

Community as tool for low carbon transitions: Involvement and containment, policy and action

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Abstract

This paper introduces the Heideggerian terms *Zuhanden* and *Vorhanden* to studies of community low carbon transitions. It sets apart *Zuhandenheit* community as involvement: the doing, enacting and belonging aspects of community movements and activism. *Vorhandenheit* community contrastingly is observed: community as an object at arm's length, to be studied, tasked or used. The article builds on authors, particularly Malpas, who have utilised these concepts in spatial theory by adopting their associated spatialisation of involvement and containment. After introducing this theoretical understanding, the article addresses the case of a Transition initiative in receipt of government funding, where both *Vorhanden* and *Zuhanden* subjectivities can be found. Through focusing on this specific Transition project, we can more clearly grasp both the tensions emerging from state-funded community and the limits to, and possibilities for, appreciating community action phenomenologically.

Keywords

Environmental policy, environmental politics, environmental sustainability, sustainable communities

The community-style, matter-of-factly (*zuhanden*, as Martin Heidegger would say) understanding does not need to be sought, let alone laboriously *built* or *fought* for: that understanding is there, ready-made and ready to use - so that we understand each other without words and never

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need to ask, apprehensively, ‘what do you mean?’ The kind of understanding on which community rests *precedes* all agreements and disagreements. Such understanding is not a finishing line, but the *starting point* of all togetherness ...

Since ‘community’ means shared understanding of the ‘natural’ and ‘tacit’ kind, it won’t survive the moment in which it turns self-conscious ... [and] passes from ‘zuhanden’ to being ‘vorhanden’ and becomes an object for contemplation and scrutiny. (Bauman, 2001: 10–11, original emphasis)

Introduction

Community is increasingly seen as a tool or technology of governance, used in order to effect low carbon living. Governments use community to get people to behave, or to discipline subjects. Grassroots organisations and community movements also use community as a social technology, or tool, in order to increase capacity for action, to ‘keep people on track’, and achieve more than solely acting alone, or influencing individuals (through advertising, advocacy or lobbying) would be able to. From both within community groups and also their surrounding ‘external’ policy and governmental context, community is often seen in instrumental terms. Environmentally, this means that community is seen as having a productive power to enable low carbon transitions. Critiques of these processes often focus on community; this paper instead critically addresses the tool aspect.

Literature here points to community’s role as a ‘policy object’, used by states to ‘enroll people and places in energy-carbon action’ (Eadson, 2016: 4). Hobson et al. point to the ‘instrumental and strategic’ (2016a: 1394) role of community-led initiatives in meeting national legislation targets, Chatterton to the ‘goal-orientated or purposive’ (2016: 4) focus of community low carbon transition initiatives. Though as yet there is little attention paid to what this particular use and tasking of community does to the internal, phenomenological community dynamics, the relationships between group members and to the intangible benefits, community is claimed to provide when pursuing low carbon targets. This article seeks to bring the proliferating field of literature on low carbon living, particularly the role of community within this, into conversation with a so far separate literature understating relatedness to tools or tool-being. The paper utilises the phenomenological distinction of *Zuhanden/Vorhanden*, developed to understand how subjects relate to and use tools, to offer a way to understand the tasking of, and conversely feeling immersed in the activity of, community low carbon action.

Community is now a key site and actor in the transition to low carbon futures: the diverse pathways – proposed, postulated and produced – towards low carbon society (Bulkeley et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2012; Mason and Whitehead, 2012; Middlemiss and Parrish, 2010; North and Longhurst, 2013). Community here takes a number of forms: a technique of governance to control carbon deviance amongst populations; grassroots, emergent energy for change; or as the ‘natural’ unit of analysis for human togetherness (Heiskanen et al., 2010; Hobson et al., 2016b; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012; Taylor-Aiken et al., 2017; Walker, 2011). Crucially, community is also a tool, used by a variety of actors to achieve various low carbon ambitions. This paper examines an expression of one community movement associated with all these: Transition. Transition initiatives have emerged as the most prominent expression of community-based eco-localisation (Hopkins, 2008, 2011). The paper presents a novel way to understand the role of community in low carbon transitions by adopting a phenomenological reading of community. ‘Community’ here encompasses *both* a grassroots

desire to volunteer, get involved and do something in the face of overwhelming environmental challenges, *and* governmental attempts to enrol citizens in avoiding carbon deviance. Addressing the subjectivities performed, mobilised and produced in these different forms and imaginings of community offers a way to comprehend the tensions that can emerge within and between community groups.

The next section will introduce the concepts of *Zuhanden* and *Vorhanden* – in English termed ‘ready-to-hand’ and ‘present-to-hand’ – specifically their potential application to community. The following section moves on to critically outline how these terms have been spatialised by Malpas as ‘involvement’ and ‘containment’. The particular methods adopted, alongside the methodological challenges of studying *Zuhandenheit*, are then discussed. Next, the article introduces and analyses a community group, their lived and felt experience of community and community action. Building on this, the paper then outlines the specific community policy supporting this group and movement, again bringing it into conversation with the *Zuhanden/Vorhanden* distinction. The article, before concluding, lays out the advantages to understanding community low carbon transitions in the light of these phenomenological theories.

Zuhandenheit, Vorhandenheit and community

Bauman, in the epigraph, outlines the significance and meaning of *Zuhandenheit* (readiness-to-hand) community: implying belonging, practicality and action orientation. ‘*Zuhandenheit* community’ follows Heidegger’s (1962: 96ff) distinction between *Zuhanden* (ready-to-hand) and *Vorhanden* (present-at-hand), and emphasises how subjects can be already practically involved and immersed within communities, before any thought, concept and reflection of what it is to be so. It does so in a way that goes deeper than merely referring to a signifier, or elision with local, place or small-scale, as the long tradition of *Community Studies* draws attention to. This is a constitutive experience of community. Instead of seeing community as an entity to be engaged with or theorised about – as one would in *Vorhandenheit* community or presentness-at-hand mode – one’s community is that in which subjects are already part of and within which they are practically engaged.

