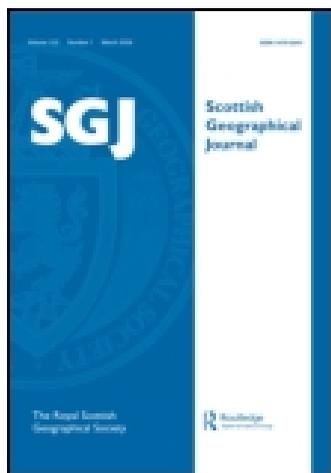


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Common Sense Community? The Climate Challenge Fund's Official and Tacit Community Construction

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ABSTRACT *The Climate Challenge Fund (CCF) is the Scottish Government's flagship initiative addressing the twenty-first century's core concern: environmental challenges. The CCF seeks to reduce carbon emissions explicitly through community. Building on community's long and strong social science heritage, this paper outlines the CCF's tacit and unspoken community assumptions. Through these assumptions, this policy (re)produces, prefigures and performs a particular form of community, this being community's elision with locality, and synonym for place, rurality or neighbourhood. Taking on these tacit assumptions is demonstrative of their belief in the effectiveness of such community. After exploring the CCF, its source and structure, the paper delves into empirical work situated at all levels of the CCF's funding chain. It then teases out how the assumptions around – and the need to demonstrate – community help determine the projects selected, and subsequently the vision of community chosen, enacted and mobilised. The CCF (re) produces a particular vision of community with implications for who receives funding, how environmental action is framed and also for the future of community in Scotland.*

KEY WORDS: low-carbon community, environmental governance, carbon deviance, Scotland, governmentality, transition towns

Introduction

Imagine you are involved in an environmental community group. You are involved because you and the others are in it together – belonging feels good. You believe it is important to do something about the massive environmental challenges facing not just where you live, but your children, grandchildren and the whole of Scotland, those in your local sports club, church, and friends and family living abroad, both now and in future: all the communities you belong to. You learn about the CCF – plenty of government money to support those with like-minds – and get excited, your group will be recognised with government support.

But a few years later, the CCF has left you more jaded than jocose. The CCF, it turns out, is not for communities like the small group of local activists you imagined. They do have lots of money, and they seem to talk the talk on environmental issues, but in order to get

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funding you will have to change your aims – focus on energy and insulation projects, not gardening or the other things you joined the community to do perhaps – and you have also been told that you would be more likely to be successful by rebranding as a Transition Town. How did this happen? Why is there such a disconnect between what the CCF formally said about supporting community and your experience in dealing with the funding process? This is the story of the experience of many such groups in Scotland, and the following paper attempts to explore the roots of these community tensions.

Producing Common Sense Community

The Climate Challenge Fund (CCF) is a crucial initiative for the Scottish Government's ambitious carbon-reduction targets (42% by 2020, 80% by 2050). It was 'set up to help communities combat climate change by reducing their carbon emissions' (Scottish Government 2011a, p. 1). The central focus is carbon reduction through community. Funded communities focus on food or transport projects, as well as through energy efficiency refurbishment or advice. The CCF distributed £37.7 million in grants during its first tranche 2008–2011, coinciding with the period of this research. The scheme has recently been extended until March 2015 – with £10.3 million annually available. Community continues to be central to the Scottish National Party (SNP)/Scottish Government's carbon emissions reduction attempts. The awards made between 2008 and 2011 ranged in value from £7000 to £650,000 (Scottish Government 2011a, p. 9). During this period, the CCF made 331 awards to 261 'communities' (Scottish Government 2011b, p. 1).

Originally the CCF was designed to run until 2011, reflecting the length of the parliament session (Stewart *et al.* 2013). The CCF's genesis can be traced back to the Scottish Green Party's manifesto for the 2007 general election. This left the SNP as the largest party but without majority. To ensure Green Party support for its minority administration the SNP adopted the CCF as Scottish Government policy, fitting with the SNP's self-proclaimed core aim of a successful Scotland through 'sustained economic growth' (Scandrett *et al.* 2012).

