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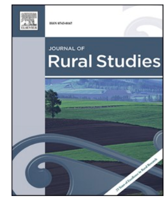

Finding rural community resilience: Understanding the role of anchor institutions☆

Ruth McAreavey *

Professor of Sociology, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University, UK

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ABSTRACT

Across Europe there is evidence that rural space has become more highly desired than before the pandemic as urban dwellers escaped to the perceived safety of the countryside. Whether or not this is a permanent trend remains to be seen, but it has brought to the fore the diversity of rural space, with some places faring much better than others. Indeed, with increased attention on so called 'left behind' places, the question of why some communities are resilient seems pertinent. Relatedly, why is it that others remain marginalised in terms education and health outcomes, economy, amenities and quality of life. Change can arise from longer-term issues such as economic restructuring or austerity, or it could be due to a sharper shock such as the pandemic or the exit of the UK from the EU (Brexit). And yet the reason behind uneven responses is not fully understood. This article examines how rural communities deal with challenges arising from change and the role of different organisations in this process. Drawing from extensive empirical evidence from a study based in England, the article identifies key traits of a resilient rural community. The research reveals that the process of resilience is not something that can be easily pinned down, nor is it a matter that is ever finished. It shows how the specificity of place, including the existence of anchor institutions, can enhance community resilience. In a rural context, a network of local institutions scaffold together to create an anchor network. Co-existence is therefore a key component of rural community resilience as it provides a range of important resources that is not solely reliant on a single organisation. Wider socio-economic context including deliberative state action also plays a role. But even so, the loss of resources, such as reduced public spending (austerity), does not actually mean a community will wither. Crucially the extent to which a community can move beyond survival seems to be limited in places without a range of anchors.

1. Introduction

The response in one small town in County Durham (England) was rapid and extensive with mutual aid groups springing up around established community centres and village halls. The people involved in these groups were well known in the locality. One charity set up a food provision scheme at the start of the pandemic for eight recipients. At the time of interview in December 2020, 100 care packages had been sent each week to families and also to older people, with a roughly even split. The contents were donations from local supermarkets or from donation websites. Families used the service because they were struggling due to reduced income arising from the pandemic. Many older people tended to be fearful of going out, they were shielding and they accessed the service. The scheme uses a pool of volunteers, some of whom had been furloughed and wanted to do something in the community. They come from the town or from the wider hinterland.

The above research note presents a picture that was frequently replicated across many rural communities and small towns in Europe as the pandemic unfolded with some places appearing to have a dense network of active groups (European Network for Rural Development, n. d). It highlights the importance of volunteers, local networks and third sector organisations, all of which is underpinned by a sense of community. The origins of sociology are rooted in our longstanding knowledge that positive engagement in social structures is a good thing. Durkheim argued that collectively making sense of a situation is what it is to be part of a community, it can create communities that are vibrant

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* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: Ruth.mcareavey@ncl.ac.uk.

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and healthy. Outside of everyday 'normal' circumstances, in the face of adversity, active community involvement can nurture a sense of belonging and in turn, it can help to shape social institutions (Calo-Blanco et al., 2017; Quinn et al., 2021). Despite longstanding scholarly and policy attention on community building, including policymakers' liaison with concepts such as social capital and community led local development, marginalised and left behind places have emerged across the developed world (Hendrickson et al., 2018; Görmar et al., 2019; MacKinnon et al., 2022). Studies have shown how different local contexts give rise to different consequences including affecting trust in government and increasing a sense of marginality (Sykes 2018; McKay et al., 2021). And yet debate rumbles on as to why some places remain left behind.

Communities are not isolated from wider social structures. For a long time we have known that the state has rowed back from service delivery in an attempt to manage citizen expectations (Skelcher 2000). The resultant 'hollowing out of the state' meant a smaller role for it overall, a reduction in expenditure in the public domain (Rhodes 1994; Skelcher 2000) and increased emphasis from the state on active citizenship (Henderson and Vercseg 2010; Bailey and Pill 2015). Preconditions for regional development and the resources that are available within and outside a region differ significantly across (city, peripheral and post-industrial) regions depending on factors including industrial heritage, population density and geographical location (and proximity to urban centres) (Tödtling and Trippl, 2005). Alongside this there is a strong narrative that pathologises poverty and inequalities, pointing the blame at individuals rather than recognising structural deficiencies including poor policy responses (Shildrick 2018). Wider policies also have an impact, not necessarily helping to address structural issues. Economic policies across Europe for a long time were very much about concentrating growth in major centres to bring about balanced growth, partly reliant on the idea of trickle down from central to peripheral areas (ESDP 1999). Reliance on this strategy has been found to have been flawed due to the specificity of place, and wider structural forces which contribute to processes of marginalisation (ESPON, 2017). Wirth et al. (2016: 63) argue that the periphery is not well provided for by mainstream regional policy as it is seen as the "laggard in the competition with urban areas that it can never win". The economic parameters used to evaluate the development of peripheral areas tends to further marginalise them as underperforming and as a result they are doomed to a future of managed decline or to a deluded process of catching up with the centre (Pike et al., 2016). Thus while human agency has the capacity to broaden and shape opportunity spaces in regional development, it is also shaped by local, regional and extra-regional conditions and contexts (MacKinnon et al., 2019; Miörner, 2022). Policy frameworks therefore need to be responsive to these conditions, as Nilsen et al. (2022) argue, one size does not fit all. It is against this backdrop that we have witnessed a larger role for local institutions, including third sector organisations. These organisations are values driven and play an important social role, advocating for social change, promoting civic engagement and acting as a watchdog (NCVO 2021). Some third sector bodies such as universities are closer to the state than others, such as sports clubs. Others still are closer to the market, e.g. cooperatives.

