Family Estates and Rural Resilience

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Introduction

This research aims to explore the links between the management and decision-making of family estates, and wider rural (community) resilience.

‘Resilience’ is defined as:

- the existence, development and mobilisation of resources, in order to thrive in an environment characterised by change, uncertainty, unpredictability, and surprise;
- the deliberate development of capacity in order to respond to and influence change;
- the development of new trajectories for the future.

Four broad themes of resilience were examined:

1. Whether the estates in this study are simply resilient or not, and cannot become resilient;
2. Whether resilience is established and enhanced through deliberate pathways or choices, and whether certain decision making pathways are essential;
3. Whether resilience is at the level of the individual, family, group, estate community, or wider - bringing in people and institutions from outside the locality;
4. Whether the estates in this study feel that it is appropriate that they should be expected to take responsibility for wider rural resilience.

Methods

1. Random selection of 23 estates from Scottish Land and Estates database, with reference to location, size, and family ownership.
2. Desk-based review of available literature regarding estate.
3. Face-to-face semi-structured interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 - 100 hectares</th>
<th>1001 - 2000 hectares</th>
<th>2001 + hectares</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Highland and Islands</td>
<td>2 (6)</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>4 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>4 (4)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>5 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>3 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12 (12)</strong></td>
<td><strong>6 (6)</strong></td>
<td><strong>2 (2)</strong></td>
<td><strong>20 (20)</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(i) Thank you to Steven Thomson (SRUC) for producing figure 2.

Results

- Estate functions are diverse. This diversification is increasingly important with internal and external factors influencing opportunities. Motivations are personal and can involve broader balancing of estate and community priorities (potentially supporting employment opportunities, local services, investing in the local area).
- Strength is influenced by the estate’s time-horizon; the point of inheritance; the purpose of indebtedness as investment rather than spend; diversity and size of revenue streams; geographical location, land quality and estate size.
- Estates remain strong and adaptable by using accumulated experience in a context of on-going change and deliberately instigating change including: decision-making arrangements; formalising business planning; diversifying investments; and increasing awareness of the external (policy/grant) context.
- All interviewees engage with others within and beyond their estates, at a range of scales. Interviewees identified three types of connection: i) seeking professional advice and information; ii) formal/informal community connections; iii) formal/informal networking with agencies and organisations.
- Interviewees’ engagement is influenced by the issue concerned; the estate’s physical and social characteristic and generational change. There is a distinction between engaging with others, and the processes of on-estate decision-making.
- The majority stated it is appropriate for estates to be expected to deliver to wider rural development objectives (citing responsibility, self-compulsion, driving local businesses). A smaller number stated it is appropriate but with qualifications and caveats (concerns about ‘paternalism’; depends on size/composition of estate and demand; distinction between ‘responsibility’ and ‘involvement’; interplay with profitability); A minority stated it is not appropriate (a role for others; should be no more/less expectation; business viability must come first; location dependent).
- For private estates to deliver more interviewees reported uncertainty and lack of clarity (policy and funding); bureaucracy and relationships with institutions; perceptions of estates and support for community engagement must change.

Conclusions

- A vibrant and strong resident family estate can contribute to the on-going vibrancy of rural communities on or near the estates, through activities including employment, service provision (eg: housing, business space), and developing shared local plans.
- Multiple factors influence estate involvement including geographical location, size/activities of estate, stage in generational timeline, governance and perceived willingness of others to engage.
- Estates are diverse; engagement with estates must not be ‘standardised’.

Acknowledgements

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