

UNDERSTANDING EVERYDAY PARTICIPATION

ARTICULATING CULTURAL VALUES

Young Adults and Community Land Management

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Community land management

In Scotland, a complex history of social injustice associated with inequitable patterns of land ownership¹ has led to land reform being a key policy issue for the Scottish Government. To redress imbalances linked to large scale private ownership of land, legislative provision affords communities the right to buy the land they live on from private landlords and from some public bodies. Buyouts often take place because communities want to revitalise the area they live in and make the most of development opportunities for the benefit of the people who live there. Community owned land is typically managed by a group of local volunteers who act as a board of directors and provide strategic quidance for their estate.

Introduction

Community owned land accounts for over half the landmass of the Western Isles. Nearly three quarters of the population and two thirds of crofts are situated on community owned estates. This is exceptional in Scotland where large scale private land ownership is the most concentrated in the world and has contributed to entrenched social inequalities².

Since the purchase of the North Lochinver Estate by the Assynt Crofters in 1993, community owned land has increased fivefold across Scotland, reversing declining population trends and providing vital economic boosts to local communities through capital investment and employment. The Scottish Government has acknowledged the positive influence that community ownership has in revitalising localities and promoting sensitive sustainable development by setting a target of one million acres of land to be transferred to communities by 2020. However, this model of ownership depends on the active participation of local volunteers who constitute the boards of directors.

In our Western Isles case study area, Understanding Everyday Participation research examined the experiences of young adults involved in this form of civic participation as their engagement is crucial to the long-term sustainability and succession plans of community owned estates.

Our research applied a mixed methods approach. Community owned estates in the Western Isles completed a survey recording the age, gender, occupation and special interests of their boards of directors, thus providing an overview of participation³. The twelve directors who were thirty-five or under at the time they commenced their service with the board were then invited to participate in an interview, which explored their experiences of community land management, how this fitted in with other aspects of their life, and the values which underpinned their decisions to participate. Finally, participant observations provided a deeper contextual understanding to the research.

Our researcher lived on the periphery of a community owned estate for twelve months, taking part in directors meetings, community celebration events, work parties and training sessions.

The research provides a perspective on how community land management as a form of civic participation can affect a person's sense of self and belonging, and can shape the place in which they

participate. It describes how participation in a community land trust is of value to people in their everyday personal lives as well as to the ongoing life of the community. The research highlights some of the stressors involved in this form of participation, but it also demonstrates a number of benefits both at the individual and communal level. Our findings have implications for approaches to community land management across Scotland.

[1] Devine, T. M. 1994. Clanship to Crofters' War: The social transformation of the Scottish Highlands; Hunter, J. 1976. The Creation of the Crofting Community; Wightman, A. 2013. The Poor had no Lawyers: Who owns Scotland (and how they got it).

[2] Scottish Government. 2014. Land Reform Review Group Final Report - The Land of Scotland and the Common Good.

[3] Twelve estates were contacted. Nine provided a full response; two provided a partial response; one provided no response.

Findings

- People aged 18-35 account for just 8% of directors on community land trusts in the Western Isles, despite making up approximately 20% of the population.
- The young adults involved in community land trusts in the Western Isles could be described as super-participators⁴. In addition to full-time employment or education, every interviewee regularly participated in up to fifteen additional spare time activities or hobbies and more than two-thirds were actively involved in other aspects of community life as a volunteer. Their narratives suggested that it is the diversity of activities that they take part in and the relationships between the activities that they value. Furthermore, being involved in various activities from an early age had led to their continued involvement in community life in young adulthood, either by preparing them for their role with the community land trust or by giving them the confidence to stand for election as a director.

"The more involved I am, the more I care about it, the more connected I am to the community."

- Community ownership has the capacity to restore a sense of community spirit to an area. Interviewees pointed to the increase in community-based activities such as fun days, walks, talks or work parties which had taken place in their area as a direct result of the land buyout. They described how participating as a director had increased their own sense of belonging to their communities or helped them to meet new people in their area. It had also helped them better understand the needs of their community beyond their immediate circles of family and friends. The diversity of people on a board not only contributed to providing a more representative set of viewpoints, but also helped to improve community cohesion by building empathy between individuals.
- Negotiating between work commitments and volunteer commitments was a recurrent issue. Almost 50% of the interviewees had either missed trust meetings due to work

or regularly took annual leave or let slip work opportunities to enable them to fulfil their volunteer commitments, demonstrating the difficulty of satisfying both obligations simultaneously. It was indicated that other young adults are put off from volunteering because of the stress it would place on maintaining a satisfactory work-life balance.

"I'm still feeling it now, that I'm the token young person. That can sometimes be a bit infuriating."