Previous rural development research has highlighted the importance of local and extra-local connections and networks in stimulating innovation and development (see for instance Ray 2006; Neumeier 2012; Bock 2016 and Gkartzios and Lowe 2019). Much of that research focused on structured processes of community led local development; a space that has previously been identified as institutionalised and elite (Cornwall 2004; McAreavey 2009a). Less comment has been made about development activities that happen outside of this institutionalised space. Often very small scale, but not always, this activity serves a critical function within a community, creating a kind of glue to bring people together. It is reliant on a lot of voluntary effort, much of which is invisible within traditional economic models – Caruso et al. (2022) draw attention to the value of this invisible work showing how in 2016–17 the voluntary and community sector in the UK contributed the equivalent of the GDP of a small country such as Honduras. The importance of such activities has become even more critical in a context of the UK, where the removal of significant tranches of EU funding has left a gap in the rural development landscape.

It is not always clear how social, economic and cultural capitals come together within a community to respond to ongoing challenges. Thus the capacity of different localities to respond to gaps left by the retrenchment of the state renders quite different results across different places. This article seeks to shed light on this issue by asking: What factors contribute to the resilience of a rural community and how can resilience be elevated within a community to enable it to thrive? What role do anchor institutions play in rural community resilience? These questions are motivated by an ongoing interest in the question of why some places, to put it in stark terms survive, and others thrive[1] and so we see the emergence of places that have been 'left behind' (McKay et al., 2021, Goodwin-Hawkins and Jones, 2021). In the UK, following exit from the EU (Brexit), there have been, and remain ongoing, significant transitions in funding, including uncertainty regarding the type and amount of support that will be given to rural communities.

The article proceeds as following: Using the framing of resilience, it considers the role of community-based organisations in rural development. It begins by conceptualising resilience before moving on to consider state-locality relations. Analysis continues by examining the concept of anchor institutions, presenting the empirical study and key findings. The research shows the importance of anchor institutions in supporting an active community, much of which falls outside of structured funding programmes. However, in places with few anchors and weaker community infrastructure the capacity to upturn deep-seated challenges is limited; there is a need for major strategic intervention, including external investment and engagement.

1.1. *Understanding resilience*

Resilience suffers from being something of a catch-all, this translating to a high level of vagueness associated with the concept (Scott 2013; Davidson 2010; Pendall et al., 2010). And yet it has enjoyed various periods of popularity over the years evident across many different disciplines including spatial planning (e.g. Davoudi 2012); social geography (e.g. Quinn et al., 2021); community studies (e.g. Magis, 2010); urban and regional studies (Pike et al., 2010; Raco and Street, 2021), social psychology and medical science (Southwick et al., 2014). Davoudi (2012) commented that as a buzzword, resilience threatened to overtake sustainability. Meanwhile some scholars convincingly argue that community resilience can be used as a way of shifting responsibility for actions from the state to individual citizens (MacKinnon and Derickson 2013), resonating with the 'hollowing out' of the state mentioned earlier.

Without going into a detailed historical review, understanding the origins of resilience offers insights for our analysis. It first appeared within systems ecology, being introduced by CS Holling (1973), and ever since it has been applied in different disciplinary contexts. Within ecological systems, Forbes and colleagues describe resilience as:

the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks… Resilience is measured by the size of the displacement the system can tolerate and yet return to a state where a given function can be maintained (Forbes et al., 2009, 22041).

In other words, in an ecological context, resilience relates to the size of disruption or displacement that a system can take which allows it to

[1] Of course this reality is more nuanced than this simplistic binary, as some communities may have a healthy economy with few opportunities for younger people. Others, such as those rich in natural assets, may have a very segmented labour market with unequal opportunities.

continue functioning. Wilson (2014) notes distinctive paradigms emerging since the origins of ecological resilience in the 1960's and 1970s moving to an extended ecological resilience approach under the umbrella of 'social-ecological resilience'. The application of resilience as a process within social psychology reveals further insights. Here it is used to counter a deficit-based approach so that, rather than solely expending time and energy in examining negative issues such as those arising from trauma, clinicians move towards a model of strength that focuses on prevention and building strengths (Southwick et al., 2014).

We have also witnessed resilience in a context of human systems and communities (Brand and Jax 2007; Davidson 2010). 'Social resilience' seeks to understand human system responses to change, be it environmental, economic or social (Adger 2000). However much of the literature focuses on coping with adversity and disturbance (see for instance Lidskog 2018, Quinn et al. 2021). Research examining the response of communities to disasters has found that resilience can be positively influenced through the development of social cohesion and social networks. This is especially the case in the absence of external interventions, and some argue that disasters can even act as an inoculation for individuals for future events, although the ameliorating impact of community support has limits, depending on the degree of stressors (Quinn et al., 2021).

Within rural studies, resilience has been examined in a context of capacity building, empowerment, planning and rural development and has found that trust, community capacity, leadership and connections to wider networks, including government, are important contributors to resilience (Steiner and Markantoni 2014; Markantoni et al., 2019, Glass et al., 2022). Scott (2013) considers resilience as offering an alternative policy narrative for rural development as well as an alternative analytical framework which considers the role of path dependencies and place dependencies. According to Scott's framing, locality is important and so geographical context needs to be fully understood.

Various actors, assets, interests, interactions and interdependencies exist within social systems. Due to this complexity, Wilson (2014) notes that communities are never 'stable', instead they are constantly in a state of flux due to different disturbances. In other words, change is ever present and we cannot expect that communities[2] will ever be at peak resilience, rather they can only strive towards maximising resilience (ibid). But it is also important not to consider resilience in binary terms of being present or absent, the reality is that as it may be more present in some circumstances (Pietrzak and Southwick 2011), a community may be more resilient at certain times than others.

