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## **Understandings and applications of rural community resilience amongst Scottish stakeholders: introducing dual discourses**

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### **Abstract**

This paper considers understandings and applications of community resilience deployed by multiple stakeholders in rural Scotland. By exploring what stakeholders think rural community resilience means in theory and practice, we enhance existing understandings of the concept. Scottish policy has shifted towards neoliberalism and community empowerment, with the Government encouraging communities to play a proactive role in enhancing their own resilience. For this to occur successfully, we argue that it is important to understand the perspectives of multiple stakeholders in how they conceptualize community resilience, identify what practical factors they believe enhance community resilience, and provide a greater understanding of the mechanisms through which community resilience can be delivered. Drawing on data collected from focus groups and in-depth, semi-structured interviews, we question what resilience means and what factors can facilitate it in practice. We find that by examining the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, dual discourses of resilience emerge: the *emergency* which reflects the policy focus on short-term damage reduction, and the *everyday* which reflects the desire for more long-term adaptive capacities developing in response to gradual change in rural communities. We conclude that the discourse which stakeholders predominantly align with will affect how they understand, adopt, and practice the concept.

**Keywords:** Rural community resilience; multiple perspectives; stakeholders; community empowerment; Scotland; dual discourses.

## **1. Introduction**

Global challenges have driven the emergence of resilience, specifically community resilience, as a lens for understanding rural development. Resilience is a process of societal change and a movement towards greater local sustainability (Adger, 2000; Imperiale & Vanclay, 2016; Wright, 2016). While research has developed and refined definitions of community resilience, the concept continues to receive academic and policy attention, with a gradual move towards “a more inclusive definition” that recognises the need to build “adaptive capacity to prevent or withstand future events” (Cafer et al., 2019, p. 206). In general, academic literature focuses on scholarly understandings of the concept, neglecting broader non-academic viewpoints. Scotland provides a useful case study to understand these wider viewpoints because community resilience is a central theme of contemporary Scottish policy, e.g. the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016. This policy context and wider rural development experience has shaped the views of multiple stakeholders (we use this term to include governing actors, non-governmental organisations, and community actors) engaged in community resilience in Scotland, both in terms of what community resilience means, and what factors can facilitate resilience.

Important research on rural community resilience has already been undertaken from a Scottish perspective. For example, Skerratt (2013) sought to challenge existing discourses of the concept, Revell and Dinnie (2018) questioned the ability of recent Scottish legislation to succeed without firstly addressing other entangled issues (such as contradictions in policy), and Steiner et al. (2018) produced an evaluative model for measuring community resilience. Zwiers et al. (2018) also considered how different forms of place-attachment can strengthen or weaken community resilience and Markantoni et al. (2019) studied whether communities can enhance resilience on their own or whether external support is required to make community initiatives a success. Despite this academic and grey literature, there remain calls for further research on the concept. For example, Skerratt (2013) highlighted the need for more attention problematising resilience as a concept. Steiner (2016) stated that why some communities are more resilient than others is still not understood. Steiner and Markantoni (2014) argued that community resilience is difficult to operationalize and Zwiers et al. (2018) stated it is

important to unpack resilience and explore its different levels and components. The supportive policy environment to resilience in Scotland (for example, the capacity of rural communities to own and manage assets) are well documented, (e.g. Combe et al. 2020; Fischer and McKee, 2017; Skerratt, 2013; Steiner, 2016;), which makes it a good case study for understanding how resilience plays out when enabled by policy and if lessons learnt from Scotland could be applicable elsewhere.

We argue that there have been developments in thinking in resilience from elsewhere that have not been sufficiently considered in Scotland. Zurek et al (2022) state that resilience is not just about the readiness of communities to respond to sudden events but also the ability to encompass other factors such as processes of long-term and gradual change in phases of robustness, recovery and reorientation. Robinson (2019) also highlight that as well as communities being able to absorb change and disturbance and adapt and transform, they should also be able to influence decisions that affect their lives. Investigating such processes of dynamic community resilience will most likely require consideration of local and other scales which makes the implementation of a common framework challenging (Fielke et al., 2018). Glass et al., (2022) argue that there is little operational detail about how to increase the resilience of rural communities and a lack of understanding why some communities are more resilient than others, despite a supportive policy environment surrounding community resilience.

This paper responds by considering understandings and applications of community resilience deployed by multiple stakeholders in rural Scotland. It seeks to understand differing perspectives and what these might mean for how resilience is enacted in communities. Integrating multiple viewpoints in the conceptualisation and implementation of community resilience in practice are, we argue, important for informing decision making in the local (in this case rural Scottish) case as called on by Sharifi (2016). Furthermore, the identification of multiple stakeholder perspectives helps to inform the operational actions that enhance community resilience in rural Scotland and highlights its complexity.