This paper argues that the CCF can be seen as 'officially' producing a particular vision of community: the tacit will for a particular form of community to be fostered top-down. The official production of community described here refers to this will – not always vocalised or grasped on the surface – rather than the conscious or programmatic imposition of a community template. By discussing the production of community the paper does not intend to unite Marxist theories of production into *Community Studies*, the analogy here being Lefebvre's (1991) discussion of social space as *Production of Space*. Production of community here refers to the way(s) in which community is created, used, brought into being and arrives as a social entity or force. The argument here is that both the funded groups and the CCF policy – along with the cultural, infrastructural, social and political context surrounding them – encourage, promote and bring community into being whether in a recognisable or silently assumed form. Producing community can be seen at different levels of the funding chain. From those volunteering for the community groups receiving funding to those who wish to initiate and are influential in driving such groups forward, to those at a government level administering and evaluating the CCF as panel members, or senior civil servants; all these voices are engaged with.

This paper's aims are three-fold. The first is to uncover the assumptions that those involved in and with the CCF make regarding community. This is that community

implies local, rural or neighbourhood scale, and that it is the most effective scale at which to effect behavioural change. The second is that the CCF (re)produces, prefigures and performs this particular form of community. Third, the paper asserts that these assumptions have far-reaching implications, affecting the types of projects selected for funding, and the vision of community enacted and deployed more widely.

This discussion is based on in-depth ethnographic research undertaken with three CCF-funded projects and 42 interviews with key actors at all levels of this funding chain: volunteers with each funded community, key office bearers within each community funded, staff paid for with CCF monies and lay public members affected by these schemes although not involved in the community group directly. Also interviewed were CCF funding panel members, civil servants responsible for administering the grant and external environmental consultants carrying out work for the community groups, with CCF monies. These interviews were fully transcribed, coded and analysed. All anonymised actor quotations below are taken from these interviews.

These three CCF projects studied were *Transition Edinburgh University* (TEU), a *Carbon Conversations* course and *Transition Edinburgh South* (TES). These projects were chosen as ‘outliers’ to the early rounds of funding dominance of local rural schemes in the highlands and islands (Creamer 2014). Yet even with these urban examples, groups preferred to see themselves as locally rooted in neighbourhoods. The CCF on the whole funded ‘communities of place’: *Carbon Conversations* was a rare exception. It must be noted, however, that the key sources of data for this paper are the funding chain, not the specific machinations of each initiative.

Searching for Community in the CCF

Between 2008 and 2011, the CCF had only three formal criteria for those applying for funding: first, the ‘community should be at the heart of the decision making process’; second, the project ‘should lead to significant CO₂ reductions’; and third that ‘it should result in a positive legacy for your community’ (CCF 2013, n.p.). Despite the central importance of community, the term was not tightly defined: typical of the use of community whether in the context of environmental behaviour change or government policy (Hauxwell-Baldwin 2013). Williams (1983, p. 76) famously claimed community is always a ‘warmly persuasive word’, ‘never used unfavourably’. Amin (2005) points out that when community is invoked in government policy, it is commonly elided with local, yet the term has always had ‘not a single meaning, but many’ (Crow & Allen 1994, p. 3). The CCF uses community similarly. The term gestures towards some positive well-meant sense of locality, rather than anything firmly described and delimited. Yet it is in and through this community that the carbon-reduction targets are to be achieved.

A government commissioned study reviewing the first three years of the CCF concluded ‘that community projects are well-placed to deliver proenvironmental behaviour change’ (Scottish Government 2011a, p. 8). The study gave three reasons for this, namely, their ‘ability to tailor and personalise their messages and interventions to appeal to individual participants’ motivations’; ‘their position in the community as trusted entities that are seen to have the community’s interest at heart’ and ‘their ability to engage those who are “moderately interested” in the environment and open to the idea of change, and spark them into action’ (Scottish Government 2011a, p. 8).

Community's plurality is writ large here. Community is linked variously above to a project, a location and a group of people, respectively. Crucial in assessing success is that CCF projects were 'seen' to act nobly. This confirms Warren and Birnie's (2009) assertion, in their case applied to renewable energy schemes, that in the use of community, the appearance of the word is important, rather than any specific denoted meaning.