Social learning processes and social memory mean that resilience is non-linear, this making it distinct from ecologically informed notions of social-ecological resilience (Magis 2010; Davoudi 2012). Thus, it is not a trait per se, rather it is a process as well as an outcome (Wilson 2014, see also Southwick et al., 2014), resulting in transformation rather than retention of the status quo (Brown, 2016; Quinn et al., 2021). It results in 'bouncing forward', adaptation, rather than 'bouncing back'. Bounce forward is implied in national and international rhetoric post-pandemic e.g. Build Back Better (UK Government 2021), Building Stronger (OECD Covid dashboard, n.d). A 'bounce forward' understanding of resilience aims to move beyond what was there before, improving weaknesses in the system, as opposed to a bounce-back scenario where things return to 'normal'. This is influenced by a range of so-called lock-in effects, that is where stakeholder groups or entire communities are locked into pathways or particular ways of doing things due to a range of factors such as geographical location, cultural norms or wider economic systems (Wilson 2014).

Thus considered, resilience is dynamic and relational, changing over time and emerging from social relations, rather than a resource to be drawn from and used (Faulkner et al. 2018). It is not a state of equilibrium such that there is an end point, be it to bounce back or bounce forward into a new and stable state (Davoudi 2012). In other words it is a process that enables social change and transformation (Imperiale and Vanclay 2016). While studies have identified the importance of a balance between the different forms of capital (economic, social and environmental) in avoiding vulnerability and contributing to community resilience (Magis 2010; Wilson 2010), fundamentally the concept of community resilience lacks precision. Equally, understanding what conditions make certain communities more resilient than others is less examined in the literature (Wilson 2010, 2014; Markantoni et al., 2019).[3] Although Wilson has conceptually shown how a range of lock-in effects (structural, economic, socio-psychological) intersect with the local context to determine community pathways, it is not fully clear how these operate at a practical level and thus when a community may be deemed to be on track to being resilient, that is with capacity to bounce forward. This article makes a distinct contribution to the literature by helping to elucidate what is a hazy concept by identifying the role of anchor institutions in contributing to a resilient rural community, including the way in which lock-ins operate in practice. By advancing our knowledge of how communities can 'bounce forward' , I contribute to wider theoretical and policy-oriented debates on why some places thrive and others merely survive. In so doing I am responding to a call by Imperiale and Vanclay (2016) for more research into how resilience comes about in rural areas.

My point of departure is that communities, due to the complexity of social system and their entanglements with social, economic and environmental issues, are in a constant state of flux that demands an ongoing response. I understand community resilience as a community-led response to challenges that arise from the complexity of social systems (Wilson 2014), be those changes environmental, economic or social which in turn generate 'lock-ins' that can influence subsequent pathways. Unlike ecological interpretations of resilience where the system returns to maintain its same function (Forbes et al., 2009), community resilience results in improvements to what was there before. It is a progressive ongoing process that is relational, involving social learning and memory.

1.2. Localism, decentralisation and partnership working

Communities do not exist independently of one other and, while there are competing interests within an area as different groups vie for power and resources, the state creates wider structures that greatly influence their capacity and motivation to act. This is in the form of central and local government policies and programmes. Indeed, many of those initiatives are delivered through local organisations who are contracted by government. In this way modern economies seek to use local organisations to empower communities through the delivery of public services (Herbert-Cheshire 2000; Henderson and Vercseg 2010; Bailey and Pill 2015). Previous studies have identified unequal relations between state agencies, the private sector and local communities as these processes have been implemented through multi-agency partnerships, many of which operate across rural territories through a partnership approach (see for instance Bosworth et al., 2016; Derkzen et al., 2008; McAreavey 2009b). Austerity was an explicit UK government policy from 2010 to reduce public expenditure and was accompanied by financial liberalisation and deregulation of the labour market. It has left a large shadow over the delivery of public services including education, health (public, physical and mental) and social care (Toynbee and

[2] In this context, Wilson understands a community as a social system within a geographic area.

[3] Literature has operationalised the concept for policy processes, see for instance Steiner and Markantoni (2014).

Walker 2020).

A decade of austerity policies, a time during which the Conservative Party has been in power in the United Kingdom,[4] has placed locality centre stage, it has redefined state-local relations and in some cases, the local state itself (Beveridge and Featherstone 2021). This has included a 20 percent reduction in per capita government spending (Office for National Statistics, 2016) and a reduction in the real value of unemployment benefits (Dagdeviren et al. 2018). The spending power of local government in England has reduced by 16 percent since 2010 (Institute for Government, 2022) and their non-education spending per resident fell by almost a quarter in real terms between 2009–10 and 2019–20 (Ogden et al., 2021). The Localism Act (2011) of the UK Conservative-led coalition government was promoted as being something rather radical and of returning power to local communities, contributing to a wider agenda of decentralisation and to the ultimate creation of a 'good' society (Featherstone et al., 2012). This legislation exemplifies the previously mentioned 'hollowing out of the state' and operationalised the idea of the 'Big Society'. It followed on from other government policies that were allegedly about giving power back to communities, such as Tony Blair government's Third Way. And while the idea of the Big Society was mothballed, the essence of it still flows through government policies, as articulated for instance in Theresa May's 'shared society' where individuals in communities help each other out (Aiken and Harris 2017). Considered in this way, localism is seen to be a 'good thing' (Featherstone et al., 2012) and yet it was implemented during an era of austerity where social welfare support was severely reduced in England.