Zuhandenheit reveals objects in terms of their ‘referential relations’ (Cerbone, 2006: 47), rather than their substance, however, defined. Seeing community as *Zuhanden* involves not seeing, but being entangled and involved in a form of togetherness integral to the condition of being and becoming human. Here, community belonging is involvement in a common demanding task. *Zuhandenheit* community is not a noun to be defined or an object for sociological study¹ but an activity to become enmeshed within; an extension of the self to belong to; community as an activity to get involved in and for. The underlying point about phenomenology from Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, or Sartre is that consciousness must always be conscious of, or towards, something. When applying this to community, we can say that a phenomenological approach to community understands that the being and becoming together that goes under the name of community must be a community *for* something.

Zuhandenheit and *Vorhandenheit* were not originally brought to bear in this area though; so some charting of these concepts’ history is needed. Heidegger describes how a hammer becomes part of the hand and arm when hammering. The hammer is not ‘grasped thematically as an occurring Thing’ (1962: 98), but rather its function is in the activity of hammering – before and beyond a theoretical knowledge of what a hammer is or does. Understanding community as *Zuhanden* builds on the ‘practical orientation’ (Cerbone, 2006: 45–46) that the ready-to-hand mode has towards objects (Harman, 2002). Seeing community as *Zuhanden* does not mean community is an object, on the contrary,

but that community implicitly has a practical orientation; that one's subjectivity extends from 'the self' towards common others for belonging and purposive agency. Community's task – getting on with doing something – is inherently part of what it is. Community, understood in this way, is not a static 'Thing' in itself; instead it is – like the hammer – an implicit extension of selfhood, a collective subjectivity imbued with agency, enabling one to achieve tasks.

Zuhandenheit is regularly set against Vorhandenheit, and it makes sense to outline what Vorhandenheit community would refer to here. Community as Vorhanden is still a tool: a 'social hammer' required for low carbon transitions, but in a modal and substantive shift from Zuhandenheit community. Here, community ceases to be the background, the context in which relationships are sustained and sutured, and becomes a tool of policy, something written into strategy documents, a 'Thing' that social researchers like myself ask questions about. Community can also become Vorhanden for those on the 'inside' – in reflection, board meetings, or when general frustrations about one's community emerge. Framing collective action as either Vorhanden or Zuhanden helps explain the difficulty in translating belonging, a desire to volunteer, and grassroots community activity (Zuhanden) to the objective task (Vorhanden) of reducing abstract carbon through community, for instance, a carbon footprint.

While Zuhandenheit and Vorhandenheit community can be a useful heuristic, setting them apart need not be normative. Setting up this simple binary would associate Zuhandenheit community as implying belonging, grassroots activities and other fluffy 'Good Things'. Community has been particularly prey to this through its conceptual history. In this reading, Vorhandenheit would be linked to the instrumentalised, strategic and disciplinary government by community (Dean, 2010; Rose, 1999). The community of low carbon transitions, posited as site of great possibility in reducing carbon footprints, is often one of Vorhanden: strategic, replicable, useful and efficient. Clearly at times both approaches can be helpful and illuminating, and neither is exclusive. Vorhanden is a detachment from Zuhanden: The mistake is to forget that any Vorhanden-type understanding has been detached from something. As the Bauman quote emphasises, lived, Zuhanden experience of community *precedes* any and all theorising or reflection. Conceptualising Zuhandenheit community is useful in order to remember that the involved aspects of community feel wholly different to what we commonly consider, write about and theorise or observe as community.

Yet both cannot be fully grasped or lived together, concurrently. For Heidegger, Zuhanden and Vorhanden approaches are distinct. One either is or is not absorbed by a given task, in a Zuhanden manner. 'Pure presence-at-hand [Vorhanden] announces itself. . . but only to withdraw the readiness-to-hand [Zuhanden] of something' (Heidegger, 1962: 103). Zuhanden is prior to Vorhanden – when we identify, relate and belong to something in Vorhanden mode, Zuhandenheit is modified. Hence, there can be no strategic deployment of Zuhandenheit community. Once an object or entity is seen as Vorhanden, Zuhanden withdraws, removes itself from the scene, where Vorhandenheit community is strategically deployed to reduce carbon, Zuhandenheit community will momentarily retreat. For Heidegger, seeing an object as a tool is tied up with our being-with-others in the world. Thus, any approach to understanding togetherness, of which we are interested in community here, is prior and together with understanding any object or social entity as an extension of self. The potential conceptual confusion here lies in seeing one particular form of togetherness (community) as both an implicit extension of self and one's subjectivity, and also as a tool to getting something done, in this case action on low carbon.

