

Lead Researcher: Amanda Bryan

Supporting Researcher: Monica Oprean

Co-ordinating Organisation: Community Woodlands Association

Summary: Remote rural communities in the West are faced with an ever increasing cost of living due to their dependence on goods and services that are produced elsewhere and have to be transported long distances. This is a trend that is likely to continue and there is a desire in some areas to consider how communities can if possible become more resilient and self sustaining.

Within this context in Scotland, particularly in the remote North and West Highlands, an emphasis on communitising assets has evolved as an important strategy in developing resilient communities. While some community owned Estates are crofted (traditional tenant based agriculture system), much of the land now owned and managed by communities does not have tenants who are working the land. Experiences of the groups are mixed and while the majority have been able to achieve benefits through employment creation, the provision of new house sites, opportunities for business creation and enabling greater access and recreation opportunities there is little evidence of individuals or groups of individuals within the communities (other than Directors) either engaging with the management of the land or accruing benefits from it. Some groups aspire to have greater engagement but have so far been unable to achieve this.

Counter to this is the experience in parts of Romania, specifically in the Apuseni Mountains, where resources are much more equitably shared and managed by individuals, the community and the state resulting in a relatively small carbon footprint with extensive use of both locally grown (agriculture and forestry based) and value added products. Wood is the main source of fuel and every village has a sawmill which serves local needs. Young people are encouraged and supported to remain in the area and newly married couples are gifted enough green timber to build a new house. There evidence of a lifestyle which incorporates low food miles, local value adding, low carbon energy use, low waste production and high local reuse and recycling, strong and active cultural links to the land, and bio diverse landscapes actively managed in a low key way

The Romania of today is in some ways to the Scotland of 40-50 years ago but more importantly has retained skills, culture and systems which mean it is better placed to respond to future challenges around sustainability and climate change. Communities in Scotland aspire to regain a more self-sustaining lifestyle, less dependent on and less subject to the vagaries of external influences. Communities in Romania are however on the cusp of significant changes with recent membership of the EU providing opportunities for support and also greater mobility and income earning opportunities than previously and also exposure to a wider range of cultural influences through new technologies and more visitors to the region which has seen an exodus of young people from the countryside. There is a danger that Romanian communities may suffer the fate of many Scottish communities without realising what they have lost.

This proposal therefore seeks to examine the relationship and interdependence between community resilience, community engagement and participation and the active and productive management of forests and woodlands, as illustrated in Figure 1 below, and through this work assist communities in identifying in how they can retain or become more resilient in the longer term, at their own hand.



Figure 1: Research Focus

The proposed research while having direct benefits to the communities involved will also add to the body of research knowledge and help inform policy development when government and its agencies look to support communities who own or who aspire to own and manage land for the wider benefit the community. From a review of literature to date there has been little if any comparative work of this nature undertaken, the most relevant being work led by Bryden on the Dynamics of Rural Areas which investigated the reasons for differences in economic development of rural communities in 4 countries in the late 1990s. Research on both community resilience and community assets has increased in recent years and both Carnegie and the Scottish Agricultural College have been active in this area, however research to date has focused on examining current activity across the UK and exploring the concepts and work has not sought to address the challenges facing communities in any depth, as proposed through this work.

Aims and Methodology: The proposal aims to facilitate experiential learning between remote rural communities in Scotland and Romania with regard to developing and sustaining resilient communities founded on practice based research. This will enable each to better understand their current situation, what opportunities exist for them to improve or retain participation in securing their future resilience, possible barriers to change and to then develop and implement plans for change learning from these experiences. This activity will take place within a wider contextual examination of the factors affecting and barriers to achieving greater community resilience focusing on community engagement and participation both in planning and undertaking management of their natural resources, which will involve broader research and consultation with other stakeholders including policy makers (e.g. Forestry Commission, Highlands and Islands Enterprise), representative organisations (Community Land Scotland, Community Woodlands Association), key influencers (MPs, MSPs, academics, writers etc.) and other community land owners and managers. While examples have been provided for Scotland a similar framework will be implemented in Romania.

The action research which has yet to be fully designed will be focused around the existing work of each community who will use the exchange visits (Annex 2) and information from the baseline research surveys and interviews to inform the development of their activities. The two Scottish communities have existing community trusts and partnerships with business and project plans at varying stages. The aspiration is that lessons learnt from the exchanges and research will shape how these plans are implemented particularly with regard to community participation and engagement and the results of any action taken will then be monitored. The next steps in Romania are less evolved at this stage but will be explored over the coming months. Figure 2 shows the structure of the proposed research.



Figure 2: Proposed Research Format

The communities in both Scotland and Romania have been identified on the basis that they are facing similar but different challenges and each provides a contrasting experience for their international partners. Each community is described in brief below.

