governance.
  3. **Move beyond context mapping of 'on the radar' modes of governance** to 'below the radar', less visible, activity, identifying any linkages between these.
  4. **Examine how novel modes of governance – such as Ayrshire 21 - may be providing new spaces for rural community empowerment.**



## Ayrshire 21

- Ayrshire 21 is a LEADER funded **rural action planning programme taking place in North, South and East Ayrshire** during 2013.
- It is supporting a minimum of **seven rural communities** in each Local Authority to develop **local action plans**, who have not previously done so.
- It is also seeking to **build capacity within communities**, and to **deliver activities and links across the three local authorities.**
- In each Local Authority, **different approaches are emerging**, and different stakeholders – including organisations delivering the project - are involved.



## Research Methods

- **Participant observation.**
- **Analysis of key documents and data** collected by delivery agents and community agents.
- **Semi-structured interviews** (Local Authority contacts; delivery agents; community agents; community members).
- **Workshops** (reference group, delivery agents, community agents, community members).
- **Additional in-depth case study work** in one community in each Local Authority.

## Emerging Themes

- Diverse approaches in each Local Authority: **where to build capacity?**
  - Institutional, collective and individual capacities.
- Timescales: **how long does it take to build capacity... and resilience?**
  - Are timescales distinct?
- **Breaking down barriers between groups** key to enhancing capacity.
  - Supporting groups to identify shared objectives and work together.
- **What has happened before, and future plans, influence integration of the programme with other structures.**
- **Building on pre-existing (rural) networks and governance structures involves diverse actors at different scales:**
  - To support empowerment *within* and *between* Local Authorities
  - Pre-existing landscapes for rural empowerment vary between Local Authorities for historical, geographical, economic and social reasons.

