

## **EVENT REPORT**

### ***Plenary Session 1: Multiple land uses, knowledges and the resulting tensions***

This session focused on the increasing diversity of land uses in rural areas of Scotland: land for agriculture, forestry, conservation, hunting, species re-introductions, leisure industries and 'alternative' energy. It examined how competition between these land-use objectives is handled and investigated the ways in which various forms of expertise are invoked to legitimise different land-use practices.

Chair: **Dr Alastair Macdonald** - Secretary, SCRR

Speakers:

- **Dr Kathy Velander** – Reader/Director of the Centre for Ecotourism and Wildlife Management, Edinburgh Napier University
- **Dr Christine Watson** – Team Leader, Soil Science & Systems, Crop and Soil Systems, SRUC
- **Dr Rob McMorran** – Centre for Mountain Studies, University for the Highlands and Islands

**Dr Kathy Velander (Reader/Director of the Centre for Ecotourism and Wildlife Management, Edinburgh Napier University)** was the first speaker in this session, and she started off by outlining the ways in which the tourism industry has been changing in recent years. She noted that the tourism industry is volatile with everyone 'chasing the golden goose'. She outlined some of the sector/rural-specific and general challenges that the industry has been facing in recent years, including the economic downturn and the rising price of fuel. She also outlined the positive and negative impacts (environment, social and economic) of tourism developments on local people.

Through a review of enterprises, Kathy proposed a typology of tourism businesses, according to outcomes. The typology included lifestyle businesses (or 'satisficers'), community businesses, destination businesses (such as the Skye Walker Hostel) and 'King Pin' businesses (such as Cream of Galloway). Kathy also outlined 'destination development', with reference to 'cluster tourism' and resort developments (such as Aviemore).

Discussion following the presentation focused on the need for collaborative partnership-working across the different sectors – including the need for private sector tourism businesses to link closely with the public sector (including local and national government) 'governance infrastructure'. The typology provoked some interesting discussion around the motivations of business owners to set up and continue their businesses, from personal lifestyle decisions through to providing experiences for visitors. A final element of the discussion focused on labelling, where there is a lack of standardisation. Kathy referred to the 'Econet' project which is seeking to achieve an EU labelling standard for eco-labelling.

**Dr Christine Watson (Team Leader, Soil Science and Systems, Crop and Soil Systems, SRUC)** was the second speaker in this session and her presentation focused on land-use related work going on as part of the Scottish Government Rural Affairs and the Environment Portfolio Strategic Research Programme 2011-2016. Christine's presentation focused on discussing the multiple 'pulls' on land use, and the multiple perspectives over what is valued, valuable, under threat, and equally what is possible – and should be possible – for different types of land. She referred to three different 'categorisations' of rural land: prime agricultural land (where there are a number of pressures including: using abandoned agricultural land for biofuels, biodiversity and climate change pressures, the need to grow more wheat for the distilling industry and industrialisation); the squeezed middle (where there is most choice about how the land should be used and also a high dependence on subsidies, pressure to grow more forestry and for more renewable energy generation, water quality issues, deer grazing) and upland hill systems (where there are limited choices about what to produce, production is extensive, with some game management and tourism and pressure for renewable energy generation). Christine encouraged us to think about the capability of land and to put that into its wider societal context. She completed her presentation by arguing that the systems are becoming ever more complex and that this is providing more challenges for land use and land management.

Discussion particularly focused on the meaning of the term ‘sustainable intensification’ and the need to think about wider ecosystems and watersheds, rather than partitioning off the land for different services and outputs. This connectivity between the different elements is critical, and therefore as researchers, we have to develop ways to identify these different components, and then identify how we can get them (in research terms) to “talk” to each other.

**Dr Rob McMorran (Centre for Mountain Studies, University of the Highlands and Islands)** was the third speaker in this session. Rob gave a thought-provoking presentation focused on definitions of wildness, wilderness, and ‘un-peopled’ landscapes. He challenged the audience to think about the normative associations with landscape which we, users, and researchers, carry with us – the social constructs – as opposed to the objective need to define, map and measure the value of land. He gave examples of research in the Cairngorms National Park which illustrated the challenges and opportunities associated with ‘zoning’ areas as ‘wild’. He called for more local dialogue around the definition and meaning of wild land but also noted moves in the EU to designate areas of land based largely on their ecology.