Heidegger distinguished between Being-human (Dasein) and non-human being, which can appear as either *Zuhandenheit* or *Vorhandenheit*. Dreyfus (1991: xi) translates these as, respectively, availability and occurrentness. Elden (2006: 43) notes, following Heidegger (1962: 54, also 66–67, 114), that the things of the world (*Vorhandensein*) are ‘not [of] the character of Dasein’, i.e. human-being. Heidegger’s discussion of *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit* was then originally a discussion of the way we deal with beings who do not share our way of being, i.e. non-humans, Things. This is obviously problematic given community is a social arrangement tying oneself to another, not oneself to a thing. However, applying *Zuhanden* and *Vorhanden* to understanding community is not carried out as a Heideggerian. It is not necessary to take Heidegger’s wider project on board. If so, it would make sense to start with discussion of *Mitsein*, *Miteinandersein*, or even *Mitwelt*. The analysis here is an investigation into community as a tool for transition. *Vorhanden* and *Zuhanden* are useful because they help explicate community as experienced in an absorbed, primary and pre-reflective manner, distinct to the community strategically deployed to meet policy targets. Applying these concepts beyond the realm of non-human tools such as hammers is not typical, but neither is it unheard of. Perhaps most famously amongst Heideggerians, Harman (2002) argues that *Zuhandenheit*, what he names as ‘tool-being’, is ‘not a limited regional description of hammers, saws, toothpicks, and other technical devices. Rather, the famous tool-analysis holds good for *all* entities, no matter how useful or useless they might be.’ (2002: 4, original emphasis). For Harman’s expansionist argument, *Zuhandenheit* is not only about practicality but a deeper being that precedes either involvement in, or theoretical reflection about, a tool. The social entity subject to ‘tool-analysis’ here is community.² Thus, the start point for this study is Bauman (2001: 10) and others who use these concepts, not necessarily a deeper investigation into what precisely Heidegger thought and meant when he used these terms. Importantly, these concepts do not just concern how humans relate to things, but the *manner* in which we relate to things, the way we use things as equipment and tools.

Understanding community transitions in the light of early Heideggerian concepts of *Zuhanden* and *Vorhanden* is crucial in this respect. As Heidegger notes, when we use equipment, it tends to ‘disappear’. Community has the same characteristic. When we fully belong to and act within a community, there is no thinking, rational or not, of the collective to which we are a part: community ‘just is’. However, when we stop to think about our social belonging – rather than feeling it, living it, our social extensions cognitively ‘disappearing’ – the tendency is to reify, objective and set-apart one social grouping from its context or actual graspability. Dreyfus (1991: 84) points out that *Vorhanden* emerges as *Zuhanden* recedes in a decontextualising process. Graham and Thrift, using these concepts to discuss repair and failure, raise the key point that items tend to become visible only upon their breakdown (2007: 8). *Vorhanden* appears when *Zuhanden* ceases to function. More precisely, the involvement aspects to community are unavailable to us once we adopt the *Vorhandenheit* detached and observed stance towards that community. Community is much like infrastructure in this regard; it works, nevermind works best, whenever it is not noticed, where community is most visible may counter-intuitively indicate its brokenness or literal uselessness.

Both *Vorhanden* and *Zuhanden* describe relatedness to tools: the difference lies in how we relate to those tools. The community that is used to meet huge environmental challenges, and the logistical, moral, practical and political necessity for transition, is focused on achieving something. Community does – or is claimed to do – something. What that something is, or might be, is messy and contested and subject to various interpretations and agendas, but community is invested with hopes, aims, ambitions and expectations. Community is used as

a tool. *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* helps provide a vocabulary to easily distinguish between the subjective, phenomenological feeling of belonging to such a collective trying to do something; and a dis-tant (in the Heideggerian sense) utilisation and establishing of community to achieve a strategic aim.

Spatialising *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit* in community low carbon transitions

Malpas follows Heidegger's *Vorhanden/Zuhanden* to give 'a distinction between two modes of spatiality corresponding to the ideas of "containment" and "involvement"' (Malpas, 2006: 126). *Containment*, linked to *Vorhandenheit*, refers to a spatiality that is extended, measurable, and crucially 'objective'. *Involvement*, linked to *Zuhandenheit*, refers to a spatiality that is orientated, directed and 'directly related to being-there's own active engagement in the world. It is the latter of these two modes of spatiality – the spatiality of "involvement" – that Heidegger tells us is proper to being-there' (Malpas, 2006: 126).

These two forms of spatiality – 'containment' and 'involvement' – helpfully correspond to how community is invoked in low carbon transitions. Community action, for grassroots actors and activists, is an involving experience. Movements such as Transition use intentional forms of community, actively chosen, opted into and desired, in order to generate an *involving* feeling of solidarity within the group, a supportive context and increased agency and capacity to achieve their low carbon aims and ambitions. Community policy, however, has often used the particular social configuration of community – settled and static, rooted and reified – as a means to guide, arrange and *contain* populations (Middlemiss, 2014; Taylor-Aiken, 2016b; Creamer, et al. 2018; Holstead et al., 2018). Thus, *Zuhanden* and *Vorhanden* – spatialised as involvement and containment – comprise a powerful explanatory framework to understand the separate subjectivities involved wherever community is used to meet low carbon challenges. Despite the same word being used and found in both community policy and community action, the 'community' of *Vorhanden/containment* is distinct from the 'community' of *Zuhanden/involvement*.

Zuhandenheit involvement produces 'useable and accessible space where things are known and work', whereas *Vorhanden* 'a situation of detached arrangements of materialities that alienate and obstruct' (Schwanen et al., 2012: 1315). For Bialasiewicz, the *Zuhanden* mode forbids standing still and commands action, getting involved. *Vorhanden* on the other hand implies a sense of distance and otherness, a stood-apart difference that 'needs to be watched' (Bialasiewicz, 2009: 329). Community can be either a social tool tasked with carbon reduction: observed, watched and detached. Or belonging that calls for involvement, engagement and unthinking understanding.