The CCF in Practice

Members of the CCF panel interviewed – those involved with creating the scheme, deciding which groups could apply for funding, then receive monies – were more interested in discussing the CCF's community benefits, rather than project logistics or carbon reduction:

The other main, the more important criteria, is community leadership. So, it's carbon reduction through community action, that is led by the community. (CCF funding panel member 1, 2009)

Where this central import of community came from is unclear, but there are a number of possible sources: one being the background policy context, where community is seen as an increasingly important site of environmental governance in the UK (DECC 2009; Bulkeley & Fuller 2012, p. 8; Seyfang & Haxeltine 2012 provide a useful overview). The two political parties – the SNP and Green Party – setting up the CCF were very keen that community was to be at the core of it. This reveals that 'government by community' goes beyond both the Westminster *New Localism* of New Labour (Freemeaux 2005; Wallace 2010) and the *Big Society* of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats (Nichols & Ralston 2012), akin to what Catney *et al.* (2013) provocatively call 'BS localism'. This could suggest that the 'will of community' (Nancy 1991, p. 57) or the 'will to govern' by community (Li 2007) is more deeply embedded in UK politics than at party policy level. There are additional reasons why these parties (SNP and Greens) were so keen to use 'communities', rather than other institutions – local authorities or NGOs such as Friends of the Earth Scotland – or government agencies like Scottish National Heritage. When the CCF was announced there was understandable upset from the NGOs and local authorities prevented from applying for CCF funds. Instead the CCF sought locally rooted, sub-national communities. Such groups had to emerge genuinely representing the 'wider community' and not be a front for an existing organisation. The SNP's perceived misgivings about the strength of often Labour-held local authorities in the Scottish central belt before the 2011 election, particularly Glasgow, were also mentioned as potential motivation in this research. Stewart *et al.* (2013) provide a detailed study of the electoral policy matters, frames and motivations involved in the emergence of the CCF. The political context and episodic elections cycles are incredibly important to understanding the CCF.

Those present at the meeting where the CCF policy was conceptualised and decided upon mentioned that the minister responsible – Richard Lochhead – was keen to explicitly outline the CCF's community emphasis. Another who was not at that meeting but nevertheless crucial stated:

Right from the very beginning of this project [the CCF], apparently the minister [Lochhead] has said, I want these to be community projects. He's been absolutely adamant these are to be community projects, so I think they have been. I mean

they're not NGO projects, which has made a lot of the NGOs scream. WWF and Friends of the Earth could have done lots of really interesting projects, which would have been working with the community, not on. Right or wrong, I'm not sure, but that's what the decision is. (CCF funding panel member 2, 2010)

Community was seen as beyond old class-based politics, empowering individuals, without relying on a large state, or even a state visible through local authorities. The emergence of the CCF and the central importance of community therein could also be seen as an attempt to govern by consensus. Barbry and Ellis (2011) identify environmental issues and renewable energy in particular as vulnerable to this attempt. The eschewing of conflict and the blurring of previously entrenched political differences has been described as 'post-political' by Swyngedouw (2007). This, alongside the community label, has been identified as an attempt to depoliticise climate change (Featherstone 2012, p. 220; 2013). There is also an incidental quality to this official construction of community. 'Community' fitted nicely for the SNP as 'the perfect example of devolution, things being done differently to before and to deliver the aspirations of a political ruling group' (Civil Servant 1, 2009). It also fitted with the Green Party preference for grassroots anarchy, power emerging from the ground up. Once again though, a will to localise community runs through both the sources of the policy and the nature of it. As an official stated:

They're not signing up to a programme, whether that's a government programme, or an NGO programme, or a local authority programme. And I think they are saying, I don't know about other places, but there's a strong perception in Scotland, particularly in the central belt, of municipal Scotland. Communities are done to by local authority, and the tradition is 'If somethin's no right, they shud sort it oot' not right, they should sort it. And this is turning it on its head, people are saying, for the first time with access to real resources, yes they've been invited to neighbourhood committees and panels and crap, but this is actually the first time they've said 'oh'. Well go on then, do something, here's some money to do it with. Taking responsibility for and managing that. (CCF funding panel member 1, 2009)