Discussion focused on the difficulties of moving forward coherently with practice and policy, given the almost post-modern relativity of definitions of ‘wildness’ and ‘wilderness’. Rob noted that there are some more standardised categories being developed which attempt to bring together, and at the same time, make explicit, the range of understandings about wildness and wilderness, but there is much more work to be done on this. Questions also focused on the need to acknowledge perceptions and meanings attached to landscape further back in history. For example, some of the current ‘wild’ areas in Scotland were intensely lived in 200 years ago so there is a need to look back at Gaelic-language texts to see how Scotland’s landscape was articulated and discussed then, rather than only relying on English-language literature from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century onwards.

### ***Parallel Session 1: The political sociology of rural Scotland***

Rural social science often tacitly overlooks questions of political culture and party politics in rural areas. This session took advantage of the current urgent debate over national identity to explore the political sociology of rural Scotland through case-studies and other data.

Chair: **Professor James Hunter** - Emeritus Professor of History, University of Highlands and Islands

Speakers:

- **Dr Michael Rosie** – Co-Director of the Institute of Governance, University of Edinburgh
- **Dr Sarah Skerratt** – Head, Land Economy and Environment Group and Reader, Rural Society and Policy, SRUC
- **Dr Philomena de Lima** – Director, Centre of Remote & Rural Studies, University of Highlands and Islands

**Dr Michael Rosie (Co-Director of the Institute of Governance, University of Edinburgh)**, the first speaker of the session, set out a provocative line for his presentation: since the issue is about making the rural ‘visible’ in social research, why not start by analysing how that visibility is reflected in the various sociology curricula across Scottish universities? More specifically, how and to what extent are the issues of rural Scotland part of the sociological curriculum? To this Michael Rosie noted that the rural (Scotland) is notable by its absence. In part this is due to the “unappealing nature of rural sociology” when competing with the subjects that currently attract students (such as austerity, globalisation and criminology), but there will be other reasons worth investigating from a social science/sociology point of view.

Rosie then moved on to ask what issues we are not talking about in sociological studies about Scottish rural communities. For instance, themes like land ownership, energy policy (the role of windfarms), or the decline of fishing communities, elections and politics, culture and identities (issues of localism, for example), all seem to be absent – and with them the social actors – from sociological academic debate.

Rosie proposed to illustrate his presentation with the topic of identity, more precisely with “Identity in the far north: Caithness”. What is identity made up of in this remote area of Scotland? Taking into account the views of locals about what it is to be a Caithnessian, he suggests an interpretation that balances heritage (language, culture and so on) with difference (a sense distance and ‘loss’ in relation to ‘other’ places, for example). Identity in this context emerges from the power to affirm the difference in face of the ‘other’ Scotland. Later, Rosie concluded that in order for the rural to reinforce its presence within social research, four basic conditions need to be in place:

networking, consortia, research, and teaching. The discussion that followed focused essentially on whether the celebration of difference translates into openness or narrow parochialism. Michael Rosie defended the view that there is always room for the two in most contexts.

The second speaker of this session, **Dr Sarah Skerratt (Head, Land Economy and Environment Group and Reader, Rural Society and Policy, SRUC)**, presented on “The political nature of empowerment and resilience: who is writing the “scripts”?”

To the question what does resilience look like, Skerratt set to analyse, firstly, whether there’s a narrative about resilience and, secondly, who are the actors that are actively writing that narrative.

The narrative exists, according to Skerratt, and it has been written at different levels. Intuitively, one does know what constitutes an empowered community much in the same way as one can picture a less resilient community. Aside from these impressionistic accounts, Skerratt depicted the main lines (and programmes) of the narrative that the Scottish Government has been writing through the years, on one hand, covering the main elements of what she called the “research narrative” on the other, based on an analysis of the literature in this area.