The paper begins with a short review of contemporary understandings of community resilience, focussing on factors that foster resilience and interpretations of the concept in Scottish policy. We then consider the factors which promote rural community resilience, examining the findings from two focus groups and 22 semi-structured interviews with academic and non-academic stakeholders. Our closing discussion and conclusions suggest that there are dual discourses of resilience, which affect how stakeholders understand and implement the concept. This has implications for rural development policy and practice, because resilience perceptions and associated actions vary between local contexts and stakeholder groups.

## **2. Understanding community resilience**

### ***2.1 Origins of the term***

Resilience is articulated in a range of different ways by multiple disciplines (cf. Brassett & Vaughan-Williams, 2015; Comfort et al., 2010; O'Malley, 2010; Walker et al., 2004). It is used by engineers (Norris et al., 2008) and ecologists (Holling, 1973) to describe a system's ability to bounce back rather than break after external shocks. Various disciplines now apply the concept within different experimental and theoretical contexts (Adger, 2000; Cafer et al., 2019; Coaffee, 2006; Coaffee et al., 2008; Cote & Nightingale, 2012; Folke et al., 2010; Holling, 1973; Porter & Davoudi, 2012; Walker & Cooper, 2011; Vaneeckhaute et al., 2017; Wilkinson, 2011). The diversity of academic interdisciplinary definitions has been well covered by Sharifi (2016).

Resilience is not a singular or fixed entity (Anderson, 2015; Patel et al., 2017; Walker & Cooper, 2011) and thus there are multiple understandings of the concept, as well as the components that support resilience (Vaneeckhaute et al., 2017). However, whilst conceptual blurriness can support a research approach involving diverse stakeholders, a lack of clarity in resilience definitions can hide the type of knowledge that is drawn upon (Strunz, 2012). The plurality of resilience arises partly because it is entangled with, and takes shape in, the context of processes of governance that vary across scales and spaces.

## **2.2 From resilience to community resilience**

The concept of *community* resilience is heavily employed in the field of rural development (Amir et al., 2015; Cafer et al., 2019; Fischer & McKee, 2017; Magis, 2010; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017; Steiner & Markantoni, 2014) and has received international attention within the Sustainable Development Goals as a means to deliver sustainable communities (UN, 2016). Social scientists have defined the concept as adaptation and recovery (or transformation) following exogenous disturbances (Comfort et al., 2010, Vaneeckhaute et al., 2017), and diverse understandings of community (Borda-Rodriguez et al., 2016) add to the complexity of community resilience. Community resilience also tends to blur with other concepts such as community capacity, empowerment, agency, adaptability, and sustainability (Magis, 2010, Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017), and explicit consideration has been given to what the concepts and elements of community development and community resilience may offer to each other (Cavaye & Ross, 2019).

There have been several papers that have highlighted specific issues that need to be considered when applying the concept of resilience in a social context such as in communities (Norris et al, 2008; Franklin et al., 2011; Davoudi, 2012; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017). These issues are listed below:

Firstly, acknowledgement that community resilience is about *change not statis*, and that stability does not equate to resilience. Similarly, Norris et al. (2008, pp. 130-131) define community resilience as “a process linking a set of adaptive capacities to a positive trajectory of functioning and adaptation after a disturbance”, which suggests that resilient communities constantly evolve (Franklin et al., 2011). It is a process built by communities and requires the existence of engaged social networks to foster adaptive capacity, but this is not a substitute for a responsive and adaptive government (Davoudi, 2012).

Secondly, consideration of the concept of community resilience must *recognise the importance of context* (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017). The concept is often used to consider how communities can

‘survive’ external threats (Thompson et al., 2016; Townshend et al., 2014). Thus, local changes and the context of system disruption frequently define how communities engage in resilience action (Vaneekhaute et al., 2017). Davoudi (2012, p. 305) states that context needs to consider “resilience to what ends?” and examine the extent to which defining outcomes is tied to normative judgements. She also advises that it is important to consider “resilience of what to what” as pre-defined approaches can lead to exclusionary practices. There are a number of critiques of the concept as being a neo-liberal construct which advocates the roll back of the state’s support in its policy responses (Davoudi, 2012; Mackinnon and Derickson, 2012; Welsh, 2014). Welsh (p. 22) states that resilience “in its political mobilisation risks facilitating the abdication of responsibility by the collective and relocates it to the individual” and warns that governing uncertainty should be subjected to critical interrogation.