This quotation hints at another potential motivation for government to use community beyond the post-political, projecting carbon responsibility and agency onto local communities. The CCF then echoes previous critiques of community fostering agency and responsibility – in this case for carbon lives – through community (see Jessop 2002; Fyfe 2005; Casey & Flint 2008 ; Staeheli 2008a, 2008b, p. 8). Barugh and Glass suggest that the CCF does not achieve this itself, but rather reflects or 'highlights the structural factors which create inequalities of power and wealth' (2010, n.p.).

Those involved with the CCF rejected suggestions they could be anything other than 'good' for communities, and by inference Scotland and the environment. One advisor began passionately:

It's certainly not dumping responsibility in that sense, because it is very clearly people entering into this. [Shifts from forceful speech to reflective] I suppose from a different perspective, you could say implicitly there is some responsibility in that sense. (Civil Servant 2, 2010)

It has long been demonstrated how government community policy projects both agency and responsibility onto local communities (Amin 2005; Wallace 2010). For the CCF this may not be the intention and possibly coincidental. Staeheli (2013, p. 2) argues that where ‘there is considerable overlap in the language used by activists, service providers and the government, the normative values that underpin that language diverge’. Polysemic language overlap can be seen in the multiple placeholder community. Yet diverging associated values and meaning does not necessarily prevent environmental activists and ‘communities’ acquiescing to ‘a diminution in government responsibilities’ (Staeheli 2013, p. 2). For these groups community in no way necessitates a withdrawal of state/government responsibilities. The activists did not formally recognise their taking up the slack of rollback neoliberalism, another reason why these community understandings were formally left vague and polysemic, but narrow and governmentalised in practice.

Through CCF use of community as a vague, loosely defined sense of positive locality, they smuggle in a coercive, narrow, silently assumed vision of community: topological, territorial, local, rural and reified. It is through this policy slight-of-hand that the CCF can assuage different interpretations. It is precisely because community was not tightly defined that the governmentalised vision of community – the silently assumed projection of agency and responsibility onto local populations – can be implemented with the buy-in of the wider public.

The CCF Carrot Attracts Community Coalescence

Edinburgh University was open to fostering community initiatives, such as the CCF-funded TEU scheme for many reasons. They felt the pressing need to reduce energy costs and were willing to ‘try anything’ to reduce demand. Community programmes were cheap enough to be ‘worth a punt’ (Edinburgh University employee 1, 2010). European Union regulation also necessitated taking effective action on emissions reduction, baldly expressed as ‘the need to keep out of the courts’ (Edinburgh University employee 2, 2010). Estates and Buildings staff, fitting with the localism agenda, were keen to ‘devolve’ responsibility for gas and electricity to each department, school and college. A synergy of discourse idealised increasing local autonomy and responsibility in the CCF-funded groups looked at here, and also the community legislation of the CCF (Bolger & Allen 2013). If Edinburgh University was going down that route anyway, the assumption was why not at least apply for money to get to where they were already heading, only faster?

The wish to deliberately inaugurate – officially produce – communities in order to tackle emissions existed not just at the top level of government and business. These high-level aims can be seen within the groups they fund: the manner in which neoliberal government ‘acts at a distance’ (Latour 1987; Rose & Miller 1992; Lockie 1999). Community emerging from the grassroots but under prevailing top-down hegemonic assumptions. Within the groups funded by the CCF, they often saw their role as proleptically initiating and being the community willed by such policies. One CCF-funded staff worker summed up their job:

I think its trying to establish communities’ and later, ‘I see it as creating communities for the future. It’s developing communities, within the area. It is enabling, it’s enabling community action, that’s how I see it. (CCF-funded staff 4, 2010)

Another took a similar perspective, noting that their job is primarily about:

Creating a community. The outcome of this is to convert people. To think about their carbon lives. So again, it is trying to create a community out of that. I suppose it is getting back to the common interest thing. We're creating a community ... We're trying to create a common interest. (CCF-funded staff 2, 2010)

The aims of CCF policy in creating community, official community, to act in specific locations are not just found at the top. They percolate down to the ground level, the level of those carrying out this work, funded from above: government acting vicariously through 'community groups'. Even here there is heightened awareness of the strategic value in creating community. This may be towards certain ends, creating a common interest in order to collectively reduce carbon; nevertheless creating community assumes central import. There may be different expectations as to what that community is or what performative quality it has on those within the community – but community as something utopian to aim for, something good, something worthy of effort and cultivation is systemic, hegemonic even.

This official construction of community ensures not just deliberate top-down production. The relatively large amount of funds made available to hard-pressed groups in an era of neoliberalism, collectives who feel an urgent need to act on environmental issues, determines a particular vision of community fostered and bought-into. So much so that looking at the production, practice and potential of community in carbon reduction in Scotland between 2008 and 2011 is impossible without reference to the CCF. The CCF was a game-changer for community in Scotland.

The CCF provides a carrot around which groups can coalesce. Designers originally questioned where these community groups would emerge but the quantity of money made available to those fitting their official and tacit requirements made it highly probable that the community they wished to fund would emerge. Groups formed coalitions in order to secure funding and the subsequent opportunities provided, such as full-time staff.

[TEU] was pretty informal until we made a formal submission to the Climate Challenge Fund. It was the opportunity afforded by the Climate Challenge Fund which gelled the group, the opportunity of being able to employ somebody, three people, full-time to carry out a proper scoping exercise, which was what gelled the group. (CCF-funded, Transition Edinburgh University employee 2, 2010)

In the case of TES, two separate projects operating in the Morningside and Newington areas of Edinburgh united as TES explicitly as a means to achieve funding. The funding was not just a carrot. Personal connections between the funding panel and those interested in setting up these groups would aid collaboration in getting their proposals and project aims 'correctly aligned' with the aims of the CCF and its vision of community. One panel member described the process:

We met, just talking through what the CCF application might look like and looking at what XX [existing group] were doing, and he [environmental/community activist] was all the language of their mission statement, whatever it was, essentially rise up and change things, campaign for this and campaign for that. So he [said activist] and I were translating some of that into CCF language. Ok, so by that, by campaign to change such and such, youmean 'engage and explore the opportunities to?' 'O. Ok,

I suppose we could say that' he said. It was just they had a much stronger campaigning tradition, a tradition which is tempered with this CCF community engagement and transition model. It's quite interesting. (CCF funding panel member 4, 2010)

This 'tempering' (not one of the projects studied here) occurred in many CCF projects. Community language – and latterly Transition Town branding – used to fit with funders' aims. It both mollifies the emergent energy for change alongside adopting open-ended language, enabling easier presentation of the case for 'success' of the project at a later date, rendering the aims and vision of emergent community subservient to government ones. This is not climate change as a post-political issue, but the deliberate 'tempering' and state mollification of often antagonistic activist desire for change and action.

Similarly the actors/stakeholders involved in the university project were continually keen to point out how the framing of TEU had to be carried out so the project could not be seen to benefit the university. It had to come from, and be seen to come from, the student and staff community, not from the institution itself. One of the members of staff of the university likened it to getting 'students to see if we can gee up, and get them to articulate and formalise, requests that they're making of the institution' (Edinburgh University employee 2, 2010). CCF funding provided an official imperative for the aims of the university to be articulated from a bottom-up perspective. In other words, the top-down production of a community framed as bottom-up.

Thus, the coalescence around the CCF's vision of community is within groups, between groups and also between funders and the community aims and language. This again demonstrates that community has a certain 'functional malleability' (Walker *et al.* 2007, p. 64). Certain visions of community were chosen, tempered and allowed to flourish. Community was officially produced.

