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## PERSON, COMMUNITY AND DEVELOPMENT ON SKYE, SCOTLAND

### ABSTRACT

In this paper we address the question of how best to attribute agency to persons and to communities within studies of rural development. A key issue is the question whether it is better to conceive of the 'individual' or the 'community' as holding social capital. We begin by outlining the implications of answering the question in various different ways, and in doing so present some of the conclusions from our recent European Commission 5th Framework Programme research project on the role of social capital in rural development. But a reconsideration of what we actually mean by 'individuals' and 'communities' allows more nuanced reflections on the quality of social life in our study areas. To this end, we return to our case study in the Skye region in the west of Scotland. We present qualitative data on how crofting (small-scale tenant agriculture) involves varying conceptions of personhood and community, and suggest that the activities of crofting are inherently social, whether they are carried out alone or in groups. We therefore encourage the search for alternatives to a strict dichotomy of individual and community.

KEY WORDS: Development, social capital, community, crofting, Scotland.

### RESUMEN

#### INDIVIDUO, COMUNIDAD Y DESARROLLO EN SKYE, ESCOCIA

Dado el interés que despierta el tema del capital social y su papel en el desarrollo, los autores se plantean si la Administración, a través de las políticas públicas, puede influir en la forma de organización y los vínculos existentes entre los individuos y en las comunidades sitas en el mundo rural. El estudio se enmarca en un reciente proyecto europeo, ya finalizado, cuyo objetivo era analizar el capital social de las regiones rurales más desfavorecidas, utilizando para ello el estudio de casos. La pregunta clave en esta investigación es: ¿quién desarrolla el capital social en un territorio, los individuos o la comunidad? El artículo comienza delimitando las implicaciones que la respuesta a esta

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pregunta puede tener cuando se aborda desde diversas perspectivas. Ello conduce a una serie de conclusiones que proceden del proyecto señalado anteriormente, a partir del análisis del capital social en diversas áreas rurales de Europa.

Los autores se centran en este artículo en el caso de la isla de Skye, al oeste de Escocia. La dicotomía entre individuo y sociedad (o comunidad) emerge claramente en el estudio de casos. En diversas ocasiones se ha criticado el concepto de comunidad porque éste pasa por alto al individuo. Sin embargo, habría que aplicar el mismo rigor crítico al concepto de individuo. En el tema del capital social, es necesario tener en cuenta que las personas son intrínsecamente sociales y continuamente realizan acciones dentro de una trama compleja de redes de relaciones sociales. El objetivo de la investigación no es, pues, elegir entre el análisis de los individuos de manera particular o el análisis de un colectivo bien organizado, sino analizar las formas en que las actitudes y las acciones son significativas por sí mismas y actúan buscando la socialización en el nivel de la comunidad.

Cada territorio tiene unas características propias, incluso desde el punto de vista social y relacional, que hacen que deban ser estudiados de diferentes maneras, utilizando, incluso, diferentes metodologías de análisis. El capital social se entiende como fenómeno interno a la comunidad. La oferta de servicios públicos puede definir un modelo para la acción colectiva que la comunidad, a través de los agentes sociales, puede adoptar. Los aspectos colectivos del capital social pueden verse acentuados por este acercamiento entre lo individual y lo colectivo. En definitiva, el capital social no es un aspecto propio únicamente de las comunidades o los individuos, sino una parte de las relaciones sociales que no hacen sino fortalecer tanto a unos como a otros. El capital social es “una metáfora para representar la calidad de algunas relaciones sociales que permiten asegurar otras ventajas a través de dichas relaciones” (Lee *et al.*, 2005:271). Este acercamiento al capital social señala la importancia de, por una parte, las relaciones y las redes sociales en las que se basan las relaciones productivas, y, por otra parte, la exploración de la metáfora, que sugiere un modo narrativo para la investigación que pone su atención en el proceso complejo, más allá de buscar una simple causa-efecto.

Basándose en los análisis de Cohen sobre comunidades simbólicas, el proyecto de investigación que da origen al presente artículo trata de encontrar y explicar las diferentes posibilidades que encierra el concepto de capital social en los variados entornos rurales europeos, siempre desde la doble perspectiva: individuo y comunidad.

