



## Scotland's rural movement - the recording and outputs from the 2021vSRP Session on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Session curated by [Scotland's Rural College \(SRUC\)](#), the [James Hutton Institute](#) and Professor Mark Shucksmith and chaired by **Dr Jane Atterton**, Manager of the Rural Policy Centre at SRUC.

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Dr Atterton highlighted the links between the session topic and current developments in democracy and localism including the review of local governance and the implementation of community empowerment legislation.

Democratic innovations such as citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting and the Rural Parliament itself are presenting new platforms for communities to come together and collectively shape policy development and implementation. This SRP session explored ways of strengthening the collective agency of rural and island communities under the banner of a 'rural movement for Scotland'.

### Summary of Presentations

**Phil Raines**, Scottish Government Head of Rural Economy and Communities made the following points:

- The Scottish Government made a commitment in the [2019/20 Programme for Government](#) (PfG) to support the establishment of a rural movement in Scotland. Achieving this necessitates understanding the nature and structures of a 'rural movement'.
- The use of the lower case in the PfG raises interesting questions, seeming to imply that a 'rural movement' is not so much a policy or strategy, i.e. an output of the civil service, but rather a process that naturally exists and is driven by communities themselves.
- This process requires the right kind of investment to provide platforms for all voices to be heard, in particular those quieter voices and those which are marginalised.

**Vanessa Halhead**, Honorary President of [Scottish Rural Action](#) and Coordinator of the [European Community Alliance](#) (ERCA) offered a broad perspective of rural movements:

- In the 1990s Scotland's rural movement was supported by Rural Forum Scotland (RFS). RFS was wound up in 1999.
- Vanessa undertook European research in 2003-04, in the process coining the term 'rural movement' to describe the organisations like RFS that network and mobilise rural and island communities.
- Rural movements - the organisations themselves - exist across Europe as independent civil society networks working in partnership with government. These networks are collaborative and develop

shared platforms for rural areas, their people and organisations to engage in rural policy development at local and national levels.

- In Scotland, Scottish Rural Action was established in 2013 with a mandate to support delivery of a rural movement. Foundations have been laid but there is need to further invest in strengthening the national approach, adding value to the work of dozens of second-tier organisations and the millions of local organisations, businesses and people that make up rural and island Scotland.
- The following activities are seen as core to building a rural movement:
  - Mapping of rural organisations and networks
  - Development of regional networks
  - Academic research
  - Regional workshops
  - National Stakeholder events
  - Rural Youth Parliament and Rural Parliament
  - Rural Manifesto
  - Advocacy and co-production with Government

**Professor Mark Shucksmith** from Newcastle University, a researcher engaged in rural policy and practice in Scotland, England and internationally, drew lessons from two very different organisations involved in delivering a rural movement - the now wound-up Rural Forum Scotland and the still flourishing English equivalent, [ACRE – Action with Communities in Rural England](#).

- Rural Forum Scotland ran from 1981-1999 operating with a Council of 24 members – 12 elected from rural communities and 12 appointed by ‘core member’ or ‘sponsor’ organisations.
- Originally RFS was funded by membership fees but over time raised money through contracts and took on a large team of staff. It was highly respected and recognised as a key delivery partner in developing rural policy by the Scottish Office Ministers.
- The model had two weaknesses – it was a network of national organisations without sufficient reach into the grassroots and it relied on ‘payment on completion’ contracts which resulted in cashflow issues that eventually caused the organisation to close.
- ACRE on the other hand, has been going strong since the 1970s. After the first Rural Community Council (RCC) was set up in Oxford in 1920, there have since emerged RCCs in every county of rural England. They are connected to grassroots communities through a network of village halls, each RCC being responsible for the village halls in its locality. ACRE is the umbrella body for RCCs and this network is partially funded by DEFRA. The core work of ACRE and its RCC network is to further rural services, address poverty and inequality and build the rural economy.
- Unlike RFS, ACRE has strong networks into the grassroots and is effective in amplifying the grassroots voice. It is an organisation that, according to Nigel Curry, a Founding Professor of rural studies at the University of Gloucester, can be summed up in two words – community and volunteering. Nigel’s history of RCCs will be published in September 2021.

The final presentation was delivered by **Petri Rinnie**, President of the [Village Action Association of Finland](#) (in Finnish: Suomen Kylätoimintary or SYTY) who offered an international perspective on rural movements:

- Finland is the most rural country within the European Union, with a population density in sparsely populated areas between 1 and 18 people per square kilometre. 50% of Finland’s population live in rural areas.
- Finland’s approach to rural policy development is shaped by broad instruments, specifically the policy priorities set by government including health, environmental sustainability, transport, economy etc. and narrow policy instruments, i.e. specific networks at national, regional, local and village levels. This ensures that there is cross-portfolio coordination of rural policy, led by the Finnish Rural Policy Committee with platforms for all narrow instruments to become involved in co-production.