Why the CCF Produces Particular Community

These top-down processes and official production of community have also led to the increased prominence of the Transition Town model as a key expression of what a 'genuine' community group looks like. Social science has a long history understanding community as a polysemic term (Bell & Newby 1971; Cohen 1985; Bauman 2001; Delanty 2010). However, the community nature of these projects was not interpreted as totally open-ended. In the early rounds of CCF funding, the highlands and Scottish isles were over-represented in terms of population. A key project used in press releases was on Eigg, an island of 60 people. Questioning the relative prominence for the rural, reified nature of community in the projects that had received funding, one of the funding panel members said:

One of the things we recognised is that the requirements for these to be community projects in urban areas it's much more difficult to define a community. Where people generally think of community [they're] meaning community of place I think. I don't think I'm being patronising here, but most people wouldn't start thinking about community of interest. (Funding Panel member 3, 2010)

Most of those 'communities' funded by the CCF were 'archetypal' communities of place – territorially demarcated, topographically bounded. This research deliberately sought

outliers: less typical, more imaginative, networked or less reified expressions of community. These types of community, such as Carbon Reduction Action Groups, were under-represented in those funded by the CCF. The early rounds of CCF funding can be seen as place-based policy (Taylor Aiken 2014). Groups such as TEU were designed with the aim of successfully applying to the CCF knowing the CCF's desire to 'balance out' their successful bids away from the reified and rural. When bids were funded in Scotland's urban areas, they tended to be from the stereotypical middle-class neighbourhoods – 'Radio 4 activists' (Aiken 2012, p. 95) – the Transition Town Network (TTN) has been identified with (Bailey *et al.* 2010; Smith 2011; Mason & Whitehead 2012). When asked why urban 'communities' did not receive funding to the same degree or extent, a CCF panel member responded:

I don't know, I just think it's because they've found it difficult to demonstrate [community], I think. (Funding Panel member 2, 2010)

The need to be able to *demonstrate* a project's community dimension is crucial to why CCF preferred a reified, rural vision of community. This mainstream, hegemonic community can more simply be described in a funding bid, and grasped by a panel member. It was seen as easier to have a topographical 2D map, with a borderline round a representation of territory, and be able to say 'this is our community' or 'who we represent'. Topological representations of space and community can be seen as less traditional, sedimented and beyond the norm (Massey 2005; Massey *et al.* 2009), at least through CCF eyes. Each project's need to demonstrate that they are a community project leads to a narrow vision of community being chosen and preferred. This form of 'cartographic anxiety' evident in the CCF refers to the 'desire to corral complex nomad spatialities into coherent and mappable territorial configurations' (Painter 2008, p. 356). Rather than being an opening to diversity and difference, the CCF's vague definition of community is what enabled its narrow, cartographic and potentially coercive use-definition. It was this context of surface polysemy – but tacitly narrow understanding – of community that TTN stepped into.

CCF representatives trusted that the Transition model had the same vision of community that the CCF wished to promote; rural, reified, cartographic:

There's several different models seem to be emerging, and one is the Transition model. So if it comes through being a Transition project, generally we'll [CCF] say 'yeah', it looks fine. And unless there's something dubious about it, or ridiculously over-ambitious or whatever, we'll fund it. (CCF panel member 2, 2010)

The presumption with TTN proposals seemed less a case of 'why?' fund it than 'why not?' This was known beyond the funding panel and groups shifted to adopt TTN branding in order to achieve funding. Existing TTN groups also altered their aims to fit the CCF's. Both the pervasiveness of the TTN brand and the lure of CCF funding brought these low-carbon 'communities' into the centre ground; they became more like each other. The CCF had a normalising, centralising influence on the groups applying for and succeeding in receiving funding, as well as on understandings of community. CCF not only governmentalised community, but also homogenised it.

The CCF tended to prefer 'branded' expressions of community attempts to meet the environmental challenge, such as TTN, but also narrowed the form that community took.