Como se ha señalado, el artículo presenta el caso de la isla de Skye, en Escocia, una comunidad rural basada en la presencia de pequeños agricultores que se dedican a la agricultura y la ganadería y que tiene sus orígenes en el siglo XIX: el “crofting”. Los “crofts” son parcelas alargadas de terreno de tipo familiar, bien en propiedad o bien en sistema de arrendamiento. Esta actividad ha dependido siempre de una cooperación estrecha entre los agricultores-ganaderos. En la actualidad, este tipo de actividad se encuentra en crisis, dadas sus escasas posibilidades de competencia, lo que hace que también las relaciones sociales basadas en ella se encuentren amenazadas. Sin embargo, esas mismas relaciones y redes sociales ahora en peligro podrían ser utilizadas para el desarrollo de la comunidad rural. Las nuevas oportunidades de trabajo parecen, según los autores, provenir de la puesta en marcha de actividades de manera comunitaria y ya no sólo basadas en la agricultura, sino mayoritariamente en los servicios. Las relaciones entre la actividad comunal y la individual se presentan como la clave para la competitividad del territorio rural. La actividad agrícola y ganadera es la que da identidad tanto al individuo como al grupo, pues el primero participa de la herencia comunal y el segundo de la acción individual. La actividad, las relaciones sociales, el marco jurídico, las ideas y la identidad forman parte del lugar. Hay, por lo tanto, una variada relación de aspectos a tener en cuenta que van más allá de la simple dicotomía entre individuo y comunidad.

En la legislación actual, “crofting” se define como una actividad agrícola, sin embargo, el Parlamento escocés ha ampliado la definición introduciendo todo tipo de actividad económicamente productiva. Tras el trabajo de campo basado en una serie de entrevistas en profundidad a un número de personas diversas pero ligadas a esta actividad, se puede afirmar que la identidad de estos agricultores, e incluso de los que ya no se dedican al sector primario como actividad principal, sigue muy ligada a la tierra, lo que, según los autores, explica algunas tensiones existentes entre los discursos institucionales (que consideran el “crofting” como cualquier actividad productiva) y el imaginario local de esta actividad (muy ligada a una agricultura concreta y al pastoreo).

Dado que, como individuos, los agricultores son intrínsecamente sociales y participan en la vida comunal que está compuesta de la suma de las acciones individuales, el capital social en este entorno rural es el elemento clave que posibilita su proyección de futuro. Las redes sociales se configuran y consolidan a lo largo del tiempo. La relación del individuo con la red es diferente según su interés particular y también según la fortaleza de la red. La agricultura y la ganadería de esta zona rural implica una variedad de actividades, desde el trabajo solitario en la colina, a la acción en comités relacionados con la actividad y otro tipo de asociaciones culturales y sociales. El análisis de las redes ligadas a asociaciones de diverso tipo en la zona ha mostrado una elevada complejidad que va más allá de la agricultura y la ganadería para imbricarse en otros temas más novedosos, como turismo, alimentos de calidad, pesca costera, etc., pero siempre basadas en las relaciones apoyadas en la actividad más tradicional: el "crofting".

La forma particular de entender las relaciones sociales por parte de los miembros de una comunidad debe ser tenida en cuenta para comprender su visión del mundo y sus relaciones con éste, así como para poner en marcha actuaciones políticas con fines de desarrollo. Un agricultor o pastor, aparentemente solitario, resulta tener unas sólidas redes de relaciones con los otros miembros de la comunidad, con la tierra, con el mercado e, incluso, con el Estado. Sin negar la utilidad que tienen los análisis basados en entrevistas, tal como el que se presenta en este artículo, los autores señalan el interés de realizar estudios de las prácticas particulares de las personas, con un acercamiento analítico sobre las experiencias de vida en una sociedad rural. Con este tipo de análisis, es posible entender de una manera más detallada los mecanismos de funcionamiento del capital social y es posible encontrar mecanismos para que las políticas públicas puedan actuar en eficacia en el seno de las comunidades rurales particulares.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Desarrollo, capital social, comunidad, pequeños agricultores, Escocia.

#### INTRODUCTION

With all the current interest in social capital and its role in development, we would like to address the question of how best to attribute agency to persons and to communities within studies of rural development. This arises from research into the role of social capital in marginal areas in Europe that we have carried out over recent years (SHUCKSMITH, 2000, LEE *et al.* 2005). A key issue in this area is the question whether it is better to conceive of the 'individual' or the 'community' as holding social capital. We begin this article by outlining the implications of answering the question in various different ways, and in doing so present some of the conclusions from our recent European Commission 5th Framework Programme research project on the role of social capital in rural development. But a reconsideration of the terms of the question – what we actually mean by 'individuals' and 'communities' – may allow more nuanced reflections on the quality of social life in the places we have worked. To this end, we return to our case study in the Skye and Lochalsh region in the west of Scotland. Insights from anthropology (STRATHERN, 1988, CARRIER, 1999) encourage the search for alternatives to a strict dichotomy of individual and community.