Thirdly, it is imperative to understand *what factors foster resilience*. Magis (2010) states that community resilience is about the existence and management of resources. Kulig et al. (2013) however contend that: “it becomes difficult to identify whether these indicators are factors influencing resilience or components of resilience itself” (p. 760). Consequently, Steiner and Markantoni (2014) argue that community resilience is difficult to operationalize, whilst Cafer et al. (2019) highlight the need to overcome the normative view of community resilience, which hides inequalities within communities and fails to ask ‘resilience for whom?’ (Cote and Nightingale, 2012 *in* Cafer et al., 2019; Davoudi, 2012).

### **3. Policy understandings of community resilience in Scotland**

In Scotland, the concept of ‘resilience’ emerged in the early 2000s within policy documents (Braslett & Vaughan-Williams, 2015). Within the Scottish Government, community resilience is often interpreted as the community’s ability to recover from emergencies. Indeed, the ‘Resilient Communities Strategic Framework and Delivery Plan for 2017 – 2021’ defines its aim as: “Communities, individuals and organisations harnessing resources and expertise to help themselves assess and understand risk, take appropriate measures to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies, in a way that complements the work of the emergency responders” (Scottish

Government, 2017, p. 2). This fits with Welsh's (2014) observation that the most obvious adoption of resilience approaches in government tend to be about responding to emergencies in terms of responsabilisation, preparedness, response and recovery which lie in localities. Welsh sees such an approach as being more about withstanding shocks rather than adaptation and/or reconfiguring in response to them. Indeed, within wider Scottish Government rural community policy, the concept of community resilience is rarely mentioned, and the explicit focus is on sustainable development.

In a policy context, community resilience is often seen as aspirational (Leitch & Bohensky, 2014), thus containing little operational detail. Policy discourses emphasise the role of communities to support resilience, which implies readiness across communities (Mc Morran et al., 2018) and assumes that the wider context does not matter (Steiner, 2016).

Alternative government approaches to resilience are orientated towards facilitating bottom-up responses (Elvidge, 2014, p. 11), by empowering community members to improve their own wellbeing (e.g. policy initiatives surrounding the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015). This signals a shift away from 'command and control' governmental approaches, towards more inclusive types of citizen participation (de Haan et al., 2018; Scottish Government, 2011). Edwards (2009) asserts that there is an increasing transition by states from being solely responsible for supporting community resilience heavily relying on bottom-up support. Such an approach incorporates a greater array of individuals and organisations and is increasingly directed to smaller spatial scales and everyday activities (Coaffee, 2013).

However, the question arises as to whether a coherent definition of community resilience underpins support for rural communities in Scotland, and whether a divergence of perspectives, and the apparent necessity for community capacity, limits the opportunity for partnership working (Coaffee et al., 2008). This paper provides a critical insight into the conceptual understanding of 'community resilience' held by key stakeholders and reflects on the influence of these perspectives on policy and practice designed to support resilience.



## **4. Methodology**

### ***4.1. Data collection***

The following approaches were deployed: i) a literature review to inform the design of fieldwork; ii) two focus groups (totalling 34 participants) iii) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 22 actors representing multiple stakeholder groups. The triangulation of these approaches allowed consideration of the concept of community resilience from multiple perspectives.

#### **(i) Literature review**

Initially, online keyword searches in journal databases (e.g. Science Direct, Web of Knowledge) identified 125 academic and policy literature sources that consider the concept of ‘rural community resilience’. The review was framed around four key questions of community resilience: i) How is it defined? ii) What does it look like? iii) How can it be fostered? and iv) How can success be assessed? The review formed the basis for data collection design.

#### **(ii) Focus groups**

A focus group is a form of participative tool that can elicit attitudes, feelings, beliefs and reactions to research questions and offer considerable potential for rural policy making (McCrum et al., 2009). They can support social learning objectives amongst participants (Schmidt et al., 2020). Focus groups generally involve six to fifteen people and are particularly powerful when used in conjunction with other methods (Scott, 2011), hence the combination with interviews in this research. The focus groups were designed to gather views and experiences of rural community resilience from multiple stakeholders and to discuss why the concept of ‘resilience’ is important in Scotland. Arising emic themes were used to design subsequent interviews.