Community needed to be demonstrated, meaning policy-makers and funding panel members could draw it on a two-dimensional, Euclidean map. This tended to rural, reified expressions of local communities of place, often in the highlands, or the Scottish isles. Thus urban community was envisioned in the image of rural ideal type, in neighbourhoods. Intriguingly, this mirrors the trajectory of community in theory, from being entirely associated with the rural (Tönnies 1955 [1887]) to retaining the place and territory assumptions in neighbourhoods (Willmott & Young 1957), where the CCF found urban community correlated with the presence of well-resourced – with time, skills and contacts – residents and volunteers. These are what Mohan (2011) calls the ‘civic core’: those who disproportionately give to charity and donate the time and unpaid labour necessary to sustain ‘community groups’. Civic core volunteers tend demographically to be middle aged, well educated, female and also involved in faith-based activities (Büchs *et al.* 2011, 2012; Wills 2012). This study only considered a selection of CCF-funded groups, but the research conducted suggested nothing to contradict such propositions across the CCF as a whole. All these factors – rural ideal type, the need to demonstrable community, cartographic anxiety – reined in what was ostensibly a wide, polysemic and flexible community in the CCF policy, and originally in Green Party documents, to ensure a relatively restricted and narrow vision of community, constituted by a privileged and well-resourced demographic, produced by the CCF in practice.

In the CCF, a relatively large quantity of money went to a relatively small percentage of Scotland’s population reinforcing assumed notions of how community can be and is being performed. What drives this is the CCF’s (pre)conception of community.

Effective Community

This officially produced community assumed community is an effective means of shifting carbon behaviours and practices. Jackson (2009) is emblematic of many who assume community is a correlate of ‘being green’ or ‘ethical living’. Belief in community being what matters, what is missing and needed to govern carbon behaviours and practices leads policies like the CCF and their adoption to hold greater public sway.

Throughout the interviews conducted for this research, it was possible to identify two near universal community assumptions: First that community represented the ‘natural order of things’; second that society, people, ethics or the good life would suffer where community was absent or lacking. One was more deviant, less human where an ‘absence of community’ existed. In line with these, the ‘lack of community’ became a common justification for perceived ills in any given area of society. One volunteer said that:

the underlying values of it [community] are very potent within certain groups of people, but they are probably universal. You know, this need for community that has been eroded in the world, by modern capitalist society, there’s basically no such thing as community, just a sea of individuals, so by focusing on that, it’s a very powerful thing. (TES volunteer 4, 2010)

Community indicated a depth of engagement beyond the superficial. This was the ‘strength of community’.¹ Community dug deeper. For a CCF panel member, ‘running a few carbon reduction workshops doesn’t cut it’, when it came to their ultimate aim: ‘real community’.

Throughout these interviews there was a yearning for a normative vision of a yet-to-be or has-been temporally displaced community, as seen in TTN (Brown *et al.* 2012).

It was ‘motivating to act as a community’, due to ‘peer pressure’. Often I was asked to ‘imagine what we can do if we can get them to act as a community’. A common theme was the overcoming of individual desires. Community ‘empowers you more’ as ‘there’s nothing worse than feeling alone with a problem’. Another volunteer expressed their frustration at working on the ‘too slow’ individual level, and expressed a desire for a critical mass. Community was a ‘hearts and minds thing’. Another stated the community approach was actually slower, but more effective, being part of community was empowering, increasing one’s (sense of) agency. This echoes research identifying community as having potential to re-orientate or ‘correct’ environmental behaviours in ways no other scheme, or state of togetherness, can (Heiskanen *et al.* 2010; Middlemiss & Parrish 2010; Middlemiss 2011a, 2011b; Bradbury & Middlemiss 2014).

For this reason community was seen as adopting an inclusive approach. It was both inclusive in the acceptance of its effectiveness: ‘everyone knows it’s a way of potentially reaching more people, and [tapping into] local knowledge too’. Additionally, its inclusivity also stemmed from the number of factors it sought to address. Amongst those mentioned were health, happiness, employment, engagement, climate change and peak oil. Under certain definitions community was also seen as welcoming diversity: ‘If it’s a local community, a street community it’s not just the usual suspects’. The belief in diversity existed regardless of the actual degree of group homogeneity. Widespread hegemonic faith in the effectiveness of community to reduce carbon deviance and promote the ‘good life’ is enough for it to be performatively adopted as crucial to managing environmental impact: both from state actors and also bottom-up.