Girbovița is a very small traditional village in the foothills of the Apuseni mountains. It lies towards the end of a dead end road around 8 miles from the nearest town Aiud which has a population of 28k. The residents remain active in terms of farm and broadleaf woodland management with informal community structures around the church and activities such as livestock grazing functioning well. Many members of the community also work in industry in the nearest towns of Alba Iulia, Teiuș and Aiud. The community lands are administered by the ‘city hall’ of Aiud and recently there has been an air of disquiet regarding decisions made about the use of these lands and possible EU subsidy payments being directed elsewhere.

Horea is a larger village comprising 2320 people situated at almost 3000ft altitude in the heart of the Apuseni mountains on the edge of the Apuseni National Park. Surrounded by Norway Spruce forests the community has started to engage with the potential development of tourism in the area and an area of land has recently been released by the community for the development of a downhill ski area much of which is being led by local people. Horea has its own ‘Village Hall’ managing the delivery of local services.

Knoydart is a remote peninsula on the West coast of Scotland which can only be reached by boat or on foot. With a population of around 100 the land has been owned by the Knoydart Foundation since 1999 and was one of the earliest community land purchases. Since 1999 a huge amount has been achieved by the Foundation including a significant house upgrade and build programme and securing of energy for the community through the upgrade of a hydro scheme. Land and natural heritage management is also a significant activity for the Foundation and there have been ongoing challenges around managing both deer and goats. There is a separate Trust which manages forestry on the Estate and they have a wide range of work ongoing in relation to felling, restocking, regeneration of native woodland, access and recreation and eradication of *Rhododendron ponticum*.

The **Coigach and Assynt** Living Landscape Initiative (CALL) is a partnership currently comprising seven landowning partners who have signed up to plan and deliver land and conservation management at a landscape scale in the North West of Scotland. The area lies to the North West of Ullapool and covers a land area of 60,670 ha. The two main population centres are Lochinver and Achiltibuie but typically settlements are very dispersed along the coastal fringes of the area with a population of approximately 1800. The partnership has a number of objectives including: **1.**

Securing Benefits: To foster a vibrant and stable/growing population through creating opportunities for local enterprise and wellbeing linked to the sustainable use of the land and its cultural significance; **2. Nature and Landscape:** To deliver improved outcomes for the natural environment and landscape including an ambitious expansion in native woodland while improving the condition, connectedness and resilience of natural habitats, and; **3. Research:** To improve the knowledge base and gain a better understanding of the entire range of habitats over the whole area including uplands, woodlands, moorlands, grasslands, freshwater, coastal and marine and how these can be better managed and reconnected to enable both resilience to climate change and provision of valuable socio-economic benefits and services.

Research Objectives: Through the above research the following objectives will be addressed:

1. To understand what role, if any, the following play in achieving greater community engagement and participation thus leading to greater community resilience through access to and benefits from land/ woodland:
 - Land/asset ownership (individual, government, state, other)
 - Governance structures
 - Institutional structures e.g. family/ church/ village
 - Income levels
 - Accessibility of goods and services provided from elsewhere
 - Practical skills
 - Knowledge and understanding
 - Cultural and historical links to land
 - Peer pressure/ perceptions of others
 - Policy measures/ funding support
 - Size of community as compared to assets available
 - Current use of land/ woodland available (e.g. for timber production, for access & recreation)
 - Wider external factors
2. To explore which of the factors identified are significant in retaining or regaining community participation and resilience and what support (advice, funding, policy, other), if any, is required to either safeguard against loss of participation and resilience or initiate change to improve participation and resilience.
3. To identify possible strategies and processes to assist communities in identifying and implementing plans to become more resilient through wider community engagement and more productive use of land /woodland assets.
4. To contribute to the debate and policy development relating to land reform and community ownership of land and assets in Scotland, particularly around issues of governance and community engagement and participation.
5. To consider given current global pressures and external influences on rural areas what might be realistically achievable in terms of community resilience should access to suitable land/ woodland be available.

Proposed Research Management: The project administration will be undertaken by the Community Woodlands Association with the research undertaken by two rural and community development practitioners; Amanda Bryan in Scotland and Monica Oprean in Romania for whom this proposal would offer a significant personal development opportunity.

The Community Woodlands Association is the representative body for Scotland's Community Woodland Groups. In existence since 2003 it has over 150 members and it has delivered a wide range of projects covering everything from social enterprise to arts, heritage and cultural projects. CWA has considerable administration and project management experience having received funding from the Northern Periphery Programme, European Structural Funds Programmes, the Big Lottery, Forestry Commission Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and many private Trusts.

Amanda Bryan, a self employed rural development consultant since 2000 who trades as Aigas Associates. Amanda works closely with a wide range of community landowning and woodland groups across the Highlands and Islands of

Scotland and has considerable experience of community engagement and facilitation. At a strategic and policy level Amanda served on the board of Scottish Natural Heritage from 2004-2010 and as Chair of its North Areas Board and she currently sits on Forestry Commission Scotland's Highlands and Islands Forestry Forum. As of August 2012 Amanda has also been appointed Forestry Commissioner for Scotland. Amanda first visited Romania in 2011.