The first focus group took place in Perthshire, on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2016. Participants were invited from a network, created as part of the knowledge exchange activities of a wider research project<sup>1</sup>. A purposive sample of invitees was selected from the network, to ensure that discussions incorporated

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<sup>1</sup> “Local Assets, Local Decisions and Community Resilience” project funded by the Scottish Government’s 2016-2022 Strategic Research Programme.

the experience of multiple stakeholders; 30 individuals participated. The range of organisations and viewpoints represented is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Focus group participant types - Perthshire, November 2016.**

Stakeholder types	Number of participants
Community representative	13
NGO/Third sector organisation	8
Policy and Government agency	7
Academic (not members of the research team)	2

The focus group was organized into plenary and small group discussions, focused on the following four questions that reflected the structure of the literature review described above: i) What does resilience mean to you?; ii) What fosters resilience in rural communities?; iii) What needs to come from government and other ‘external’ actors, and what can come from within?; and iv) To what extent are the factors that contribute to resilience shared from one place to another? Detailed notes were taken by the facilitators, which underwent qualitative thematic coding, using the four discussion questions as an analytical framework. A report was circulated to participants for their validation and formed the basis for discussion in the second focus group.

The second focus group took place in Edinburgh on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2017. It was designed to gather the views and experiences from Scottish Government policymakers; four individuals participated. The focus group tasked those attending with discussing the following questions arising from Davoudi’s (2012) critique of government responses to resilience: (i) How do policymakers understand resilience?; (ii) Resilience of what to what?; (iii) Resilience by whom for whom?; and (iv) How is community resilience to be integrated within the policy and planning system? The second focus group was recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically based on the above targeted questions. A report was circulated to all participants for their validation and reflection.

(iii) In-depth interviews

The focus groups identified the broad views of participants and were useful for understanding how participants’ opinions converged or diverged, however it was felt that more depth of discussion was required and that the knowledge and experience of different stakeholder voices could have been better captured. Therefore, semi-structured interviews with 22 purposively-selected interviewees who reflected multiple stakeholder views were undertaken in summer 2017. The interviewees were identified from focus group participation and from existing professional networks. These interviews provided the opportunity for rich exploration of the interviewees’ perceptions including definitions, perceptions, and practical experience of rural community resilience, considering both successful processes and barriers faced by some communities. Table 2 illustrates the multiple stakeholder groups interviewed and their associated codes (to safeguard anonymity).

<b>Interviewee type</b>	<b>Codes in findings</b>
Academic	Ac1 – 8
Policymaker	Pol1 – 4
NGO practitioner	NGO1 – 7
Community actor	Comm1 – 3

**Table 2: Interviewee types**

Most interviews were conducted in-person, with the remainder by telephone. All were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview data underwent qualitative thematic coding, once again utilising the same thematic structure as for the focus groups. Further analysis reproduced this thematic coding but separated different types of participants. All authors co-analysed the data, with a summary report sent to interviewees for feedback.

## **5. Findings**

The literature review identified that there are specific issues that need to be considered when applying resilience in a social context. Section 5.1 refers to what community resilience means to stakeholders,

presenting dual discourses of resilience and how the concept relates to adaptability to change; whilst Section 5.2 considers the factors that foster resilience. Finally, Section 5.3 reflects on the problems that multiple stakeholders find with the concept of resilience which draws on “*resilience for whom*”, and considers whether there are other, more meaningful concepts.

### ***5.1 What does community resilience mean to you?***

Community resilience was universally acknowledged as being ‘tricky’ across the stakeholder groups. For example: “Resilience of what, and resilience for whom?” (Ac1). Despite the term being ambiguous, all participants had self-definitions, which included economic perspectives (NGO3), socio-cultural considerations (Ac6 and Ac8), and place-based perspectives (Ac5). The clearest consensus amongst participants relating to community resilience definitions was a requirement for community governance, which was seen as important for community connections (Ac4, NGO1). This requires the existence of community assets and involves communities developing their own sense of purpose without change being imposed on them (NGO1).

Consensus also occurred across all stakeholder groups that community resilience should suit ‘complex local conditions’ and reflect collective responses to challenges. Participants highlighted the importance of the existence of networks between the community and businesses, voluntary organisations, public bodies, and the ability to access a wider support at different scales. Joined-up approaches were also seen as being central to resilience (Ac5), which highlights that a shared understanding is necessary to effectively use it; NGOs and community actors particularly aligned with this, for example: “I always try to make people understand that what we are trying to do is create an employment and skills-base and extend the resources so that the place gets better” (Com3). Academics and policymakers were more comfortable using the term ‘community resilience’ than the other actors. NGO participants however explained that they do not use the term ‘resilience’ when engaging with communities because of the multiplicity of the term (deemed as being unhelpful). Community actors, however, tended to perceive resilience in terms of dependence on both ‘hard’ or physical assets (e.g. village halls) and ‘soft’ or social assets, (e.g. volunteer capacity), and experience and expertise from

previous community initiatives. Community actors stressed that a sense of control over assets and/or actions was central to their understandings of resilience. They also felt that community confidence was fundamental to resilience, and that community action could lead to change.