In the final part of her talk, Skerratt discussed how researchers have investigated this resilience narrative. Using examples from her own research (on Community Land Trusts, for example), she concluded that many advantages derive from an idea of localism that sees “local people with local knowledge taking local decisions on local matters...”. Her final remarks drew on the normative and political nature of resilience: as scripts are being written and goals are being established it is up to the research community to deconstruct and unpack them. Discussion addressed essentially the risk that policies for resilient communities may pose in terms of what was called “Darwinian development” (in which the “fat get fatter”).

**Dr Philomena de Lima (Director, Centre of Remote & Rural Studies, University of the Highlands and Islands)**, the third and final speaker of the session addressed the issue of “Identities and belonging: where are you really from?” with the aim of exploring the notion of ruralities through the lenses of what she named the ‘translocational’ dimension of identities among minority ethnic groups in rural Scotland.

By stressing that there seems to be a sort of ‘space blindness’ in research about ethnicity and race, de Lima proposed a conceptualisation of identity and belonging that breaks up with the binary notions that are still predominant in the literature (urban and cosmopolitanism, for instance). She claimed that the presence of ethnic minorities in rural areas challenges notions usually associated with the “rural idyll” as well as notions of who belongs (and who doesn’t) in rural areas.

Drawing on results from diverse research projects developed across the UK, de Lima discussed a varied range of ways of ‘being’ and of belonging to a space that are relational (such as the tendency to “fix” an identity based on stereotypes) as well as contextual (dependent on space, be it social or geographical) and performed through various events set to reproduce identity as interpreted by the actors involved.

De Lima concluded that despite the pressure and isolation that minority ethnic groups experience in Scottish rural locations, they seem to be able to develop ‘adaptive strategies’ that cross spatial boundaries. As time was running short, discussion was restricted.

## ***Parallel Session 2: Empowerment and vibrancy in rural society***

Policy makers are keen to envisage rural Scotland as characterised by vibrancy and empowerment. This session examined the extent to which different forms of rural community in Scotland can be viewed in this light. It also highlighted recent policy initiatives, assessing whether they have acted to promote dynamism in rural communities and examining who the principal beneficiaries have been.

Chair: **Dr Liz Hawkins**, Team Leader, Rural Social Research, Scottish Government

Speakers:

- **Dr Liz Dinnie** – Researcher, Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences, James Hutton Institute
- **Professor John Nelson** – Chair in Transport Studies and Co-Director, RCUK dot.rural Digital Economy Hub, University of Aberdeen
- **Dr Artur Steiner** – Researcher, Rural Society Team, SRUC

**Dr Liz Dinnie (Researcher, Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences, James Hutton Institute)** was the first speaker in the session, and she started off by outlining the extensive and growing policy context for community empowerment in Scotland. She introduced ongoing research work in Orkney (OrkCEmp, part of the *Scottish Government Rural Affairs and the Environment Portfolio Strategic Research Programme 2011-2016*) which is exploring local perceptions of community empowerment. The project is a practical research project involving members of the community over an extended period of time, focusing on the processes used to engage residents in the Climate Challenge Fund (CCF) project “Reducing Energy Growing Green”, run by the Orkney Housing Association (OHAL).

The key findings of the research so far are that:

- Community engagement happens over the life course
- Community engagement takes considerable time and personal resources
- Community engagement is often based on – and can help further strengthen - a sense of history, tradition, and of ‘sharing something in common’.

She concluded by commenting on different meanings of community, including as a formal, sometimes ‘bureaucratic’ instrument of the state, or as an idealised, romanticised notion.

Discussion following the presentation focused on the methodology used to identify interviewees (which extend across the Islands, and beyond those directly involved in the CCF project, the representativeness of the findings to other rural locations, and the extent to which the importance of history and traditions in encouraging engagement can exclude ‘incomers’.

**Professor John Nelson (Chair in Transport Studies and Co-Director RCUK dot.rural Digital Economy Hub, University of Aberdeen)** was the second speaker in the session. He started by outlining some of the challenges of delivering rural transport, including the state and existence (or otherwise) of existing infrastructure (including digital infrastructure) and the accessibility and availability of transport services. He noted that the flexibility of different forms of transport varies, with buses being fixed, taxis being flexible but expensive, and various forms of community and public sector transport schemes being flexible. The characteristics of ‘flexible transport systems’ (often referred to as demand-responsive transport) were outlined, as well as some of the challenges of delivering them, including a lack of coordination (and sometimes competition) between providers often operating to different boundaries, constraints provided by rules, regulations and eligibility criteria, and challenges with implementing a one-stop booking and payment process. Work is currently ongoing with the ‘Grampian Health Transport Action Plan’ to develop and evaluate a flexible transport system platform involving users and other stakeholders.