In their critical analysis of localism and of giving power back to local communities, Featherstone et al. (2012) single out the perception of local people as a monolith free from intra-local tensions, sharing a vision of how their community should be shaped. This is a flawed assumption; rural oriented research has for a long time highlighted the tensions between different stakeholders and interest groups as they come together to effect change (Storey 1999; Shortall and Shucksmith 2001). The reality of localism is that it devolves service delivery rather than power and authority (Featherstone et al., 2012) and third sector organisations play a critical role in that service delivery (Levitas et al., 2007). That shift is problematic, not least because it brings the third sector into an arena where it is no longer in opposition to government. So extensive is this altered role, that it has been described as 'an entire ecosystem of charity to meet our basic needs: donated dignity filling in where the state once stood' (Ryan, 2021). Consequently, it reinforces the power base of controlling institutions as they use the same tools of activists – community participation, empowerment and social capital (Miraftab 2004; Bailey and Pill 2015). Accordingly, people intuitively see these tools in a positive light.

Delivering services through local communities raises further challenges as it privileges communities with 'resources, expertise and social capital to become involved in the provision of services and facilities' (Featherstone et al., 2012, 178–9). Herbert-Cheshire articulates similar concerns, going so far as to predict that 'community-based strategies for self-help will increase the division and inequality in rural towns by empowering a small, fairly powerful minority who are better positioned to mobilise themselves' (2000, 213).

1.2.1. An alternative model? Anchor institutions and community wealth building

There is evidence of some resistance to prevailing modes of service provision within civil society (contracts and short-term funds), and of the prescriptive approach of locality politics. Alternative models have started to emerge which seek to address inequalities; to create stronger links between people, the economy and wealth creation; and to generate longer term solutions (Jackson and McInroy 2017). This typically means an asset-based approach that takes account of what already exists within a community and building from that. It is not simply about economic growth, but it takes account of wider social and environmental issues. As a result, across the UK in recent years there has been increased interest in community ownership and models that allow wealth and benefits, of all forms, to be fairly distributed (CLES 2021). Despite the flaws already identified, the UK Localism Act of 2011 recognised the potential for anchor institutions to play a role in shaping their areas, creating conditions that allow for community ownership. This includes dismantling complex finance systems and creating greater flexibility for councils such as acting directly in the interests of their communities without concerns that they are acting beyond their legal powers. The Localism Act recognised the concept of an asset of community value (ACV) which is land or property that is of importance to a local community as it furthers social wellbeing or social interests, e.g. schools, pubs, civic halls and buildings and theatres. ACVs are subject to additional protections from development and sale (Sandford, 2022). Subsequently the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2015) later also recognised the significant and strategic role of anchor institutions in a locality.

Community wealth building (CWB) seeks to shift the prevailing economic model that has instilled poverty, produced inequalities and ecological degradation in modern society to a new political-economic system that includes bottom-up development and different scales of economic and political interventions (Guinan et al., 2020). This approach has some parallels with degrowth ideology that seeks to reorientate the prevailing social narrative of economic growth within capitalist economies (Mastini 2017). CWB is centred on place-based economics, democratic participation and ownership and the reconfiguration of local institutions to guarantee more sustainable and equitable outcomes (Guinan et al., 2020). This includes unleashing the power of so-called anchor institutions which seek to give power to the local community and to increase community wealth through their actions (Jackson and McInroy 2017). With such a shift in how things are done, anchor institutions have the potential to create transitional ruptures, that is a regime shift (Wilson 2014), that contribute to community resilience.

The status of anchor institution evolved from urban regeneration discourse and was originally assigned to large-scale organisations with a fixed presence in a typically urban area, involving 'eds and meds', that is universities and hospitals (Jackson and McInroy 2017; Guinan et al., 2020, see also Sellick 2020). Much of the emphasis on their role has been on procurement policies and more traditional economic contributions. Anchor institutions have an important presence in a community due to being tied to a particular place and as such they are spatially immobile. Other key traits include being a largescale employer, controlling large areas of land or assets; being a large purchaser of goods and services in an area, in other words they make a strategic contribution to the local economy (UKCES, 2015; Jackson and McInroy 2017). Examples include libraries, education providers, local authorities, large local businesses, social housing providers, faith-based organisations and the combined activities of the community and voluntary sector.

Recent research has pointed towards the importance of smaller scale anchor institutions, including those in a rural context. Development Trusts Northern Ireland (n.d.) explain how community anchors deliver services and facilities, solving local problems, supporting other organisations and initiatives to succeed (often through capacity building and empowerment), and bringing about social, economic and environmental benefits to their community. However, less is known about the role of these organisations in a rural context and that is the gap that this article will fill, including what constitutes anchor institutions - size, geographical space and activities and their intersection with community resilience, including their potential to influence 'lock-ins.'

[4] Although as Featherstone et al. (2012) note, this changes have been occurring for much longer, with a prominent role for market-based initiatives evident from the 1980s accompanied by discourses of the 'active citizen' (see also Kearns, 1995), the 1980s also being a time when the Conservative Party were in power.

1.3. Methods and materials

A multi-method study that was funded through the (English government) Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the study sought to understand the needs of rural communities in England in the wake of Brexit and the accompanying transition of rural development funding. EU funds supported rural economies through various initiatives including the Leader programme, which was later mainstreamed as a community led local development (CLLD) approach. Ethical approval was provided by Newcastle University.