Monica Oprean works for a small NGO Satul Verde (Green Village) in Transylvania, North Western Romania. A native of the region she worked as an English teacher for several years securing her Masters degree in English Translation. Through developing exchange opportunities at a European level for her senior students her work has evolved into further developing and leading a wide range of training and cultural exchange opportunities focused around traditional craft, archaeology and the environment. She has worked with partners from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Slovakia and the UK and has visited Scotland on several occasions.

Copies of the CVs for Amanda and Monica are provided in Annex 3.

It is proposed that a Reference Group be established in both Scotland and Romania. This will help oversee the project, providing guidance on the methodology and potential use of any findings. Full details of the role and possible make up of the reference groups is provided in Annex 1.

The proposal has been discussed widely with many of the potential participants both at a community and at a policy and advisor level. To date support has been secured from the 4 communities involved, Forestry Commission Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Community Woodlands Association, Community Land Scotland, the Forest School in Campeni, Romania and the Forestry Department in Romania.

Draft Budget:

Cost Description		2013	2014	2015	Total
Researcher Time		£14,560	£9,920	£11,340	£35,820
Exchange Visits	Romania	£7,260	£7,260	£0	£14,520
	Scotland	£7,260	£7,260		£14,520
CWA Admin Fee		£1,500	£1,500	£1,500	£4,500
Seminars		-	£3,500	£6,500	£10,000
Dissemination		-	£2,000	£2,000	£4,000
Reference Group		£1000	£1000	£1000	£3,000
Researcher Expenses		£1,000	£1,000	£1,000	£3,000
Total		£32,580	£33,440	£23,340	£89,360

Detailed Budget provided in Annex 4.

Costs do not include any contribution towards community time as it is anticipated that this proposal should not require any additional community time but would shape or steer normal work plans/ activities. Should additional project related activity be identified and costed e.g. training or specific projects such as orchard development, sawmilling or craft skills then funding will be sought from a wide range of possible sources by the community with support provided by the researchers.

Early discussions have taken place with FCS, HIE and others regarding potential match funding. These will be taken further should the proposal proceed to the next step in securing support from the Arkleton Trust.

Research Team

CWA and the two researchers will have telephone or skype conferences every three months to plan activity and discuss management of project funds.

Reference Groups

It is proposed that reference groups be established in both Scotland and Romania to help oversee the project, providing guidance on the methodology and potential use of any findings. The groups would meet twice per annum, once in person and once by telephone conference. A full terms of reference will be developed in due course.

It is suggested that the reference group in Scotland could be made up of the following:

Professor Frank Rennie, Professor of Sustainable Development, Head of Research & Post-Graduate Development, LCC UHI. Trustee Arkleton Trust.

Dr Philomena de Lima, Director Centre for Remote and Rural Studies, UHI.

Professor Mark Shucksmith, Director Institute for Social Renewal, Newcastle University. Trustee, Arkleton Trust.

Sandra Holmes, Head of Community Assets, Highlands and Islands Enterprise

James Ogilvie, Social Policy Adviser, Forestry Commission Scotland (or Dr Anna Lawrence, Forest Research)

Jonny Hughes, Director of Conservation, Scottish Wildlife Trust

Jon Hollingdale, Chief Executive, Community Woodlands Association

David Cameron, Chair, Community Land Scotland

It is suggested that the reference group in Romania could be made up of the following:

Representative from Forestry Department, Alba.

Principal Forest School in Campeni

Martin Clark, Forestry Consultant, Grampus Heritage

Representative, School of Forestry, University of Transylvania, Brasov.

Others tbc.

Annex 2 Exchange Visit Programme

It is suggested that representatives from each community visit their international partners on 2 occasions with the make-up of the party varying each time to ensure widest potential for exchange and learning. The visits will be timed at different times of the year in order that a wide range of activities can be experienced first-hand. The emphasis will be on taking part in practical activities.

Each party from Romania is likely to consist of 3 representatives each from Horea and Girbovița accompanied by Monica Oprean who will act as translator, giving a total of 7 participants. Amanda Bryan will be driver and guide and the exchange would involve time spent in both Scottish communities.

Each party from Scotland is likely to consist of 3 representatives each from Sleat and CALL accompanied by either Amanda Bryan or a representative from the Reference Group (refer Annex 1), giving a total of 7 participants. Monica Oprean will be driver, guide and translator and the exchange would involve time spent in both Scottish communities.

<u>Potential Activities in Romania</u>	<u>Potential Activities in Scotland</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tree felling and extraction by horse. • Traditional fencing. • Orchard management and preservation of traditional fruit tree varieties. • Forest grazing regimes (wood pasture). • Food from the forest and preservation techniques • Small scale sawmilling • Timber building techniques • Tools/ crafts/ utility items made from wood. • Products from single trees • Wood fuel production – logs and faggots • Local forest linked education – Campeni • Hunting management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access, recreation and interpretation • Path construction • Guided walks and educational activities • Mountain bike trails • Community arts and culture activities • Wood fuel production – chip • Conservation management • Deer management • Forest schools • Integration of tourism and other land management • Vocational skills training • EU and other funding