The analysis revealed two further emic themes. Firstly, the existence of multiple resiliences and evidence of dual discourses of resilience existing and, secondly, the importance of adaptability to change and shaping a positive future. These will be considered in turn.

#### *5.1.1 Dual discourses of resilience: 'Everyday' and 'emergency'*

All participants noted that the term 'community resilience' was contested. In particular, the academic participants discussed this contestation, for example:

“There is certainly a neo-liberal form of resilience, but I think there are a lot of other different understandings of resilience as well. I think that gets really interesting when you begin to look at the idea of community resilience, or the different ways in which communities cope with stresses. What we currently identify as community resilience within the UK would be one of those modes or ways of responding to shock” (Ac2).

The results confirm that a diversity of views about community resilience were held. Some participants (particularly community actors) appeared to be more closely aligned with social and economic manifestations of community resilience. Other participants focussed on the environmental aspects of community resilience. For example, it was felt that emergencies can enforce responses or create change (Com 3), thus: “What we're really looking at is social capital, addressing vulnerabilities, connectivity, awareness between communities and thinking about positive solutions and pathways for change” (NGO7).

Community resilience was frequently distinguished into two dominant discourses by participants, which we name the '*emergency*' and the '*everyday*'. Emergency resilience relates to responding to catastrophic crises whilst everyday resilience relates to gradual systemic changes in communities.

There was a clear distinction between those participants who aligned with the everyday or emergency discourses. Those who aligned with the emergency attributed this to the professional focus of their work, rather than their affiliation to a stakeholder type (e.g. academic, community actor). In both discourses, emphasis is placed on the community's capacity to respond to change, thus: "an ability to survive that comes down to change" (Pol3).

Community actors were found to be more focused on local experiences and consistently aligned to the everyday discourse. In both the focus groups there was agreement that there can be different levels of response to community crises or threats, which relates to the ability of individuals in communities to respond, how the response is facilitated, as well as the scale of the change.

A tension was found to exist in relation to whether participants aligned with the everyday or emergency discourses. Those participants who aligned with the everyday discourse stated that framing resilience in terms of the emergency rather than the everyday may provide a negative, rather than a positive focus. Some focus group participants (Ac3, Pol2, NGO4,6) stated concerns of resilience being limited to an emergency context rather than an everyday context as it was felt this could negate community agency. Interviewees (Pol3, Comm2) stated that not all changes to rural communities were negative and may require local capacity to take account of these changes and respond. However, there was a consensus amongst participants that resilience should be about moving forward rather than returning to a previous state. How communities respond to threats, either in the everyday or as an emergency is dependent on the nature of the problem and the scale of the threat. However, a problem identified with the everyday discourse is that gradual change is harder to detect than a crisis – until it reaches a tipping point, requiring an immediate response. Participants (particularly community interviewees but also Pol2,3) suggested that resilience should not just be about communities adapting to risks, but also about gaining capacity to take advantage of opportunities. Resilience should not be framed only around the emergency, despite potentially being most evident at those times. Participants aligning with the everyday discourse felt that it is necessary for a policy definition or understanding of resilience to be broader and inclusive than is currently the case.

Participants regarded both discourses as being equally important for different reasons, such as: each discourse of resilience has particular drivers, motivations and constraints (Ac4, NGO1); understandings of resilience differ because it is a very broad term (Comm 1,5; NGO 4,6); an emergency in a community requires a different response to a longer-term vision for the community (Pol1); and the two discourses may involve different sets of actors working on different dimensions of resilience (Pol3). Participants also recognised that it is important to consider how the two discourses can work together and are connected. It was also noted that the emergency is much more tangible than the everyday, as it is easier for communities to identify with and work out a framework of how to respond to an emergency whilst this is less easy for the everyday. A minority of interviewees were not in favour of dividing the term because: they don't agree there should be an emergency discourse as responsibility for emergency situations should not be at the community level; the distinction isn't meaningful; emergency resilience is already related to strong everyday resilience; and finally, that resilience is more encompassing than the two discourses as it is also about enabling local communities to respond to external, unfolding threats.

Despite multiple perspectives, interlinkages exist between the discourses of community resilience espoused by the participants, and the potential for a broad 'all-encompassing' understanding of resilience for rural communities.

### *5.1.2 Adaptability to change and shaping a positive future*

Whether participants aligned with the everyday or emergency discourse, both described resilience as being about having an adaptability to change and shaping a positive future. NGO participants described how their work sought to develop communities' capacity to adapt and move forward in a way that was best suited to their circumstances: "if you have communities that have the means and the collective consciousness to be tackling the little issues, then there is a better chance that they'd cope better with the bigger ones" (NGO4).