The study sought to provide insight into socio-economic dynamics of rural England with a view to informing new rural policy post Brexit. It focused on seven localities that were selected by the research team in consultation with Defra to provide a range of places with diverse attributes and features. In so doing, the research team recognised diversity across English rural communities; and each area demonstrates some particular aspect of what it is to be a rural community. DEFRA's urban-rural classification was used as the starting point for selection, this uses the density of population and the settlement type. Further selection criteria were used and are outlined in Appendix One. A range of sources including local authority and central government data, Office of National Statistics and NHS data was used to develop area profiles. A summary profile is provided below in Table 1. These area profiles provide important context for understanding the interview material.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from third sector organisations and local government either based directly in the localities or with a remit in one of the areas. Many of these could be categorised as 'active citizens', some were employed by a small charity, some volunteered, but they all were inspired to make a difference within their community. A residents survey created a snapshot of issues across the study areas encapsulating a breadth of insight into topics including access to services; volunteering; employment and housing. Meanwhile 77 rural businesses completed a survey across the seven areas. This article focuses primarily on 37 interviews (see Appendix One for overview of interviewees) that were conducted across three of the study areas in the North of England. The North of England is the focus for this article due to the prevailing inequalities that exist and the importance of third sector organisations. It is estimated that 955,000 volunteers provide over £69 million hours of work (valued between £565 m - £940 m per year) (Chapman 2020). The majority are very small, with limited income and do not employ staff (ibid). Northern England is quite distinct from the rest of the country, not least culturally and economically. Much of the innovation in the Industrial Revolution was spawned in the north and its economy was aligned with that industry, including shipbuilding, weaving, mining and steelmaking, all of which has created a very distinctive culture and society. However, the region has long suffered from industrial decline, and many areas have high levels of inequalities, including poor health outcomes, poor employment opportunities and high levels of child poverty (Marmot et al., 2020, IPPR 2022; Stone 2022). This challenging context provides a particular backdrop for exploring community resilience and the role of anchor institutions.

Interviewees were identified through a snowballing technique and by targeting individuals who were very active in the community. Initially in each area, the local rural development agency and the local authority were approached and from those initial contacts further organisations and individuals were identified. Interview themes included volunteering and community engagement; housing; responses to covid; and challenges and assets within the community (see Appendix One for interview schedule. They were held at a time that suited the individuals and were sufficiently loosely structured to allow respondents to discuss issues that were important to them. The fieldwork was conducted during the global pandemic (from November 2020 to August 2021) and so most interviews were held over zoom, with a few conducted by telephone. The majority of interviews were recorded and transcribed and for those few respondents who did not agree to this, detailed notes were taken and written up after the interview. Transcriptions and notes were coded and then analysed using thematic analysis. Area profiles set important context for understanding actions that were unfolding on the ground. The research team read across one another's synthesis of findings and then met on several occasions to discuss emerging themes. The findings presented here draw on wider themes that were identified across the overall project including trust; voluntary activity; anchor institutions; and reduced government.

Table 1
Summary profile of three case study areas.

Area One: Post-industrial (focused around Shildon, Co. Durham)	Area Two: High amenity value, located within Lakes national park (focused around Keswick, Cumbria)	Area Three: Agricultural area with landscape designations (focused around Barnard Castle, Co. Durham)
• Distinct sense of place, connected to its industrial heritage. • No major employer in the region. • Health outcomes are lower than the English average, with high levels of poor health conditions and inactivity • High levels of private sector rented accommodation and significant level of poor quality housing and absentee landlords. • There are no supermarkets in the small town and a higher than average level of fast food outlets. • Limited pool of volunteers.	• Small town located in National Park with strict planning legislation. • High amenity value; national and international landscape designations. • High proportion of second homes and of retiree immigrants. • Thriving theatre and arts ecology. • Residents are older and healthier than the national average. • The town has one high-end supermarket that is considered by some residents to be insufficient as well as a couple of smaller supermarkets. It has many public houses, restaurants and bars. • Large pool of active volunteers.	• Prosperous market town is the principle service centre for the hinterland. Services include agricultural market, supermarket, cinema, theatre, museum and art galleries. • One of the most expensive and desirable places to live in the county, surrounding landscape is designated as AONB. • Major private sector employer located in the area. • Large pool of active volunteers. • Significant number of retirees. • Health data does not show major inconsistencies from regional or national data. However, average age and life expectancy is slightly higher than the national average

1.4. Responding to a sharp external shock

Change is endemic within any community, but its intensity varies according to circumstances, this provoking a range of responses. For instance, an emergency response group was established in one area to address flooding; a foodbank also providing financial support, sought to mitigate the impacts of austerity in another; and in yet another area the establishment of Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Services (UTASS) had a different remit. Research conducted by the health service, found that ever-increasing complexity of paperwork and the fear and consequences of getting it wrong was a major factor in suicides within the farming community. In response to this external economic change i.e. the rise of bureaucracy within farming and a reduction in support from government, UTASS created a support network that has since gone from strength to strength. UTASS continued to play a role during the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in 2001 and then more recently, during the pandemic by supporting farming families in a range of different ways including offering virtual social events and helping to drop food parcels to vulnerable members of the community. Groups worked collaboratively, creating a collective effort to ensure all geographies were covered and, in so doing, maximised impact. The responses to the pandemic highlight community agility and capacity to respond to events unfolding in real time, on the ground. It involves collective actions and shared

solutions to a common problem emerging from within the community rather than being imposed upon them (Imperiale and Vanclay 2016), demonstrating that communities are not passive but that they have agency (Glass et al., 2022).