Understanding community through the conceptual lens of *Vorhanden* and *Zuhanden* leads to a crucial valuing of the *orientation* of activities. As Malpas outlines, the 'way in which our activity, and our orientation to things and places within that activity, is not merely determined by the end *to which* we are directed, but also by the structure of the spatiality *in which* that activity is situated' (2006: 127). Malpas gives the example of being orientated in his carpentry shop. His relation to a tool implies not only an understanding of what they are, and are for, but also of the spaces they occupy and how one then relates to them in turn. The way we carry out a task is as important as the specific task we have in mind. The means (the *in which*) are as, perhaps more, important than the ends (the *to which*). Thus, the two forms of subjectivity (*Zuhanden* or *Vorhanden*) also form two separate spatialities (involving or containing).

Zuhandenheit community comprises a togetherness that is outwardly orientated-towards, for a collective togetherness that is active, engaging, and seeks to carry out and participate in tasks. This form of community involves a pre-reflective involvement in tasks. Furthermore, as the hammer is an un-thought extension of the arm enabling one to achieve hammering, so community is an un-thought extension of the self, enabling these tasks to be accomplished. That is, gathering in particular spatial and social arrangements can allow greater achievements and tasks to be accomplished than solely acting alone; whether through mimetically emulating peers, group norms or social confirming. A hammer affords hammering; a community can similarly afford different tasks to be achieved. Zuhandenheit community can be a social space and glue that can increase agency, a form of togetherness at once un-thought and unquestioned, yet also task-focused and characterised by involved activity.

Of course this suite of ideas helps us better understand not only *involvement* in, but also *containment* of community low carbon transitions. Vorhanden:

can occur when activity breaks down... For instance, when the tip of the pencil I am using breaks off, leaving me, say, looking at the pencil in my hand, the pencil is encountered as in my hand, useless. No longer involved in my activity, the regional place that the pencil formerly occupied in my ends, tasks, and actions has dropped away, and the pencil is now encountered simply as occurring at a spot (*Stelle*) in objective space: in my hand. (Schatzki, 2013: 55).

This helps us to understand *why* treating social entities such as community in an objective way can lead to their reification and functional breakdown. The community that is subjectively formed, felt and lived by those involved within it is like a functioning pencil. Setting community apart, objectively viewing it, or focusing on community's capabilities, like the ability to reduce carbon, implies that community has ceased to function. At least in its involvement/Zuhandenheit aspects, which are often the reasons why people get involved in these initiatives in the first place. As Schatzki states, Vorhanden appears 'when activity breaks down'. Strategic, objective community in this sense is a broken pencil.

Where funding schemes treat community in an objective and distant manner – a few adjacent streets, a reified topographical neighbourhood, a community defined by workplace – spatiality and collective arrangements of togetherness are seen as 'objective' (See Taylor Aiken, 2018 for another example of this process). When the ends, tasks and actions have dropped away, the Zuhandenheit function of the community will stop, however, temporarily. When one's manner of relating to something shifts from Zuhanden to Vorhanden, 'the entire mutually referring network that Heidegger calls a world – is abruptly destroyed' (Verbeek, 2004: 79–80 in Graham and Thrift, 2007: 3). The function of a tool breaks as it becomes visible. Brokenness and visibility (when things become present to us) come together in the same moment. The rendering of tools visible is at the very same juncture rendering them broken or literally use-less (Harman, 2002: 44–48). Paradoxically, the more visible community is – the more it is mentioned, pursued, glorified – the more likely it is broken.

The pre-reflective social glue that Zuhandenheit community provides dissolves in the strategic thinking of community and one's relatedness with others as Vorhanden. When state schemes seek to strategically reduce carbon – deploying present-to-hand, Vorhanden community (Schatzki, 2007) – the result in theory (a theory explored through empirical evidence in this paper) should be the breakdown of the community solidarity, feeling and belonging, into alienation and obstruction. That this is mirrored in the experience of many community movements, from initial Zuhandenheit towards Vorhandenheit can again indicate the philosophical and phenomenological shift in one's community relations and

subjectivities that takes place when community is instrumentalised, governmentalized and tasked with objectives.

Methodology

'Things only come into visible focus as things when they become inoperable – they break or stutter and they then become the object of attention' (Graham and Thrift, 2007: 2). This encapsulates the methodological difficulty of studying *Zuhandenheit*. One may well become engaged in a task or piece of work, but in order to reflect upon that, or consider the importance of an ethnographic experience for the realm of theory, or to think through policy implications, one must 'break' and render inoperable one's experience. Discussing, observing or reflecting on community, such as any community policy document, review, funding bid or even this paper, must see community as *Vorhanden*: set apart, broken, inoperable. The mother of all caveats must be declared here then. The paper emerges from what I consider to be *Zuhandenheit* experiences of community, subsequently reflected upon and abstracted from and presented here through the lens of *Vorhanden*. These *Zuhanden*-esque experiences are community in use, flow, absorption and engagement – but only recognised as such after the event. The vocabulary of *Zuhanden* and *Vorhanden* give such a critical purchase to understanding community low carbon transitions that it is worth going through this theoretical rigmarole. But it would be remiss to pretend that this analysis does not accompany methodological challenges.

Methodological concepts already exist to discuss the differences between the experiences of research subjects and more objective understandings. Perhaps most common is the distinction between *emic* and *etic*. This allows differentiation to be made between the ways a social group would grasp, understand and make sense of their situation themselves (*emic*), and those a researcher might develop after some reflection (*etic*). Yet, there is something beyond language, even the *emic* ways groups can describe and explain themselves that is captured by the *Zuhanden/Vorhanden* distinction. *Zuhanden* here is more of an understanding than a knowledge, a non-rational, pre-linguistic absorption in a task. Even if a perfect *emic* description from case studies could be found, it would still fail to be fully *Zuhanden* as it entails a stepping back and halting of the task in order to contemplate what precisely is going on.