Adaptability to change was predominantly discussed by NGO participants, perhaps reflecting their role as facilitators and enablers within rural communities: “It’s not just about status quo...It’s about creating a stronger community to ensure there’s a future success” (NGO3). Academic participants, however, discussed change and community resilience reflecting the notion of ‘bouncing forward’, and involving pro-active human agency. These perspectives echo developments in rural development literature (e.g. Magis, 2010; Skerratt, 2013). This perspective supports community learning, human agency, and enhanced social capital; for example: “[a definition of community resilience I like is] the ability to plan and prepare for, absorb, recover from, and more successfully adapt to adverse events. It’s not only bouncing back but it’s also bouncing forward” (Ac1). Academics also discussed resilience in relation to time. For example: “Building up short-term resilience, you end up more resilient in the long-term” (Ac5).

Another academic participant suggested that there may be a need in some communities for a gradual adaptation in response to transformative stresses (Ac1). An example of how ‘transformative resilience’ (i.e. incorporating deeper and reflexive learning) was thus described:

“[Resilience should be about] ...really reflecting on what we should be doing, what are we trying to achieve here, and making more radical changes. That would be changes based on an experience, but also anticipation of things - that actually things are getting quite bad, like climate change getting worse. So, it’s a lot deeper and I guess you would equate that more to double and triple loop learning. A much deeper reflection” (Ac4).

NGO participants also highlighted the need for communities to be proactive in shaping their local futures.

### ***5.2 What fosters resilience in rural communities?***

The participants debated what fosters community resilience. Being part of a community, having a sense of collectiveness, the availability and utilisation of local skills and resources, a diverse skill and employment-base, and access to financial capital were predominant themes.



### *5.2.1 Sense of collectiveness*

Several participants highlighted the value of a sense of collectiveness and inclusive community spirit, thus:

“It seems to me that the critical thing is that people see themselves as part of a collective....If you see yourself fundamentally as being part of this bigger collective, then I think you see that your actions are more likely to be for the community benefit or for the benefit of that collective” (NGO3).

Social connectedness and community cohesion at the level of community and individual resilience can play a role in enhancing resilience.

### *5.2.2 Local assets, skills and community infrastructure*

The importance of the availability and utilisation of local assets and skills, as well as robust community infrastructure, were common points made by all participants. There was consensus that community infrastructure can take many forms, from health and social care to road infrastructure. There was some debate, however, regarding the extent to which infrastructure and assets could foster resilience. Ac1 argued that community infrastructure needed to survive both environmental and economic changes. Alternatively, NGO participants (NGO2,3,4,7) noted that resilient communities must be enabled by the local economy, businesses and enterprises.

Across stakeholder groups, human agency was a predominant theme. A ‘can do’ attitude and high levels of activity within communities, were considered critical for community resilience. Utilisation and ownership of local resources were also viewed as important, particularly from NGOs and policy participants. Policy participants observed that local people required control of assets (Pol2,4), whilst several NGO participants drew attention to the role of autonomy in facilitating community confidence. Community resilience was viewed as having, and taking advantage of, necessary assets to facilitate active social networks:

“I think once a community owns an asset... immediately you are taking responsibility for it, and if you are taking responsibility for it, it makes you work with other people to deliver the project in whatever way that project may be going forward, but it is that stepping up” (NGO4).

Participants considered the diversity and utilisation of local skills as key in fostering community resilience. The crucial need for diversity of people, skills, and different perspectives was frequently noted.

### *5.2.3 Financial capability*

“Money is a key enabling factor and we often forget about it” (NGO3). Access to finance, the level of investment, and availability of grants were perceived across stakeholder groups as key enabling factors of community resilience. Funding for community initiatives thus emerged as a challenge to resilience and the availability of support measures was therefore seen as an important. Well-resourced communities were considered more capable of adaptation. Indeed, Ac2 suggested that “rich communities are more capable of adapting to threats and shocks and new opportunities”. Therefore, under-resourced or disempowered communities may lack the capacity to act resiliently.

### ***5.3 Are there more meaningful concepts than community resilience that enable rural development?***

Community actors and NGO research participants voiced concerns about the concept of rural community resilience: “One of the problems I have with resilience, is that we would think of it as something about how communities are adaptive to gradual and systemic change, but there is a tendency for it to revert back to what will the response be to a major catastrophe” (NGO4). The existence of multiple understandings of community resilience means that those working in rural communities and using the term resilience must spend their limited time deliberating what it means, which reduces their impetus to create change (Ac6). The existence of multiple perspectives was considered to negate the agency of communities to influence processes of change and to be proactive (Com3, Ac3).

