

OrkCEmP: Exploring Ideas about Community Empowerment in Orkney

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OrkCEmP



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Introduction

- Enhancing rural vibrancy and empowerment are important objectives for policy makers
- The term community is increasingly used in relation to achieving these objectives, where it gives rise to a number of institutions, policies and practices spanning private, public and third sector organisations
- The discourse of community has been important in rural governance changes over the last two decades because it implies a devolution of power away from a central state to rural communities themselves

This case study has two objectives:

- To explore Orkney residents' perceptions of, and involvement in, community life
- To understand the role and capacity of institutions to bring about change

The research questions are:

- What do residents of Orkney understand by the term community?
- How is this understanding negotiated and contested with other meanings of community, such as those found in policy?
- What processes do local-level institutions use to engage local actors?
- What is the capacity of local actors and institutions to empower themselves through such processes?

Methods

- Longitudinal study of rural island communities in Orkney 2012-2016
- Interviews with Orkney residents in summer 2012 and spring 2013 (and planned for spring 2014)
- Observation of two projects funded through the Climate Challenge Fund 'Reducing Energy; Growing Green' initiative being run by Orkney Housing Association Ltd

Reducing Energy; Growing Green

- Two projects: household energy monitors and creating a community garden
- Interviews and observation to understand:
 - local perceptions of community
 - the processes through which people are engaged in different projects and in different kinds of social engagement
 - the capacity of institutions to deliver change



Results

- The term community is widely used in rural and urban policy making, where it is closely linked with goals such as vibrancy, resilience and empowerment
- Policy makers and residents of rural communities have different understandings of the term community, which influences involvement and engagement with local projects, organisations and institutions aimed at state (national) goals
- **In policy** the term community is used to refer to a geographic area, with an homogenous population, when the reality may be different communities with different goals, interests and capacities for engagement, and the term community is used instrumentally to achieve goals
- **For rural residents** engagement in community life varies over the life course, and the term community is associated with non-instrumental goals such as family, stability and emotional attachment



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Conclusions

- Contested understandings of the term community have implications for inclusion and engagement of local actors in state directed policies through local agencies and institutions, including organisations and practices
- Local meanings challenge the ideology of rural governance shifts towards greater inclusion of local actors, and the capacity of different institutions to bring about change