Community functions in different ways depending on one's absorption within it; this paper adopts *Zuhanden/Vorhanden* in order to find a way to express this. This research forms part of a wider study, originally interested in sociological questions such as 'what does community mean?' when invoked in the transition to low carbon futures. Semi-structured interview questions looked for various (overlapping) semantic associations: place, group, interest. After adopting ethnographic techniques, the grounded experiences and lived spatiality of actors become the primary focus. This was due to an emerging awareness that the community used by government/policy actors not only varied semantically, but had wholly different linked values and sense of associated subjectivities to the grassroots emergent energy for change coming from community activists. As the paper demonstrates, these different understandings and expectations of collective subjectivities have profound implications for governing community transitions. It is appropriate that this focus and manner of study should emerge *after* a prior research commitment, given the theoretical frame of the early Heidegger focus on engaged activity for grasping spatiality.

Specifically, this paper presents research from one anonymous community group – a Transition initiative – who were funded by the Scottish Government's Climate Challenge

Fund (CCF), a flagship policy to meet their low carbon targets. This research comprised an analysis of the funding scheme itself, and key actors involved in the process of allocating funding. More widely, the community group itself was engaged with before, during and after this period of funding. Experience of this community group throughout this period and an awareness of the distinction funding, particularly the manner of the way funding assessments were carried out, proved important. It also allowed a window into seeing frustrations emerge between this community group and their funders, the CCF. This paper is an attempt to find a way to explain how such conflict could emerge when on the surface both were committed to using community to accomplish low carbon tasks.

From this wider study, this paper also utilises 29 semi-structured interviews between an hour and three hours long, conducted with key actors at all levels of those funded: government-funded staff, bank account signatories and volunteers in each funded community initiative; those on the funding side included funding panel members, civil servants and other grant managers. Certain actors were interviewed and more frequently communicated with over a longer period of time. Also interviewed were others external to these groups but affected by them: local residents, related nearby groups, external consultants. Participants were chosen through ‘purposive sampling’ (Longhurst, 2012: 108) for their expertise or unique position and viewpoint of these initiatives. Interviews were fully transcribed, coded and analysed. All anonymous actor quotations below are taken from these interviews.

Two years of wider ethnographic experiences included attendance at formal meetings and events, from strategic meetings to public outreach occasions such as film screenings. These were only the formal aspects of the wider involvement in such a group and movement. It was the much more quotidian aspects, from sharing cups of tea to emails and phone conversations that helped build up a full picture of what the experiences of belonging to such a community movement was like: practically and emotionally.

Community action and phenomenology: ‘How can I say it...’

‘Community’ in the group researched here often appeared as something ineffable, impossible to express in words or in an interview: rather I had to ‘go on a journey’ with volunteers.³ Community was not a word to be defined, but a task to be carried out. Yet interviewees did attempt to describe community. One volunteer declared community to be a by-word for ‘practical projects’. Another saw a vision for their Transition cell as: ‘Capturing those communities of interest and allowing them to grow into something that’s practical and possible’. One could say at this point that what community denotes is action, doing. This is true but only partially so. The awareness that community meant verb and doing, was not the ability to draw a line between the signified and signifier – rather it was a ‘knowing in your bones’. Volunteers expressed reluctance to attempt to identify and define what community meant, as doing so would represent an abstraction from what community did. In this way, community stands for something – if it stands for anything – ineffable, grounding, perhaps what it means to be human.

Volunteers did not describe community as such: not due to inarticulateness, for they could be eloquent and forthcoming on other issues. Interviewees frequently gestured towards community, finding succinct words elusive. Volunteers would often wonder aloud ‘how can I say it...’; ‘I suppose I’ve never really thought about it’ another reflected, later in the interview finding the words ‘it’s a bit like being *in the zone* where you’re just on it, all focused and that’. Some participants clearly valued community’s belonging or norming aspects but could, would, or did not express this directly. For example, when some volunteers talked about the ‘best bit’ of community, they expressed it as ‘swimming with the tide’

when with their Transition peers. This ‘just is’, or *Zuhandenheit* aspect to community is not something that can be solely read off from participants behaviour, actions, speech-acts or discourse. This sense of community is not separate to these associations, but is the undergirding or starting point of them, as Bauman (2001: 10) indicated at the outset.

Both those inside and outside this initiative were asked what difference taking a ‘community-approach’ made to these tasks and projects. Those inside the groups emphasised solidarity and practical action: ‘We work together, we do things together’. We like to ‘keep things as practical as possible – not too fluffy’. We ‘see what’s practical and what can be done’. As explained in the methodology section, this project was originally interested in exploring what community means or can do within the transition to low carbon futures. Most often the direct questioning of community was met with blank expressions, or what felt like rambling, obfuscatory answers. I asked one key individual within the group, what ‘working with community’ meant, given they used this phrase widely. Their answer explored many of the specific activities undertaken – the community orchard, the public information-sharing events, or the insulation and retrofitting projects – without reflecting specifically on what difference it made to carry out these tasks through ‘community action’. Compared with, say, outsourcing the insulation work to private contractors, or organisation of the orchard to the local council? ‘What difference does (working through) community make? It’s bloody hard work!’ she concluded.