During the pandemic short-term support from central government to local government filtered through to grassroots organisations and partnerships. For instance, Area Action Partnerships in County Durham were allocated £1.6 m for emergency funding which was spent at a very local level, often through local groups, for a range of activities including providing food parcels and offering support for village halls. This co-existence between different actors is a key component of resilience, reflecting its relational nature and the way in which collaboration with government is important (Glass 2022; Markantoni et al., 2019): they were championed by local government but were fully anchored within the community, interacting with very local organisations and with capacity to flex their way of operating:

> … we simplified the application process, we delegated approval of applications to either myself or my head of services, if it was over a certain amount. So anything under £5,000 I could approve. (18.03.21)

Similarly in another area, a local group explained how the residents were scared, fearful about what was happening. They understood very quickly what the need was on the ground and responded accordingly, describing how they were able '*to hit the ground running and set up a larger food bank',* (08.03.21). Resilience occurs in real situations; it requires sensitivity to lived experiences (cf. Imperiale and Vanclay 2016). Different organisations were connected with one another as a means of responding to change due to the pandemic, undertaking activities that, in a rosier welfare context, could potentially displace the work of paid employees. This was not an actual risk due to the fragility of the public sector and the shortcomings of the welfare system. The emergency funds were just that; a temporary measure to deal with an immediate situation and without any attempt by the state to stimulate new ways of working on a more permanent basis. They relied on active citizens who created a positive community level transitional rupture to reduced welfare and small government. Engaging active citizens was more rapid to implement than slow, institutional, macro-level change (Wilson 2014) i.e. permanently reversing cuts to government expenditure.

1.5. Different forms of anchor institutions in the community

As already discussed, with the retrenchment of the welfare state, there is an increasing role for third sector organisations across UK society. Their combined action has been identified as having an anchoring effect in the community (Jackson and McInroy 2017). The church meanwhile represents a more typical anchor institution, and it continues to play an important role in rural England: the trustees of an agricultural support service (UTASS mentioned earlier) in one of the study areas is made up of leaders from the community, including representatives from the church. It retains a strong presence in the region, supporting farming families in the Dales *'from delivering meals to people to picking up prescriptions … '* (23.11.21). As such it has an important social role.

Nearly all of the respondents to the business survey indicated that being connected to the locality was vital to the success of their business. Rural businesses include independent press and agricultural marts. Individuals spoke about how they perform a central role through direct employment and contribution to the wider economy while also nurturing a strong sense of place and identity. Theatres were very active in two of the research areas, providing important activities for a range of users, including some youth drama workshops where participants could choose to pay as much as they could afford. The research found how an independent local press, which is declining across rural England, c was considered to be a powerful force, with letters coming from local residents and editorials influencing place-based debates. Agricultural marts also hold a central role in the community:

> A lot of people in [the town] say that having the mart in the middle of the town is actually not good, it is smelly, there is noise of cattle and sheep and there is [sic] wagons going and it is not the best access to the mart side. But to have a market town without a market is a bit of a contradiction, and I think there is a lot of people who maybe wouldn't shop in [the town] if there wasn't the market there. You know you do two jobs at once and it is keeping the professional firms there, the solicitors and the accountants. And other people that a farmer and his wife might decide to visit when they go to the mart on the Wednesday. That tradition is perhaps weakening a bit compared to how it was 20 years ago. I think that is national. (23.11.20).

1.5.1. Single anchors

In some places, the action of a single third sector anchor institution, albeit with multiple roles, was critical and worked across a single area, with little input from other third sector groups. The centre for food and finance solidarity in Shildon, was established by the church in the midst of the austerity era (2014) in the post-industrial case study. It includes a foodbank, credit union collection point and a point of contact for support across a range of issues. It revealed innovative features as it sought to address specific challenges within the locality (Bock 2016; Neumeier, 2012, 2017) by becoming flexible and incubating social enterprise (Jackson and McInroy 2017), a typical trait of an anchor institution. Rather than being locked into a particular path dependency (Wilson 2014) of reliance on grants, this group understood its capacity to affect change by employing a social enterprise model. Services were developed to respond to the deep-seated welfare cuts and to economic decline arising from deindustrialisation in the locality. As a means of shifting away from economic deadlock where there are few employment opportunities and reliance on welfare support, the centre nurtured social enterprise while still providing advocacy services. In so doing, it created a rich tapestry of support structures, addressing largely social and economic issues:

> ' … what we did two years ago, well we moved from our small shop fronts, into three shop fronts that had been previously, one had previously been a pizza shop, one was derelict, and one was an old flowershop. So what we did, is we created a centre for food and finance solidarity. And each building has a different purpose. So, the old flowershop is now a foodbank and credit union collection point. And it is also a point of contact where people can come in and do job searches and get support … The middle building was our community centre, but at the moment that is closed and is a temporary food bank where we were doing a lot of deliveries during Covid … The next shop along is the pizza shop, and old pizza shop that we have turned into a takeaway … and we provide free meals for school aged children all of the time all year, we have done for the last two years. When they are at school we provide a breakfast and when they are off school we provide a hot lunch. The takeaway is for everybody in the community and it is our social enterprise really. It is my, it is our dabble into social enterprise because we have a … we have a donation menu, and we also have a … paid menu (12.03.21).

As the extended quote shows, the centre proactively incubated social enterprise, providing a wide range of services for different members of the community.[5] This also removed stigma associated with getting a 'hand-out':

> I didn't want to alienate people who were the working poor, or people who wanted to make a difference for the environment (12.03.21).

It reveals the importance of individual resilience which in turn

[5] Housing providers were found to perform a key role within the case study areas, but this is explored in a separate paper.

influences community responses (Magis 2010); this all contributing to the existence and buoyancy of anchor institutions. The impact of individuals cannot be emphasised enough; time and again in the research, individual leaders were central in building up wider community resilience.

The fundamental and complex challenges of poverty and poor employment opportunities are powerful forces. The actions of the anchor institution in this post-industrial community made a very real difference in the area, but its capacity to break the loop of the vicious cycle of economic decline was limited overall. Rather than bouncing forward, it was more accurate to observe that this community was treading water, that it to say the community was surviving. The limited pool of volunteers curtailed capacity for action overall:

> … the chair of my partnership, her husband she is a county councillor, her husband is on my board as a public rep. they are also town councillors for the town council. Their daughter and son in law sits on the town council. So you know I think the challenge is to try and expand a little bit' (18.03.21).