More meaningful terms than ‘community resilience’ included ‘community empowerment’ (Pol2), and phrases such as ‘communities taking charge’ (Ac3), or ‘communities positively moving forward’ (NGO2). Ac8 mentioned that in the Netherlands, the terms ‘liveability’, ‘vitality’ and ‘adaptability to change’ were used more often than community resilience. NGO participants and community actors working with rural communities discussed the terms ‘community development’, ‘community capacity’, and ‘social capital’. Some participants felt that other terms were more contemporary expressions of resilience thinking, particularly ‘community empowerment’ (Pol2, NGO3). However, the predominant alternative concept discussed was ‘sustainability’. Both NGO participants and community actors felt that a resilient community may not automatically be ‘sustainable’, and that sustainability should be the higher goal: “if you’ve got sustainability, then you’ve got ongoing resilience potentially” (Com1).

Academic participants suggested that the term ‘community resilience’ can be considered more negatively than ‘sustainability’, as the former refers to reacting to a threat or a challenge and places responsibility on a community. Community resilience is therefore: “more difficult in a number of ways. One is that you can only see if [a community] is resilient if they actually face a challenge. Sustainability is a bit ‘softer’ and it can be more positive” (Ac7).

Some disagreed that sustainability was a more useful term, with community resilience considered “more meaningful and less woolly” (NGO1), and it was asserted that sustainability had “had its time” (Com3). Furthermore, these participants believed that rural community resilience was more useful because it encompasses more concepts that facilitate positive rural development processes (e.g. community robustness, community capacity, and social capacity). Academic participants suggested that the term community resilience encourages interdisciplinary thinking (Ac5) and supports the adoption of futures-thinking approaches (Ac6). Therefore, there were differences within stakeholder groups around the usefulness of the concepts of sustainability versus community resilience.

## 6. Discussion

Our findings support the idea highlighted in the literature that *'resilience is about change not stasis'*, and thus resilience is a constantly evolving process (Franklin et al., 2011). However, findings here specifically from NGO and academic participants suggest that communities need to be adaptive and proactive in shaping their futures (Norris, 2008) to respond to threats, and to adopt transformational change in relation to moving (communities) forward.

Our findings also support others who highlight the importance of context, as local specificities define how communities engage in resilience actions (Cafer et al., 2019; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2016; Townshend, 2014). We found that all stakeholder groups recognized that community resilience required clear community governance processes that should reflect and respond to complex local conditions, collective responses to risks and challenges, as well as strong support networks between different stakeholder groups working in the community. These findings connect strongly with the 'Sustainable Cities and Communities' SDG, which emphasises the need to enhance capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable planning (UN, 2016). Furthermore, empowerment (perhaps specific to Scottish policy) was considered intrinsic to fostering rural community resilience particularly by NGO and policy participants. The findings highlighted that joined-up approaches between multiple stakeholder groups were vital for community resilience to be enacted successfully at a local level.

Our research develops the idea that community resilience has multiple meanings, and that it is imperative to consider these. This paper advocates recognising and embracing these differences rather than employing a single definition. Specifically, we note the existence of dual discourses of resilience in rural communities ('everyday' and 'emergency'), supporting Cafer et al.'s (2019) call for more focus on 'general resilience', rather than 'specific resilience' and the association with disaster response. We argue that these dual discourses have emerged because neo-liberalism has put emphasis on what Davoudi (2012) terms short-term damage reduction to the detriment of long-term adaptive

capacity building and this research supports more recent findings (e.g. by Zurek et al., 2022) that resilience needs to consider long-term change as well as disaster response. Our findings suggest there is a desire from multiple stakeholders to develop long-term adaptive capacity that aligns with the everyday discourse. Current academic understandings of rural community resilience align with this everyday discourse and can be broadly defined as the capability of communities to overcome long-term challenges relating to rural decline (Imperiale & Vanclay, 2016; Magis, 2010) which may be more difficult to identify and respond to and to be more challenging than emergencies (Fielke et al., 2018). The policy rhetoric surrounding resilience in Scotland, discussed earlier, broadly aligns with the emergency discourse of resilience. Our findings show that alignment by stakeholders to one or other discourse did not map onto discrete stakeholder groups, but instead appeared to be related to their specific professional or community focus, as well as their understandings of adaptability, and the way in which governance could lead to joined-up approaches. It was also found that policy participants had a strategic focus to their work, whilst community participants focused their work locally. As a result, it is imperative to adopt an approach to recognise these complexities when practising rural community resilience.