Discussion following the presentation focused on the potential use of e-bicycles in urban and rural transport planning, the potential role of digital technology in more ‘traditional’ forms of flexible travel such as hitch-hiking and the potential benefits of collaboration between different providers, including to share costs, notwithstanding differences in terms of the markets in which providers are operating.

**Dr Artur Steiner (Researcher, Rural Society Research Team, SRUC)** was the third speaker in this session and his presentation focused on the ‘C4C’ (Capacity for Change) project (also part of the Scottish Government Rural Affairs and the Environment Portfolio Strategic Research Programme 2011-2016), in which SRUC researchers are working with Dumfries and Galloway LEADER programme. The C4C project links capacity-building and empowerment – two concepts which are often separated – to achieve sustainable empowerment in communities which have traditionally not engaged in programmes such as LEADER. A clear process has been established to engage these communities – from selection, to verification of readiness, to receiving initial support (£10,000), to selecting project ideas, to developing the projects, although it is recognised that the process rarely operates in such a linear way.

The researchers are gathering longitudinal data in the communities (i.e. before, during and after intervention) and carrying out interviews with stakeholders in order to evaluate the C4C project.

Discussion following the presentation focused on the potential for an offer of help to communities without a direct request, to be misinterpreted as often the emphasis in policy and research is on communities taking the first step. Discussion also focused on the challenges when there are sub-groups and/or particularly powerful individuals within a community, which may lead to some people becoming disempowered, and the complexity of empowerment. For example, some communities may choose not to engage – which is their right – but they may demonstrate high levels of resilience and empowerment in a moment of crisis. The final issue discussed related to the ‘geography’ of community empowerment – often policies are referring to the empowerment of local communities, but this raises questions about the need to, and ways of, empowering dispersed communities of interest.

## ***Plenary Session 2: Sustainability in Rural Scotland***

This session analysed how broad notions of ‘sustainability’ are put into practice in rural areas of Scotland. It considered how rural communities are affected by national and international sustainability agendas, and examined the meanings attached to sustainability in rural cultures and practices.

Chair: **Dr Ian Bainbridge** – Head of Science, Scottish Natural Heritage

Speakers:

- **Dr Jayne Glass** – Research Associate, Centre for Mountain Studies, University of the Highlands and Islands
- **Dr Ann Bruce** – Senior Research Fellow, University of Edinburgh
- **Professor Bill Slee** – Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences, James Hutton Institute

The three speakers in this session discussed, and to a certain extent analysed, broad notions of ‘sustainability’ and how these might be put into practice in rural areas of Scotland. The topics were wide-ranging, from traditional land owners, to farmers to rural communities. The session thus considered how rural actors and communities are affected by national and international sustainability agendas, and examined the meanings attached to sustainability in rural cultures and practices.

One particularly pertinent aspect of this session was the different understandings of sustainability – from the more conceptual approaches used by academics and researchers, to the more practical experience of actors trying to adopt sustainable practices in their work – and the ways in which these different meanings are mediated to ensure sustainable development for rural areas and livelihoods.

**Dr Jayne Glass (Research Associate, Centre for Mountain Studies, University of the Highlands and Islands)** spoke on ‘Putting sustainability into practice: What does the concept mean for Scotland’s Land Owners?’. Jayne commented on the challenges of doing transdisciplinary research, and its suitability to sustainability, drawing on her PhD study with private land owners in Scotland. This study raised questions about how the concept of sustainability is situated in the real world. Jayne used the Delphi method to build bridges between different knowledges – the practical knowledge of the land owners and the conceptual knowledge of researchers. This emphasised the importance of overall social learning processes and being proactive in moving beyond current debates about sustainability.