This has serious implications in a context of small government where reliance on active citizens side steps a lack of government investment. Local organisations in a rural context often have multiple roles from providing hands-on support to very small-scale grassroots activity to more strategic actions such as connecting with other key institutions in the locality through referrals or shared resources e.g. transport. Their role is intensified in places with few community organisations.

1.5.2. Stickiness and anchor networks

Elsewhere, key organisations or anchors were major employers in the area and had very positive relations and spill over benefits into the community. A range of different anchors create a more resilient community:

> I observe in the Barnard Castle community, is the impact of GlaxoSmithKline as a massive employer. Because I have never actually worked in a kind of … an environment in a charity where so many highly qualified very well-paid people are working for one company, and have such an influence over what is happening in a community … it is like everybody has worked there! I mean it is just this weird thing. You know some of our club leaders have worked in GSK in the past, packing, doing whatever … in terms of the kind of local community, and the economy, GSK is pretty influential really … it is definitely part of the … whatever the community is in Barnard Castle it is definitely part of it … that kind of typical, retired middle class fairly affluent volunteer profile, a lot of those people would be ex GSK employees (28.01.21).

The knowledge and expertise among these employees stuck within the community, reflecting the sticky nature of anchor institutions (Sellick 2020). In contrast to the limited reserve of volunteers mentioned in the post-industrial community, in another place individuals described how their organisation was 'lucky' to have such an extensive pool of volunteers, including skilled board members, many of whom had been employed in GSK and had gained extensive experience, knowledge and expertise as a result. The knowledge and skills acquired through their careers was brought to bear within the third sector organisations.

> So then when the recovery money came out, I applied for that money to kind of … deliver the activities and pay the internal customers. Because I thought, well if they are not going to have any sessions to run and they can't pay us to hire the room, let's pay them to deliver those sessions for free in the building. So all those things have meant that we have still managed to use the building and deliver similar things to what we would have been delivering (09.12.21).

This group was not constrained by the status quo, that is 'locked-in' to the traditional way of doing things, instead they had the capital (money, knowledge) that allowed them to be open to changing how things are done, creating a positive rupture in a known pathway of action. Resilience is not static, it is not about an end point, it is a process and individual agency is often key to that process. The vision of both trustees and employed staff is a crucial part of building on the vision of the paid member of staff:

1.6. Community wealth building and structural constraints

Respondents discussed time and again the importance of a place-based identity and how it influenced how people act:

> I think in this area it is what people have done that has made them what they are. And here it is very much tied up with landscape. So in the Upper Dales it is farming. It is hill farming, and a very particular type of farming which determines a lifestyle really. (15.01.21)

The flip side of this can occur when communities are 'stuck' in specific pathways because of structural problems including geographical constraints and economic lock-ins connected to economic capital (Wilson 2014). Here, while the activity of locally based organisations can be significant; there are circumstances where they cannot overcome major structural challenges, including long term lack of investment and economic decline. As one development support officer explained:

> We haven't got the resources to do anything big anyway really in the scheme of things. And I think the issues in places like … we almost need to, you almost need to start again with them if that makes sense, it is a bigger issue, it is a bigger regeneration issue. It is a housing issue, it is a transport issue, it is an employability issue. It is a social issue. Because we are not going to go into [the community] and change it. We haven't got the capacity to do that, as much as we would like to … (18.03.21)

The retrenchment of the welfare state has pared back local services leaving a skeleton local government in its wake. Third sector anchor institutions can fill some of those gaps, but the volume of the voluntary effort required to overcome all fissures extends beyond the capacity of community organisations. In places where issues are complex and multifaceted, they cannot be fully addressed through locally based community development activities. In Shildon, due to change originating from outside the area economic restructuring arising from deindustrialisation, there were limited community assets from which to build. That stated, there was a very active core community, undertaking a breadth of activities and creating a strong underpinning to the community. Fundamentally, major investment, regeneration even, was seen to be the solution. One respondent described how, in a neighbouring locality, Bishop Auckland, a benefactor had been investing in the community with very positive results, explaining how her area really needed a similar patron. Another person described how residents in a pit village felt a lack of empowerment, exclaiming:

> 'nothing ever happens here … nobody ever comes and brings stuff to us'.

Thus, before such places can even engage in a development process where there are interactions between the local area and the wider environment (Bock 2016, Bosworth et al., 2016), there is a need for external stimulus and investment to help rupture the pathway by overcoming structural lock-ins. But there is also a need to nurture trust. The very stark quote above indicates a lack of trust that anyone will assist, something that was picked up elsewhere in the research. To provide some context to this community, there was evidence of managed decline. Some of the communities in the post-industrial area were designated by government as category 'D' villages, meaning that they were viewed to have limited futures (and in some cases were threatened with demolition). The designation created considerable political dissent amongst these communities. Planning policy failed to recognise the importance of place for residents, but it also stigmatised category 'D' villages.

Vested interests may cause power struggles that prevent pathway transitions and community wealth building. In one area it was evident that parts of the community did not support house building. Such 'lock-in' effects can be hard to disrupt (Wilson 2014). It also highlights the existence of different communities within a locality leading to multiple path dependencies (Allen, 2003; Bailey and Wilson 2009).

> And I think then in a rural community there are the two levels of community, which I experience all the time. The known community that has lived here forever, and the incomer community which is sometimes the most active in the volunteering community sector (28.01.21).

Those with knowledge, expertise and influence are often those with 'middle class affluence and ability to articulate to actually get that kind of movement off the ground' (28.01.21). Many of these individuals were 'newcomers' to the locality.