As outlined in the methodology, it is not difficult to access *Zuhandenheit* task-absorption; the difficulty then lies in post-hoc reflection on such engagement, necessarily done in a *Vorhandenheit* manner. One of the reasons why it is so ‘difficult to find the right words’ as one volunteer put it, is that such collective engagement in tasks cannot be understood in the language sought here. The word community was used in a regular, everyday sense by those in this group, but perhaps nothing semantic was meant by it, other than this was a group who were collectively absorbed, involved and engaged in a series of tasks that they sought to achieved together. These attempts to describe the ineffable aspects of community chime with both Malpas’s spatialising of *Zuhandenheit* as ‘active involvement’, and also current research on Transition. Barr and Pollard find Transition ‘attracted a body of socially concerned individuals with a tendency for activism and a desire to “become involved”’ (2017: 57). They also characterise the ‘burgeoning literature on Transition [with] the focus that has been placed on the outward manifestations of Transition through attention paid to “activity”’ (2017: 57).

External actors this project worked with also had a sense that this group was action orientated. A local councilor noted they focused on meeting their needs: ‘not just something idealistic, something of use to us [the council]’. They had: ‘the appreciation of the real, the practical’ and ‘have always been a practical organisation, really pragmatic, it’s like: how can we get stuff done? How can we get groups to change their behaviours? How can we implement stuff? How can we help people to do that?’ They are ‘getting their hands dirty and that’s getting some real’.

Despite differences in seeing and characterising community, actors from both inside and outside saw a common identification of Transition’s community as inherently tied up with its action focus, community-as-verb. The *Zuhanden* nature of these groups was elegantly explained by one volunteer: Transition groups were not a community of place, or even of interest, but of ‘praxis’. ‘It’s the doing. It’s head, heart and hand’. Another volunteer when asked how she would define community, sat thoughtfully for a moment before musing ‘I wouldn’t put it as a noun. It’s [community] probably much more of a verb’.

Community policy and phenomenology

The CCF is a policy explicitly focused on community. It is within and through community that the Scottish Government would in part meet its low carbon objectives. CCF funding notes outline who was eligible for funding, including: Community Councils, Community Interest Companies, Development Trusts, Faith Groups, Housing Associations or Schools. Funded groups were:

required to include a copy of the organisation's constitution, memorandum and articles of association or any other governing documents. You are also required to send us a recent bank statement (if available) giving details of the organisation's bank account. We need this information before we can pay any grant to an organisation. However, you can apply to the CCF if you do not yet have your constitution and bank account set up, as long as you are working towards getting this organised. (CCF application guidance notes, 2013: 7)

Communities were constituted organisations. The process of applying for funds not only included formalising community, as the acquiring of a bank account and constitutions indicates, but also of tasking the community with a series of goals and outcomes to be achieved. The community itself was required to be 'clearly defined', using national statistics on population size, demographics, with postcodes (specific territorial and location bound indicators of the community) preferred. CCF documents state: 'You will need to know the size of your target group before you can make any prediction about the emissions which the project will affect' (CCF, 2013: 17). CCF limited its indicators to those 'which have a recognised conversion factor from a reliable source' (CCF, 2013: 16), which included carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_2e), kWhs and 'hard measures installed' such as insulation or alternative energy generation.

The activities of the community groups were to be 'outlined, as clearly and concisely as possible' (CCF, 2013: 8), specifically detailing 'what differences or changes they wish to achieve' (CCF, 2013: 8) Funded groups were required to 'identify the CO_2e baseline against which you will measure your CO_2e reduction' (CCF, 2013: 11). These were seen as the affordances of community: the aims and objectives that community would be able to achieve.

None of this specificity is unusual when it comes to the allocation of government funds. There are good legal and fiduciary requirements why allocating state funds should be as specific and targeted as possible. Here though, this article is focused on how this scheme related to the (collective) subjectivities utilised in the call for community to pursue low carbon challenges. First, community is assumed to be settled, cohesive and reasonably easy to grasp and conceive – to describe unproblematically in either a funding bid, or to social researchers. Second, community is being set apart, and is a particular social form that is achieving tasks. The tasks here relate to CO_2e reduction. The community receiving funding is also presumed to be intentional, that is consciously entered into and active. Funding documents conversely talk about 'target communities', those to be affected by the volunteer, funded efforts. Regularly, the (funded) community is assumed to be comprised of those undertaking activities with the specific and conscious aim of acting environmentally. Each of these aspects narrows down the community discussed here, from the wide, polysemic understandings of community available.

The form of community used and understood by the funding scheme was one that mapped onto the *Vorhandenheit* modes of relating outlined above. However, *Vorhanden* modes of relating to community could be identified not only in the funding scheme, but also within the group itself. The process of filling in these funding bid documents enforced a

Vorhanden sensibility in approaches to community. As outlined above, this must accompany a breaking of (Zuhandenheit) community's involvement and task-orientation. Typically, one volunteer joined the funded group initially as an alternative to their desk job and loved 'doing something practical'; 'not just something idealistic, something of use only to us'. These activities including volunteering in the community orchard – 'getting my hands dirty' – or helping to organise a retrofitting insulation scheme in their neighbourhood; practical, engaging, absorbing and fulfilling tasks. After becoming involved and attached to the community project, they used the skills from their day job to help prepare a funding bid to further the project. It made sense to help out their fellow volunteers and promote something they enjoyed and felt worthwhile, but they found engaging with CCF forms and ways of measuring frustrating. Volunteers felt difficulty in adequately describing the benefits of community in these forms: 'when you fill in the form everything has to have a number on it'. The shift from doing things, to describing doing things was frustrating. Such descriptions could never be comprehensive, but were also not what attracted volunteers. As this volunteer described it, this process can be seen as a shift from being thrown-towards and within an absorbing task, to having to sit back, and consciously reflect on what the group is doing, why they want to achieve it, and how. Engagement with the funding scheme (CCF) produced, in this instance, a shift from Zuhanden to Vorhanden.