- It is important to note that Finland also has a devolved democracy compared to Scotland with more powers in the hands of smaller, localised units of democracy including municipalities and villages.
- The Finnish Village Movement Association includes the Community Led Local Development Network alongside over 4000 villages. At regional level, multiple villages organise into umbrellas through village coordinators. This approach better enables targeting of funding and investment and supports local enterprise and volunteering.
- The Association is recognised by government as a vehicle for sustainable development in rural and remote areas. During the early stages of the pandemic, for example, the Association partnered with the Finnish Government and the Farmers' Union to establish a new company which gained special permissions to ensure there were no travel-related barriers to securing the migrant workforce needed to keep the country's agriculture sector in production.

## Discussion Points

Discussions were structured around four questions:

### 1. What should be the purpose of a rural movement in Scotland?

- To network rural and island communities and to provide platforms for *all* voices to be heard - a rural movement should seek to capture the diversity of views and priorities, while giving platform to voices that frequently struggle to be heard - younger people, Travellers, ethnic minority groups, single parents etc
- To give communities opportunities to share expertise about effective ways of working.
- To build partnerships to collectively address complex problems similar to Finland's example of overcoming workforce shortages during the pandemic – the connecting tissue between the diverse rural actors.
- To provide insight into the unique geographic, social, economic and environmental context of policy making for sustainable rural and island communities – rural movement platforms should enable rural lived expertise to shape national and local government policy.
- To hold government and other institutions to account when policy initiatives fail to respond to the rural and island context.

### 2. Who should be involved in a rural movement in Scotland?

- All people matter in a successful rural movement yet most people living or working in rural Scotland aren't even aware that they are being represented. A communications strategy is needed to ensure people are aware of the rural movement.
- All sectors should be involved – private, statutory, academic, third and community - and all geographies, including provision for urban linkages to be made.
- A central directory (register) of all the groups and organisations with an interest in rural and island Scotland would be helpful.
- Particular focus on engaging with:
  - Land-based and marine industries, tourism etc. to ensure they see the rural movement as relevant;
  - Local authorities and CoSLA to ensure policy coproduction extends to local government.
  - Existing networks/movements – land use, climate change, communities, equalities, housing -to identify how the rural movement adds value to their work;
  - 'Community in its entirety' i.e. acknowledging and strengthening interdependencies between community, private and statutory sectors;
- Covid-19 has increased digital engagement – new potential for connecting people and building platforms.

### **3. What should a rural movement in Scotland do and how can its impacts be measured?**

- The rural movement should speak to all sectoral issues in an interconnected and strategic way – issues cannot be siloed or disaggregated. This is how it can add value to the activities of specialist and sectoral actors.
- A successful rural movement will manage potential conflict – conflict between the interests of different communities and/or between the interests of different sectors – in transparent and positive ways, avoiding a situation where those who have the loudest voice drive the agenda.
- There is lack of clarity around the desired short, medium and long-term outcomes of a rural movement in Scotland and an associated challenge in measuring impact. In part, this lack of clarity stems from confusion using the term – does it mainly relate to a discrete organisation such as Scottish Rural Action, ACRE or the Finnish Village Association? Or does it relate to a movement in the collective sense of the word, where the actions of multiple stakeholders are taken into account, measured and assessed.
- The intersections between the rural movement and democracy highlighted at the beginning of the session are critical to examine. A rural movement should be about redistributing power away from centralised decision-making vehicles to rural and island communities.
- What rural movement leads (organisations, communities) need to do is negotiate the transfer of power. In many cases this will require new vehicles – new networks, new platforms, new strategies and research programmes – which in turn, require resourcing.

### **4. How should a rural movement in Scotland be facilitated and resourced and by whom?**

- Building on the previous question, there is recognition that a rural movement will require resourcing, and some expectation that the Scottish Government should provide this. There are however significant constraints on organisations in receipt of government funding being free to ‘speak truth to power’. Until there is sufficient clarity around the processes and outcomes of a rural movement, it is difficult to be certain what funding/resourcing model would be most appropriate.

## **Next steps**

No specific recommendations arose out of the 2021vSRP session however, the discussions pointed to the need build consensus around the term ‘rural movement’ in a Scottish context.

To support this consensus-building, the Scottish Government has commissioned the SRUC and Professor Mark Shucksmith to produce a review of rural movements in Europe. The review will explore the key characteristics, roles, methods of engagement, etc. of rural movements in other countries and, based on these, distil a set of proposals for Scotland, taking into account wider national policy developments (e.g. community wealth building, local governance review, wellbeing and inclusive growth, etc.), the characteristics of community activity (including relating to the Covid-19 pandemic) and potential barriers/opportunities.

