

Strategic Programme

Vibrant Rural Communities (Rural Communities) Theme

Introduction

The Scottish Government Rural and Environmental Science and Analytical Services division (RESAS) has initiated a Strategic Research Programme to address major policy issues and deliver evidence based information vital to Scotland's future prosperity and wellbeing. The Strategic Programme is being carried out through collaboration between leading teams of scientists across the range of Main Research Providers* and is being delivered through two interlinked, multidisciplinary programmes: Environmental Change (Local Responses to Global Change) and Food, Land and People (Optimising the Potential of Scotland's Natural Assets). The Vibrant Rural Communities Theme is a component of the Food Land and People-Programme.

The Theme's key aims and objectives

Research in this theme supports the Scottish Government's aim of achieving sustainable and equitable economic growth across Scotland. The Theme consists of three workpackages (WPs). The first aims to enhance understanding of the reasons for differential economic performance across rural Scotland and linkages between social and economic outcomes. The second aims to show how greater empowerment, through new governance mechanisms, can enable rural stakeholders to contribute more effectively to the Government's aim shared and sustainable growth. The third aims to increase understanding of the interdependencies between rural and urban areas in Scotland and how certain types of interactions (eg outdoor access, use of greenspace or local food systems) can enhance wellbeing as well as deliver improved prosperity to rural Scotland.

Intended benefits from the Theme's research

Research will increase understanding of:

- the social and economic factors that underpin differential economic performance across Scotland.
- how best to design and evaluate local place-based policies aimed at enhancing the resilience of rural communities and their capacity for change.
- the nature of rural urban interdependencies and how they are changing (as a result of economic restructuring and wider changes in society)
- the value and use of greenspace and rural service delivery

This, in turn, will provide a basis for designing policies that are tailored to fit the needs of specific rural territories.

Key policy documents relating to the theme.

- OECD (2008) Rural Policy Review Scotland, UK. Paris: OECD
- Scottish Government (2011) Land Use Strategy
- Scottish Government (2007) Government Economic Strategy
- Scottish Government and COSLA (2009) Scottish Community Empowerment Action Plan to
- Scottish Government (2013) Low Carbon Scotland: Meeting our Emissions Reduction Targets 2013-2027 - The Draft Second Report on Proposals and Policies.
- Scottish Government (2012) Consultation on Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill
- Scottish Government (2013) National Planning Framework 3

Theme Research Activity

The relationship between economic performance and social outcomes in rural communities

This WP seeks to understand the causes of differential economic and social performance across rural Scotland and the scope of place-based policies in addressing social disadvantage and engendering economic development. Existing data and alternative modelling techniques are used to map and explain the pattern of development across rural Scotland, including analysis of differences between objective and subjective measures of rural wellbeing. Research will test the hypothesis that social as well as economic factors help to explain differential rates of growth

between rural areas is explored while economy-wide models are used to analyse how rural Scotland may respond to specific policy or market-induced changes.

Benefits of the research

The research will lead to:

- a better understanding of the importance of economic structure in determining patterns of development
- insights into how social factors can influence economic performance.
- a comparison of alternative measures of wellbeing
- ex ante appraisals of the impact of policies on rural areas (from the economy-wide models).

Governance and decision-making for community empowerment in rural communities

Research in this WP focusses on developing methods for understanding, improving and designing effective approaches to enhance local capacity and resilience in rural communities. Alternative concepts associated with community empowerment will be reviewed and linked to ways of evaluating interventions aimed at supporting or enhancing the adaptive capacity of rural communities. Findings will be tested in a series of case study rural communities in Scotland, in Orkney, Aberdeenshire, Ayrshire (North, East and South) and Dumfries and Galloway. Research will allow different approaches to place-based rural development policy (as opposed to sectoral approaches) to be assessed and the policy implications of the research identified.

Benefits of the research

- Identification of methods of evaluating vibrancy, resilience and social capital in Scotland's rural communities;
- Assessment of methods to evaluate interventions;
- Systematic understanding about what is working well at local level (and why); what makes some communities vibrant and resilient and others less so, and what processes and governance might support and enhance capacity.
- Systematic understanding of how to increase effective empowerment – both at community level and within the range of institutions that work with communities.

In addition, through the participatory research and Knowledge Exchange events, the research will contribute to building a shared/networked understanding of rural community vibrancy and resilience within Scotland and will extend and enhance policy, research and practice networks nationally and internationally.

Understanding the interdependencies between rural and urban areas

Rural areas in Scotland cannot be understood without reference to the many ways in which urban people, places and processes influence them, and vice versa. This WP explores the interdependencies between urban and rural areas in Scotland and how they are changing as a result of economic restructuring and wider changes in society. In addition to an economic analysis of rural-urban linkages associated with changing residential, production and consumption patterns, research will explore potential conflicts associated with increasing outdoor access to urban residents and the extent to which both urban and rural greenspace can play a role in securing better health and wellbeing.

Benefits expected from the research

- A better understanding of economic interdependencies between rural and urban Scotland and the resilience of rural areas to urban shocks and vice versa.
- The role of small towns in contemporary rural Scotland
- Increased knowledge of the contribution of local food supply chains to rural economies
- An enhanced understanding of people's needs from local rural service provision and the factors influencing that delivery
- Enhanced knowledge of existing rural-urban conflicts resolution mechanisms and ways of addressing issues at different spatial scales.
- An improved understanding of why people use and gain benefits from greenspace and how greenspaces can play a role in securing better health and wellbeing, especially in relation to disadvantaged groups in society.

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