**Dr Ann Bruce (Senior Research Fellow, STIS, University of Edinburgh)** spoke about the different ways in which the ‘problem’ of methane is presented by different groups – farmers, journalists, academics. In popular culture methane is presented as amusing, and as arising from a single cause – hence cows cause global warming (through methane & CO<sub>2</sub> emissions). Farmers, on the other hand, have a more complex picture of emissions from livestock and point to all the other sources of methane emissions, of which sheep and cows are only one source. There is thus the potential for conflict between different audiences, and hence the need for a range of approaches and different solutions for different actors.

**Professor Bill Slee (Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences, James Hutton Institute)** took as his topic community wind energy and the gap between the possibility and actuality of communities engaging in wind energy as a source of revenue. One of the difficulties is that little is understood (or assumptions are made) about what or who communities actually are. Wind energy has the potential to inject income into rural communities and reduce emissions, thus contributing to sustainable development. However, this potential raises issues to do with

ownership of land and leadership from local community, and could foster a two-tier rural economy and potentially come into conflict with other streams of rural income such as tourism.

## **Closing Discussion**

In this session panellists and the audience attended to broad conclusions from the day's presentations, and attempted to outline research and engagement opportunities relating to social scientific work on topics concerning rural Scotland.

Chair: **Professor Stuart Monro** – Scientific Director, SCRR

Discussion Panel:

- **Professor Steve Yearley** – Chair of Executive Committee, SCRR/Director of ESRC Genomics Forum
- **Professor Deb Roberts** – Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences Group Leader, James Hutton Institute
- **Dr Jane Atterton** – Policy Researcher, Rural Policy Centre, SRUC

**Professor Stuart Munro** reiterated the importance of looking into the social sciences perspective when the issues of humanity and natural environment are so closely intertwined. **Professor Steve Yearley (Chair of SCRR Executive Committee/Director of ESRC Genomics Forum)**, making use of the “Whole Equation” idea (a book about the movie industry in Hollywood that stresses how few industry figures ever mastered the “whole equation” of filming) expanded it into a metaphor to claim that the rural, too, needs ‘a rural equation’. By this, he argued three main questions need to be explored: a) what the rural is about, that is, many of the themes are exclusively rural and bridges need to be built for a better understanding of what rurality means in today's societies; b) how broad the governance of the rural is: as the demands on the ‘rural’ increase, how well are we prepared to face them and whose role it is?; c) there is no question that natural scientific knowledge is part of the social make of the rural space and this interrelation needs to be reflected in the analysis and study that is produced about it. Yearley concluded that the SCRR is a good vehicle to help us thinking of the “whole rural equation”.

In her comments, **Professor Deb Roberts (Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences Group Leader, James Hutton Institute)** stressed that transdisciplinary is key to finding a better understanding of the issues of rural communities. The collaboration and cooperation that already exist in some degree between social and natural sciences will help to demystify what social sciences are and what their input can be as natural scientists still tend to think of there being one social science. Cooperation will have to prevail over competition, according to Roberts. At a different level, she stressed the importance of thinking what opportunities are there for rural communities in the current economic climate, that is, how rural areas respond to the challenges that arise from an economic crisis, such as unemployment.

**Dr Jane Atterton (Policy Researcher, Rural Policy Centre, SRUC)** highlighted some of the topics that had been covered in the sessions that are particularly relevant for thinking through and analysing the rural in the current context: the importance of localism and of local participation in conjunction with the understanding that there are communities that are not local and that are likely to be disregarded; the significance of language and terminology and how Knowledge Exchange can be central to encouraging a common understanding amongst the different parties involved in studying ‘the rural’; the diversity of the rural as a counterpoint to seeing the rural as a monolithic entity; the role of the private sector in addressing some of the problems of rural communities and contributing towards dynamic and vibrant communities; finally, Atterton pointed out that more needs to be done in relation to gaining a better understanding of the role of the planning system overall.

The final discussion that followed was lively and stimulating, and offered a strong indication that more similar events will need to follow.

*Report compiled by Dr Eugénia Rodrigues (Genomics Forum, University of Edinburgh), Dr Liz Dinnie (JHI), Dr Sarah Skerratt (SRUC), Dr Jane Atterton (SRUC), and Prof Steve Yearley (SCRR/University of Edinburgh)*