## Documents and initiatives mentioned during session:

Country	Organisation	Links / docs	Information text
Europe-wide		<p>Part 1: <a href="https://www.sra.scot/sites/default/files/document-library/2021-07/rural%20movements%20of%20europe%20part%201%20%282020%2006%2015%202014%2050%2039%20UTC%29.pdf">https://www.sra.scot/sites/default/files/document-library/2021-07/rural movements of europe part 1%20%282020 06 15%2014 50 39%20 UTC%29.pdf</a></p> <p>Part2: <a href="https://www.sra.scot/sites/default/files/document-library/2021-07/rural%20movements%20of%20europe%20part%202%20%282020%2006%2015%202014%2050%2039%20 UTC%29.pdf">https://www.sra.scot/sites/default/files/document-library/2021-07/rural movements of europe part 2%20%282020 06 15%2014 50 39%20 UTC%29.pdf</a></p> <p>Part3: <a href="https://www.sra.scot/sites/default/files/document-library/2021-07/rural%20movements%20of%20europe%20part%203%20%282020%2006%2015%202014%2050%2039%20 UTC%29.pdf">https://www.sra.scot/sites/default/files/document-library/2021-07/rural movements of europe part 3%20%282020 06 15%2014 50 39%20 UTC%29.pdf</a></p>	Report on The Rural Movements of Europe written in 2004, to feed into initiatives to re-start a rural movement in Scotland. Which also helped to start the wider European network of rural movements – the European Rural Community Alliance
		<a href="https://www.sra.scot/sites/default/files/document-library/2021-07/SAC%20%282012%29%20Rural%20Parliaments%20in%20Europe%20a%20Report%20for%20the%20Scottish%20Government.pdf">https://www.sra.scot/sites/default/files/document-library/2021-07/SAC%20%282012%29%20Rural%20Parliaments%20in%20Europe%20a%20Report%20for%20the%20Scottish%20Government.pdf</a>	Report on the rural parliaments in Europe completed by SRUC for the Scottish Government in 2012
		<a href="https://www.sra.scot/sites/default/files/document-library/2021-07/Prepare%20%282011%29%20Rural%20Parliaments%20%26%20Emerging%20Participative%20Democracies.pdf">https://www.sra.scot/sites/default/files/document-library/2021-07/Prepare%20%282011%29%20Rural%20Parliaments%20%26%20Emerging%20 Participative%20Democracies.pdf</a>	Report of the Rural Parliaments in Europe by PREPARE
	European Rural Parliament	<a href="http://www.europeanruralparliament.com">http://www.europeanruralparliament.com</a>	Website of the European Rural Parliament – a partnership of national organisations in 40 countries and 7 pan-European networks
		<a href="https://erp2019.eu/">https://erp2019.eu/</a>	Website of the 2019 European Rural Parliament gathering in Spain
England	Action with Communities in Rural England ACRE	<a href="https://acre.org.uk/">https://acre.org.uk/</a>	Website of the English rural movement - Action with Communities in Rural England ACRE

Estonia	Kodukant Estonian Village Movement	<a href="https://kodukant.ee/">https://kodukant.ee/</a>	Website of the Estonian village movement Kodukant
Finland	Village Action Association of - Finland Suomen Kylätoiminta ry SYTY	<a href="http://www.kylatoiminta.fi/en/home.html">http://www.kylatoiminta.fi/en/home.html</a>	Website of the Village Action Association of Finland SYTY
		<a href="https://www.ruralpolicy.fi/mita-teemme/neuvosto">https://www.ruralpolicy.fi/mita-teemme/neuvosto</a>	The model of Rural Policy Council in Finland
		<a href="https://www.smartrural21.eu/">https://www.smartrural21.eu/</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLNRTLWroE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLNRTLWroE</a>	An example of bigger-scale projects that the village movement is nowadays often taking, a broadband infrastructure project in Raudanmaa village
		<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o672Aj5m8v4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o672Aj5m8v4</a>	Video of a travelling project in the Finnish villages
		<a href="https://www.oecd.org/gov/oecd-rural-policy-reviews-finland.htm">https://www.oecd.org/gov/oecd-rural-policy-reviews-finland.htm</a>	OECD rural policy review on Finland
Ireland	Irish Rural Link	<a href="https://www.irishrurallink.ie/">https://www.irishrurallink.ie/</a>	Website of the Irish rural movement – Irish Rural Link
Netherlands	Landelijke Vereniging voor Kleine Kernen (LVKK) National Association of Small Villages	<a href="https://www.lvkk.nl/wie-we-zijn/">https://www.lvkk.nl/wie-we-zijn/</a>	Website of the Dutch National Association of Villages - Landelijke Vereniging voor Kleine Kernen (LVKK)

		<a href="https://www.developmentaid.org/#!/organizations/view/224160/landelijke-vereniging-voor-kleine-kernen-lvkk-national-association-for-small-cores">https://www.developmentaid.org/#!/organizations/view/224160/landelijke-vereniging-voor-kleine-kernen-lvkk-national-association-for-small-cores</a>	About the Dutch Rural Parliament
Northern Ireland	Rural Community Network	<a href="http://www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org/">http://www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org/</a>	Website of the Northern Ireland rural movement – Rural Community Network
Sweden	Hela Sverige ska leva Rural Sweden	<a href="https://helasverige.se/">https://helasverige.se/</a>	Website of the Swedish village movement - Hela Sverige ska leva - Rural Sweden