Vibrant Rural Communities Workshop Report

Birnam

20th November 2013

The workshop, held in Birnam Arts and Conference centre, provided an update on research being done under the 'Vibrant Rural Communities' theme of the Food, Land and People Strategic Research programme, funded by Scottish Government. http://www.knowledgescotland.org/userfiles/ruralcommunitiestheme8.pdf

Researchers from the James Hutton Institute and SRUC were joined by delegates from Scottish Government, local authorities, agencies and universities to discuss how to shape current research to better meet user needs, and to identify priorities for future research.

Where we are: Poster Presentations

In parallel poster sessions that were followed by group discussions, the following presenters introduced their projects in four main research areas:

1. Economic and Social performance
Nico Vellinga: nico.vellinga@hutton.ac.uk
Mapping Socio-Economic Performance in Rural Scotland
Alana Gilbert: alana.gilbert@hutton.ac.uk
An Analysis of Wellbeing Across Rural Scotland
Andrew Copus: andrew.copus@hutton.ac.uk
Understanding Contemporary Rural-Urban Inter-Linkages

2. Governance and decision making
Katrina Brown: katrina.brown@hutton.ac.uk
Mechanisms for Managing Rural-Urban Synergies and Conflicts
Mike Woolvin: mike.woolvin@sruc.ac.uk
Exploring the Landscapes of Governance for Rural Community Empowerment in Ayrshire

3. Greenspace and wellbeing
Tony Craig: tony.craig@hutton.ac.uk
Seeing, Experiencing and Using Greenspace
Margaret Currie: margaret.currie@hutton.ac.uk
An Exploration of Differences in Health Service Provision in Rural and Urban Scotland

4. Community empowerment and resilience
Liz Dinnie: liz.dinnie@hutton.ac.uk
How Can Rural Communities Be Empowered or Empower Themselves? Findings from the OrkCEmP Project
Annie McKee: annie.mckee@hutton.ac.uk
The Role of Community Activity Nodes: The Cabrach Case Study
Sarah Skerratt: sarah.skerratt@sruc.ac.uk
Family Estates and Rural Resilience

Further information on the poster topics is available from the presenters using the emails given above.

For more information on the 'Vibrant Rural Communities Theme' please contact
- Theme Lead: Deb Roberts (deb.roberts@hutton.ac.uk), or
- Knowledge exchange co-ordinator Liz Dinnie (liz.dinnie@hutton.ac.uk)

Future priorities

In the afternoon discussion session workshop participants were asked to identify the most important priorities for future research concerning rural communities that emerged from group discussion and feedback. Thirty-five people participated. The following analysis shows the 10 priorities perceived by workshop attendees to be most important for future research into vibrant and rural communities, **divided into 'themes'.**

TOP 10 Future Priorities

1 **Community Capacity** – Look at how high and low capacity communities can distribute resources more equally and constructively.

2 **Wellbeing** – Define clearly the concept of "wellbeing and link to other aspects of research on rural communities.

3 **Rural Population** – Determine what a sustainable rural population is, and how it impacts on access to services (transport, care for elderly).

4 **Natural Capital** - Examine the most effective ways of sustaining natural capital and benefits to communities.

5 **Housing** - Issues of affordability and access to housing.

6 **Community Empowerment** - Evaluate drivers for community engagement in decision making and ways communities can share good practice and learn from each other.

7 **Ecosystem Services** - Integrate communities into ecosystem services research.

8 **Public Sector** – Study the effects of declining public sector and the impacts of the changing sources and distribution of funding for rural communities.

9 **Research Impact** – Measure the effectiveness and evaluate the impact of research on policy.

10 **Economic Resilience** – Look at what kind of economic growth is achievable and desirable in rural areas and how important a role innovation (in energy, tourism) and entrepreneurship will play in achieving growth.

Not making the 'top 10' but felt by some participants to be important, were factors associated with inequality and further economic issues, the location of work and commuting, and care ('care for elderly', 'fuel poverty').

'What Can We Do Better?' and Workshop Evaluation

Responses from evaluation forms showed that delegates were mostly or very satisfied with the workshop. One half of delegates reported the workshop fulfilled their expectations to a certain extent, and the other half to a large extent. The majority felt that they had a chance to express their opinions to a large extent. The research team were singled out for their **"good work and genuine enthusiasm".**

The content of discussions was deemed useful for determining the direction of future research, or a **"useful barometer of views among both researchers and stakeholders"**. Some delegates will report on the discussions to their colleagues and use outputs from the presentations in the formulation of policy. There is a need to make links to other research areas and to strive for an effective integration with other themes in the Strategic Research Programme (e.g. Ecosystem Services).

The main project outcome delegates would like to see was described as **"research into action"**, which involves deriving practical implications from research for interest groups, making outputs more focused on policy-development and applying research findings in practice. The relevance of research outputs to existing knowledge and the wider Scottish policy needs to be outlined more clearly.

To **"shape positive change"**, the message was to involve more stakeholders in research through direct participation in research design and workshops and by making research outputs publicly available (e.g. publish posters online). Knowledge exchange and dissemination of findings need to be organised through greater collaboration between policy and research communities and through informal channels and existing networks like SCVO or LEADER.

To make networking easy for delegates, future workshops could start with an "ice-breaker" and badges need to state the organisation name.

As one of the delegates summarised their experience at the workshop: **"I feel privileged to be involved and hopeful for meaningful, relevant outcomes that have a positive impact"**.