More understanding is needed about how these dual discourses are the same and how they differ, whether they are separate or part of a more encompassing understanding of resilience, and whether they are interconnected. For example, do the discourses strengthen or weaken each other? Rural community resilience as a concept is now being applied in dual ways in Scotland which has the potential to cause considerable confusion when applied to and enacted in rural communities. The fact that this is happening is important: if policy-makers typically adopt the emergency discourse, but rural communities understand resilience as the everyday discourse, rural communities may become frustrated and policy goals may not be achieved, particularly when Coaffee (2013) recognized that resilience policy is becoming more community-driven. If we are open to multiple understandings of resilience, and the way in which they might contribute to creating or strengthening each other, we can uncover more effective ways for rural communities to overcome the challenges they may face in the future. We suggest that by recognising the multiplicity of the concept, future policies and plans can be

better formulated to account for this, e.g. in multi-level governance approaches. As noted by Cavaye and Ross (2019), “building community resilience needs to recognise the synergies between the community and other scales (or levels) within a system, internally and externally” (p. 194). Therefore, we recommend that future research examines how multiple constructs of resilience can be effectively understood, enacted and supported in rural communities by different stakeholder groups (including government actors), and to best fit with different needs.

We found the concept of community resilience is multifaceted and multi-referential. Different stakeholders appear to interpret and apply the concept in diverse ways. Indeed, community actor and NGO participants noted that this multiplicity can undermine the value of the concept and, in turn, the potential agency of communities to enact resilience. Our findings support Magis (2010) who believes that community resilience tends to blur with other concepts and Cavaye and Ross (2019) who note the importance of agency for community resilience, as opposed to self-help or ‘learning by doing’, which is more aligned with community development. We add that this diversity varies between different stakeholders, and with professional perspective. However, community resilience was generally considered to be a more contemporary and valuable concept than sustainability, due to its focus on local context, ongoing processes, and transformational change.

Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2017) state that it is important to understand the ways in which rural community resilience can be fostered. Our findings have identified that a combination of assets, social capital, and human agency are necessary to foster rural community resilience in Scotland, but that these are time and place dependent. How resilience is fostered is also dependent on whether is understood as an everyday or emergency discourse. Kulig et al. (2013) question whether these factors are influencing resilience or are components of resilience; our results support the latter assertion.

The value of understanding community resilience from the perspective of multiple stakeholders includes the potential to integrate and synthesise different knowledge types (Hirsch Hadorn et al., 2006; Pohl et al., 2010). Participants represented a range of backgrounds, experiences, academic

disciplines, and non-academic knowledge types. Seeking to integrate these diverse knowledge types is fundamental to advancing community resilience understandings. The identification of different and shared perspectives of community resilience held by these multiple stakeholders has implications for the successful enactment of community resilience, and the implementation of national and local policies in Scotland and beyond. Further research is necessary to explore how gaps may be bridged between policy and practice and between the emergency and everyday discourse, as well as how best to support the sharing of knowledge and experience across multiple governance scales.

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper sought to understand and critique what multiple stakeholders think community resilience means in theory and in practice by considering how they value and employ the term ‘community resilience’ in rural Scotland. In doing so, it demonstrates the value of integrating differing viewpoints in the conceptualisation and implementation of rural community resilience and it explores the convergences and divergences between different constructs of community resilience. The findings progress debates on community resilience with the novel proposal that there are dual discourses of community resilience evident in Scotland, which we name the emergency and the everyday. Depending on which discourse stakeholders align with will affect how they understand, adopt and practice the concept. As rural communities are increasingly expected to enhance their own resilience, particularly due to neo-endogenous rural policy, it is important to understand the perspectives of multiple stakeholders to enable this and to be cognisant of the implications of their alignment with one or other of the dual discourses.

We show that community resilience constitutes an assemblage of different, shifting factors and opinions that unfold over time and vary between local contexts, and between stakeholder groups. We believe these findings have international relevance, in particular where rural communities face critical challenges and decline (e.g. loss of services and depopulation) and governments move away from their roles as providers to become facilitators and enablers, encouraging communities to play a proactive role in improving their resilience (Markantoni et al., 2019). Therefore, for those tasked with

formulating policies to enable and support rural communities to take a leadership role, the variation of perceptions between local contexts and stakeholders emphasises the need for place-based approaches that can deliver the resilience factors prioritised by the participants in our research (e.g. social connectedness, control of community assets, robust community infrastructure, etc.). A key conclusion is that for community resilience to be a meaningful and operational concept, it is important to clarify how it is being understood and being responded to by all actors, particularly governments seeking to empower communities to become more resilient. Therefore, resilience in practice remains more complicated and less straight-forward than current academic definitions suggest.

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