1.7. Towards community resilience: discussion and conclusions

This research shows how the loss of resources, as experienced through a decade of austerity, does not actually mean a community will wither. However, the extent to which a community can overcome this rupture and 'bounce forward' is not clear. The research reveals that the process of resilience is not something that can be easily pinned down, nor is it a matter that is ever finished. It is ongoing and always in progress.

The pandemic represented an external shock for society at large. During this time, UK central government provided substantial short-term financial measures to support local authorities. This injection of public funds is paradoxical and sits in sharp relief with a more long-standing erosion of the welfare state and of public services more generally. It could be expected that communities had little or no slack in the system to adequately respond to emerging needs (Vizard and Hills 2020), some even being at a level below the resilience threshold due to lack of capacity, low levels of trust and little experience of participating. Resilience literature identifies the existence of different communities within a locality where many different pathways can be found and where there are multiple path dependencies (Allen, 2003; Bailey and Wilson 2009). In a rural area, due to the smaller scale and the limited number of anchor institutions, there are fewer possible pathways. Creating connections between groups supports positive relations (Magis 2010) and so can help to open up new possibilities for action. Surprisingly, this research shows how in the rural context, the pandemic created opportunities for small anchor organisations to rethink their way of operating, addressing longer term viability thereby shifting the normal way of doing things and as a result becoming even more resilient – improving what was there before.

As Glass et al. (2022) point out, relationships with government are important and while they call for relations to be on a more equal footing, this research demonstrates different relations with different scales of government. Central government policies, such as relating to planning or welfare can erode trust in government and undermine capacity for local action. It is clear from this study that resilience operates at different scales. Individuals can be resilient in the way in which they respond, connecting with others and bringing about positive responses to critical issues within the community. At a community level, groups can operate as a collective, elevating community resilience. This can create conditions that enables an area to move beyond passivity and to build capacity. Having a diverse network of anchor organisations levers in more resources and expertise, expanding the scope of what is possible. To a greater or lesser extent, in all the case study areas there was evidence of interdependence between local organisations as they worked co-operatively, pooling resources and sharing information. Rather than a single large anchor institution, such as the 'ed and med' model found in an urban context, in a rural context, there are multiple, smaller scale place-based organisations that together make a strategic economic and social contribution to the locality. They often scaffold together to create a kind of trampoline to allow the community to 'bounce forward', that is to improve what was there before. Collectively they are anchored in place and their activities are fundamental in addressing social and economic challenges. In communities with fewer anchor institutions, the capacity to enact change is much more limited, due largely to a limited pool from which to draw both in terms of volunteers but also regarding wider resources that this levers into the process, including capital and networks.

Having identified the importance of the anchor network for the rural context, certain conditions seem to be critical for supporting a resilient community. A robust economy serves as a backbone for a rural community, providing employment, supporting a buoyant housing stock and maintaining a balanced age profile. It also brings about indirect benefits including a highly skilled volunteer pool that becomes 'sticky' within the locality when that knowledge is transferred more widely through volunteering activity, rendering an important social role for major employers. Further research could explore the limitations of the rural anchor collective and the extent to which they can address structural challenges such as the lack of employment, place categorisation (i.e. stigmatization), strategic investment or affordable housing.

Public expenditure increasingly relies on active citizens, as demonstrated for example in the UK government's recent launch of its Shared Prosperity Fund.[6] This is problematic for a number of reasons. As this research has shown, much voluntary work is invisible, relying on the actions of a group of individuals within their locality. That work ought to be a leverage point for securing government resources, thereby demonstrating its wider value. Secondly this reliance can negatively influence the capacity of an area to enact change, especially in areas that have witnessed decline due to longstanding structural transformation, where levels of trust are often low and where few volunteers are available. Conversely areas with a dense network of anchors benefit from the strategic contribution that those organisations make to the economy as well as from the skills and expertise of past employees. There is a danger that existing inequalities may be hardened as already marginalised areas struggle to gain benefits from (centralised) government funds.

1.7.1. Final comments

This article set out to shed light on community resilience. It shows how in a rural context, a network of local institutions scaffold together to create an anchor network. Co-existence is therefore a key component of rural community resilience as it provides a range of important resources that is not solely reliant on a single organisation. The rural anchor network encompasses groups from within and beyond the rural development sphere, including, but not limited to, employers, local press, agricultural support organisations, housing providers, social enterprises and local agricultural markets. By dint of these groups working closely together in an organic way, they are able to create strong community links which nurture a sense of cohesion, but that also allow that community to positively respond to ongoing social change. However, this is not the case for all rural areas. In places where the economy has struggled to adjust to deindustrialisation, there is evidence of more limited capacity and action. This suggests that the 'critical triangle' of economic, social and environmental capital (Wilson 2014), is skewed towards economic and social capital. The research shows how social capital is mobilised by individuals who are driven by improving conditions in their community. This creates community-level resilience – it builds trust, it develops capacity, it is empowering and it provides dignity to those who have been marginalised by a welfare system that is not fit for purpose. Individuals working in such marginalised areas identified the need for significant external investment to address longer term issues such as lack of employment or poor quality housing. That investment

[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus.

will not necessarily come from within the community and rather than bounce forward the community is confined to the status quo. The impact of austerity rippled through local communities, fundamentally restricting the possibilities for local government action. Paradoxically, the pandemic resulted in the injection of funds into local government and helped to consolidate resilience. Community asset building is potentially limited where there are deep seated challenges, structural lock-ins or multi-level limitations. By the latter, I refer to the different scales of budgets that impact on government expenditure, from the local through the regional, up to the national. Without economic restructuring or major investment from a third party, be it government or a benefactor, there is a danger that left behind places remain confined to marginalisation.

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Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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