Understanding community as Vorhanden is not only a negative, detrimental perspective. Graham and Thrift notice 'when things break down, new solutions may be invented' (2007: 5). They link this to Goffman's account of when factors that were 'backstage' momentarily become 'frontstaged'. This allows a realisation and potential for reconfiguration of those unthinking, 'just is' aspects. These moments are important in community enrolment and action for low carbon aims and ambitions. Vorhanden allows for reflection and improvement. But recognising that they are moments, and they are temporary breakages in ordinary, unthinking Zuhanden state-of-being, goes unnoticed in funding documents. What schemes such as the CCF want to fund and encourage are absorbed, engaged, involved community action(s). Within Zuhanden, this task orientation accompanied unreflective belonging, affirming and purposive action. Without returning to Zuhanden, this is forestalled, and involvement ceases.

Community as Vorhanden and Zuhanden

Amongst volunteers, the community of this Transition initiative echoed previous research on activists, where: 'Values such as being anti-capitalist, and equality and justice were commonly shared and did form an almost invisible common ground, but they were rarely openly discussed or regularly interrogated' (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 486). Community – as a value – regularly functioned in a Zuhandenheit manner: silently assumed, unquestioned and unthought. Volunteers reported that community itself was not their focus, but rather community was what accompanied a collective absorption in common tasks. Rather than directly focusing on each other, intersubjective bonds were strengthened through acting alongside one another, rather than addressing the bonds themselves. In this way of thinking, as Frankl (2004) wrote of happiness, 'community' cannot be pursued, but rather ensues. Community, for those in the Transition groups was something that 'just happened'. 'It can't be imposed', said one volunteer, 'people learn these kinds of values from their peers'. However, Vorhanden sensibilities were also designed and used by members of the community group themselves. They designed group activities not only with the aim of getting things done, but also of 'making community'. 'People need a focus' said one key individual; 'This is not just a social club' said another.

The civil servant responsible for the CCF also saw that beyond the formal documents, successful projects were the ‘ones with put the hard miles into them. They go out and engage folk. They put the hard work in’. Later in the interview they justified why Transition projects received so much funding from this scheme, as they were ‘practical’, ‘full of energy’ and ‘dynamism’. Throughout the policy’s administration, there was a ‘genuine believe in community. [The minister] really thinks it works’. Intrigued, and wondering what it means for community to work, I asked more: ‘He means communities are the ones who are going to do this work for us’. This assumption in government by community literature that community can accomplish the legwork of (revanchist) states is well established (Taylor-Aiken, 2016a). Often in these interviews, there was a fusion between work and community. Community both implied a way to get things done, and that community itself was the work. It was difficult to separate out community as a tool and community as a task. Yet community was assumed to imply both of these in an unreflective way. According to this interviewee at least, task-orientation is what schemes such as the CCF wanted to further and promote. Yet, the manner in which they promote such initiatives seems to have backfired.

This builds on recent findings that ‘empowerment attempts might have unintended counter-effects’ (Avelino et al., 2017: 5). In this article, these counter-intuitive, counter-productive effects are that the attempt to promote and pursue community through Vorhandenheit-type understandings of community removes the very thing these policies often want to promote. That is, the Zuhandenheit-type community as it is lived in experience and action. Group projects – such as film screenings, awareness raising, installing energy efficiency measures, a community orchard – were purposive, they were focused on a specific goal, and they were also both means and end. That is they were operating as a community not solely as an end in itself, but in order to use it as a tool to achieve something greater. The all-encompassing nature of Zuhandenheit community in part explains governments’ attraction to community movements such as Transition. This project received government funding as a ‘collective, practical action project’ (CCF, 2012). Transition projects, through community action match the ‘collective’ criteria, and the Zuhandenheit involved mode covers both the ‘practical’ and ‘action’ parts of the condition too. Yet, this funding scheme was governed through Vorhandenheit aspects; environmental relationships were reduced to a number, for instance, a carbon footprint. When governments use community to reduce carbon, this is often the manner in which it is carried out (Rice, 2010; While et al., 2010). Those within the community groups often parodied the CCF as being solely number focused: specific carbon reduction targets. Transition was rather, as one volunteer put it, a ‘real community’ – embodied, lived, relational – but also driven by its desire to do something, to work together on a common demanding task. Again, a common theme assumed that taking a community approach required *working together*.

Understanding this disconnect is readily understood in the light of Vorhanden and Zuhanden. Heidegger points out how things which are Vorhanden, must exist in the world as Zuhanden first (1962: 101). Identifying community as a tool used to contain or influence the carbon lives of populations is important. But as Polt (1999: 50) states: ‘activities [in this case community] can all involve using things, but they cannot be reduced to utility’. In the same way, grassroots groups can use different community activities – gardening, retrofitting, discussion groups, meetings in the local pub, feelings of solidarity and belonging, a sense of purposive agency – but they cannot be reduced to these. These are the limits to instrumentalising community.

Community continues to be prevalent as a tool of policy. This tool is used to: engender better behaviour, discipline populations, enable human flourishing or delegate state

objectives at arm's length. Likewise, community is a tool used by grassroots activists in order to build the better world they wish to see, or pursue 'the good life'. However community is used, and whatever ends it is presumed to meet, community as a tool – a tool not in use, but discussed and observed – accompanies and (re)produces *Vorhanden*-type subjectivities – distant, contained and set-apart.

This awareness is profoundly useful. Activists generally get involved and are motivated to participate for *Zuhanden*-type reasons: involvement, belonging and activity. Though policy makers and activists can seemingly agree and use the same words and language to discuss tasks (pursuing low carbon challenges and objectives) or the specific tool for those tasks (community-led solutions and activities), these words belie fundamentally distinct subjectivities. Community is the task (the end result; the *to which*) and the tool (the means through which the task will be accomplished; the *in which*). But behind this common word community, we find huge differences, even to the depth of subjectivity.