- Half of the interview participants felt that their participation with the trust was not taken seriously by older directors on account of their age. In some cases this related to a young person's own lack of experience and confidence, which they were subsequently able to improve through their participation with the board. These cases demonstrated the learning potential inherent in civic participation. For other young people the feeling that they were not listened to was a frustratingly familiar experience. Whilst this had not deterred them from participating, it could affect those not currently involved in community land management.
- Interviewees mentioned a host of different skills, knowledge and competencies they had accrued as a result of their time as a director. Younger directors saw this experience as helping to prepare them for their future lives.

"I'm beginning to...develop new skills in areas that I never even thought I'd be able to."

[4] The notion of super-participators has arisen in previous UEP ecosystem research whereby some people, typically retirees, take part in a wide variety of activities resulting in increasingly busy lives. This group formed the focus of our Peterborough ethnographic work which was centred on participants in the U3A.



Recommendations

1. Improve post-buyout support for community land estates to encourage wider participation

Our research shows that a wide range of benefits accrues to young adults who participate in community land management: from practical skill development to increased self-confidence and feelings of belonging. This complements research by the community land sector itself, which demonstrates the value of community ownership to the community as a whole.

National and regional government should continue to provide support and encouragement for communities to purchase their land. This should be supplemented by additional post-purchase support to enable community land trusts to be more proactive in engaging with their wider community. Initial funding packages could include costs for a community officer to assist with the more intangible aspects of community development and to help ease strains on volunteers.

2. Support an array of everyday participation

Our research indicates that engagement with administering community assets may be contingent on experience and confidence gained in participation activities elsewhere. It also indicates that participating in activities locally may help to foster a sense of belonging and commitment to one's community.

National and regional governments should extend their provision of resources for a broad range of everyday participation opportunities for people, particularly children and young people, including arts, crafts, sports, outdoor adventure and citizenship activities. Resources should support independent participation experiences in addition to formal or facilitated sessions. Where appropriate, these should be offered in local areas rather than becoming centralised. Centralised services should provide satellite or outreach services.

Community land trusts should extend their notion of participation beyond the board: not everyone wants or is able to be a director so alternative routes to participation ought to be offered. One-off volunteering opportunities such as work parties, or short-term volunteering opportunities such as developing a specific project, may encourage broader engagement with the trust. Such engagement would engender a sense of ownership or belonging amongst those involved which may increase the likelihood of those individuals participating with the board at a later date, when their personal situation permits it.

3. Ease conflicts between work and volunteer commitments

Our research found that conflicts between work and volunteering were a common problem. National policies urging all employers to support their staff to undertake regular voluntary work, such as flexible working hours, have begun to improve this situation and should be expanded.

Employers who operate from within a community owned estate should be encouraged to consider providing their employees who are elected directors of community land trusts with a monthly allocation of hours to be used for services with the board. Taking a more holistic approach to what constitutes 'work' would help to enable the mutual flourishing of the board, the business, the community and the individual.

At the individual trust level, greater recognition that people may want to contribute in a less formal or regular manner, which better fits in with their work patterns, could help to increase participation overall. As noted above, one-off or short-term volunteering opportunities would support this aim.

4. Further research

Our focus on young adults who are participating in community land trusts leads to questions about those who aren't. Research exploring what prevents young adults from engaging with their community land trust could prove useful and may indicate the way in which social and structural inequalities impede an individual's capacity to participate.



[5] Bryan, A. and Westbrook, S. 2014. Summary of Economic Indicator Data; Bryan, A. 2015. Results of Pilot Study of Social Impacts of Community Land Ownership.

Understanding Everyday **Participation Articulating Cultural Values**

Understanding Everyday Participation Articulating Cultural Values Definitions of cultural value matter because they are powerful. Naming something as 'cultural', or not, marks out boundaries of status and resource between people and places. Culture is strongly implicated in the making of economic, social and geographical inequalities.

The Understanding Everyday Participation project (UEP) proposes a radical re-evaluation of the relationship between participation and cultural value - one which transcends traditional ways of understanding the value of 'culture' to include the significance people attach to their hobbies, pastimes, and community-based activities. Using innovative research methods, we are addressing current policy challenges, including economic inequalities, class divisions and well-being.

We are generating results which signpost ways to build social capital and community resilience to austerity. UEP research emphasises the social and civic dimensions to everyday culture. It reveals the multiple ways in which people participate, and how this impacts on their sense of self, relationships with others, and their engagement with the places they live in and visit. Our findings confirm that it is participation per se, rather than particular cultural practices, that matters most.

They also highlight the importance of family, habit and tradition in people's consumption preferences, providing robust evidence which questions market models of choice and decision-making. We work proactively with both local and national stakeholders, including policy influencers, cultural organisations, community groups, members of the creative economy and government. We ensure our research findings are available and accessible so that the broader benefits of everyday participation to society are widely shared.

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