This ‘common sense’ normative belief allowed place-bound community construction. This can be seen in the Transition Town and the CCF-funded practice of naming their examples after the place/territory where they ‘belong’ (Lochwinnoch Energy Action, Transition North Howe, Killin Cutting Carbon). In urban environments TTN retains this notion by operating at the neighbourhood scale (Transition Edinburgh South). The acting out of this faith in the effectiveness of community of place (bounded, topographical and neo-Euclidean) can be seen in one Edinburgh project focusing on a single street and the central importance of ‘community of place/geography’ therein:

Well, with the energy project, just by the nature of the project, there was a conscious decision at the start to focus on street area. Because we just thought, well it [community] needs to be geographical. (Volunteer 3, 2010)

The assumption that community needs to be geographical – in this case we can read geographical as territorial – was held together with the belief that community controls (carbon) deviance and that this territorial (local) community has a norming effect on residents behaviour.

Conclusion

The Scottish Government through the CCF seeks to govern the environmental behaviours of its citizens through community. The CCF appeals to ‘individual motivations’, gaining widespread consent across wide sections of the population. This encourages inclusivity

of environmental action, rather than just appealing to minority interest groups: the ‘usual suspects’.

This belief does not solely flow top-down. For funders, the agency and responsibility to spend funding wisely reside within the communities themselves:

This group have voluntarily thought that it'd be a good thing to cut its carbon emissions by this much, we think it's a good idea, and we'd love to see them succeed, and here some money, we'll give them some money to do that. (CCF panel member 2)

The belief here is that the will for transition comes from within a given, pre-existing community; they have the desire to act and the CCF merely functions as a facilitator: ‘It’s actually the first time, for many of them, they’ve actually had to do this stuff for real’ (CCF panel member 1).

A positive spin was put on all this but there were negatives too. Community groups would advertise unpaid internships. For instance, one group requested overhauling their website, as no-one within the community had the requisite skills. The group relied on an ‘age of austerity’ (Seymour 2014) with many skilled unemployed people wishing to have something extra for their CV, covering any gaps in employment. Sure enough such workers often came forward. Surrounding structural conditions remained unaltered, but the group would claim ‘everyone could win’ in this situation. Groups achieved tasks without outsourcing, they could still claim to be reliant on skills from ‘within the community’, funders did not need to spend more and a ‘government by community’ discourse could spread.

This paper shows that the narrow normative presumptions of what community is or could be in the CCF, despite documents explaining otherwise, are based on a set of beliefs around how certain states of togetherness – the local, reified, place-based community – control (environmental) behaviours effectively. Beliefs that community implies low carbon and people will lead less carbon-deviant lives in community pervades. Thus the Scottish Government targets its ambitious carbon reduction cheaply through mobilising affective, community-as-belonging for instrumental aims. These beliefs exist at all levels of the funding chain, and are not merely assumed at the top level and foisted downward. The reasons for this are variously selective (differing views/visions of community may not have been funded), but also the centralising nature of the funding process. Successful proposals breed success, in a similar fashion to themselves, as can be seen in the widespread adoption of the TTN model. Yet it is also representational, the ways in which community and carbon reduction can be demonstrated is crucial in the CCF. This increasing focus on *demonstration* in environmental governance then gives rise to a relatively narrow vision of what community is and can be and how the environmental challenge is framed, understood and met. Alternative visions of community are not to be found here: community as networked, topological, heterogeneous, dispersed or even communities of interest.

Officially produced community is hegemonic, not formally planned, rationally aimed and directed. Rather through a ‘common sense’ assumption of what community is and can be, the hegemonic community is officially (re)produced. What one takes to be ‘common sense’ is contingent of the continual (re)creation of norms, assumptions and partially sedimented structural conditions. The CCF can be seen as one of those structural factors.

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Note

¹ All participant quotations in this section are from volunteers or paid employees for the funded community projects unless otherwise stated.

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