Conclusion

This article examines *both* policymaker and activist use of community as a tool. The tension driving the research is not that both *mean* something different by their use of community, but rather that *phenomenologically* community does different things, producing different subjectivities. Both policy makers and activists use community as a tool to achieve low carbon aims and objectives, but both relate differently to community as a tool. The theoretical lens here offers a way to understand how different actors, despite using the same language and also ostensibly sharing the same goals, can – through different methods, and approaches – actually be antagonistic towards each other. Phenomenologically, community policy can counterproductively undermine community action. The subtle, unthinking and pre-reflective aspects to one's connection with others – environmental others, other people, other things – are crucial if a full account is to be made of these groups, movements and their aims and ambitions. Also, and more normatively, if we seek to understand what makes such groups 'succeed', these ideas are profoundly helpful. Success is a loaded word. Taking these groups on their own terms though, they wish to see a wholesale realignment of economy, society, politics, patterns of consumption, thought, feelings and behaviour and even community. To do so, they mobilise and act-with motivated like minds in particular local collectives. On the whole, this is hard work. But largely, they are successful, they impact – however, small-scale – their surrounding contexts, socially, politically and economically in ways they would wish to see them transform (or transition). However, these groups also regularly report 'limits to growth'. At a certain point, their collective energy gives out, a stumbling block reveals itself, or the group itself fractures, perhaps fatally. One of these stumbling blocks are the way(s) in which government policy can undermine, or distract groups from what they aim to achieve (Aiken, 2014).

In this case, both funders and activists broadly wanted the same thing. Disagreements revolved not about aims and objectives, both sought a 'low carbon future' as a desired end; nor – on the surface – how they got there, both talked effusively about the possibilities and necessities of community action. Rather the difference in visions and particular strategies adopted (e.g. the CCF decision to focus on carbon accounting procedures such as measuring carbon footprints) can be seen as a difference in the mode of relating to community. Funding schemes such as the CCF desire to put the emerging activist energy of community to use. However, unquantifiable collective desire and energy transforms though when understood in a *Vorhandenheit* manner.

The discord between community policy and community action was not one of semantics. The clash of outlooks in the tasking of community was not due to different invested meanings. It is far too simplistic to say something like community=location for policymakers and community=belonging for activists/volunteers. Rather there was a difference in subjectivity, or in what collective subjectivity is or could be. Hence turning to phenomenology for an explanation. The differences in vision between funders and activists, often a source of tension, can be understood as a difference in the *experience* of community. This awareness highlights how funding community in a *Vorhanden* manner is mistaken when forgetting that the community it uses to contain, arrange and task with certain aims is always an abstraction from community that is more *Zuhanden*. These *Zuhanden* understandings and perspectives can also allow awareness that a more objective analysis is a different category to their felt, lived experience of community. This is not to harmonise or collapse together *Vorhanden* and *Zuhanden* – that would be impossible. But, by understanding community in the light of this early Heideggerian theory, we can get closer to understanding how and why the same word – community – can hold together competing agendas, or cause conflicts.

This group studied here was motivated by the desire to take action on climate change, to find belonging and commonality within the group and increase their agency: collectively acting in solidarity and in common. There existed here though two different communities; nearby in adjacency and lexical familiarity, but wholly separate in purpose, feel and potential. One was the community mentioned in funding bids and the group's website. The other the deeper, intangible and ineffable feeling of community from those involved.

The manner in which community is approached, the stance one takes towards it, and the character of that community is inextricably linked. Objectively trying to understand community, the way one might attempt to rationally understand the uses of characteristics of a hammer, inevitably leads to *Vorhandenheit* understanding. Getting involved, being and becoming together with others in pursuit of a common demanding task is wholly different. Community clearly can be studied, held at a distance and objectively understood; community can even be disciplinary. There is an opening for critiquing community here. But there remains something progressive, something vanguard, something capable of achieving together within it, which is deeper and beyond this surface deployment of community. This is community that only reveals itself in use, not in utility. As Polt says 'the only way to understand ready-to-hand entities is to handle them' (1999: 50). Following the evidence here, we can likewise say: the only way to understand involvement in (*Zuhanden*) community is to get involved.

Community is an immensely complex concept, even if it first appears to be a relatively simple and static social entity. Both community policy and the community activists have what seems like an inexhaustible use of the word and term community. However, I find it much more interesting to ask of community not 'what does it mean?', but 'what does community do?'. It is at this point that phenomenology becomes helpful. The principle starting point is not that policy makers use community, but that *both* policy makers and activists use community. Both policy makers and activists use community as a tool to achieve low carbon aims and objectives, but their relation to that tool is distinct. The *Vorhanden/Zuhanden* split identified by Heidegger reveals a tension: it is not that both mean something different by their use of community, but rather that *phenomenologically* community does different things to different subjectivities. Staying alive to questions of subjectivities will remain crucial in apprehending the roles community plays in pursuing low carbon futures.

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Notes

1. That is, studied objectively. As will become clear, viewing community through this lens only renders *Vorhandenheit* community visible. *Zuhandenheit* community is experientially understood not rationally known.
2. Harman continues: 'Whatever Heidegger's intentions may have been, his theory of equipment applies to all entities: chisels, nuclear warheads, and sunflowers. It is vital that we not be misled by the usual connotations of the word "tool"' (2002: 4). Here, we are interested in community as a tool.
3. All quotes in this section and the next taken from anonymised interview transcripts.

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