We first need to be clear about how we conceptualise development itself. We use the term in a broad sense to refer to processes of social change and continuity, encompassing both planned social change, through 'development projects' for example, and the everyday ways of life that people attempt to continue and improve by their own efforts. Our European Commission research, which ran from 2001 to 2004, was concerned to track the means by which these often rather different processes were playing out in particular case study contexts (ÁRNASON, *et al.*, 2004; LEE, *et al.*, 2005). We

often returned to the themes of continuity and change, looking at, for example, the ways that development projects were often relatively short-term affairs and sometimes contrasted with other efforts simply to continue valued ways of life. The constant search for newness and innovation in rural development projects – where finance is available for business expansion but not maintenance, for example – marks out a distinctive discourse of development not unrelated to modernist ideals of progress. It links to Kovách and KucEROVA's recent comments on 'projectification' (KOVÁCH AND KUCEROVA, 2006). These authors suggest that rural development elites are increasingly pursuing development agendas that reflect their own intellectual and economic interests, partly as a result of decentralisation of budgets to rural and regional levels. We disagree with the idea that it is decentralisation that is the problem, since in many of our case study sites, particularly Scotland, we have seen a loss of autonomy over budgets and thus economic development decisions within localities, suggesting that the entrepreneurial ethos is in fact perpetuated at larger scales. Yet, their distinction in possible outcomes between the 'instrumental' use of funds for limited interests and 'revitalisation' of civil society certainly chimes with our research in rural western Europe (ibid.: 5). It also indicates that the space created by EU regional funding mirrors those created by the 'Third Way' approach adopted by other liberalised democracies (e.g. KENDALL, 2000; MACKENZIE, 2004) where policy spaces are created in which 'policy entrepreneurs' can operate. In this paper we maintain a broad interest in our case study area, opening the relationship between formal development projects and ongoing social life to critical evaluation.

#### COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL

The question of individual and community roles in social capital has been important in studies of both formal development projects and of local social life more generally. Shucksmith raised the issue in 2000, as part of an evaluation of LEADER in the west of Scotland. In these and similar attempts at endogenous development, easy assumptions are often made about 'the community', and unequal power relations within the group and differential participation in development processes are often ignored (SHUCKSMITH, 2000: 209-210). Community development runs the risk of reifying traditional notions of rural society as homogenous and bounded, despite prolonged social science attention towards rural class structure and other internal differentials (e.g. NEWBY, 1979, MILBOURNE, 1997). 'Community' is often equated with 'territory', with the result that these questions of internal social differentiation may not be asked. If regional territorial identity is becoming more significant in European rural development (RAY, 1999), there is the possibility that symbols of collective identity paper over more specific issues and hide inequalities in power, wealth and access. As Shucksmith put it, from the point of view of people within these communities, 'their (individual) capacity to act will be diminished by such approaches to (collective) capacity building, and it is unclear *prima facie* whether this will increase or decrease inequalities in society' (SHUCKSMITH, 2000: 10). This is a critique of the concept of community from the point of view of the individual, whereby attempts to build the capacity of the collective in determining the course of development can end up excluding or disempowering certain individuals from it.

The idea of community therefore appears as a symbol that is available for manipulation and use through discourse and action. Cohen (1985; 1987) explores the 'symbolic boundaries' of community in detail, showing how common distinctions between 'us' and 'others' are maintained through small acts of speech, narrative and everyday action. Having long since lost its status as an inviolable empirical fact (BELL AND NEWBY, 1971), community-as-symbol alerts us to the production of the commonalities of a social group and territory on the one hand, and the production of difference to others on the other. In academic terms, if not always in lay discourse, 'community' has long since lost any veneer of neutrality. In recognising 'community' in this way we destabilise it and call into question those regional development initiatives that place it at the centre of rural policy. It is important to scrutinise the political processes through which 'communities' are constituted and social capital attributed to them, as well as the contexts within which notions of community and of individuals belonging to a collective are formed. It is through these kinds of scrutiny that we can most usefully examine social capital.

It is notable, however, that the idea of the individual is rarely subjected to similar critical scrutiny. If we need to be careful about how we use the term community, because of its symbolic construction, what should we make of the 'individuals' to whom it is often opposed? On principle it seems unrealistic to identify one half of a dichotomy as being constructed and thus problematic, while accepting the other as natural<sup>1</sup>. We would instead expect either to agree with the validity of both terms and simply work with them, or to look for the ways in which each side of dichotomy brings the other into being, and to examine effects of such usage in its totality. In this case we seem to have unpacked one side of the dichotomy without paying much attention to the other. In practice this means we have focused on the problem of community without making similar efforts to uncover the symbols or other insinuations that result from analytically constructing people as 'individuals'.

Individuals are the unit and subject of much social science research, and we see as much when we ask 'how many interviews' or 'how many survey responses' we have collected for a research project. All too often, we as researchers then build up the 'social' dimension by collating responses of individuals: reading off the collective attitude or activity from the aggregated units. The dichotomy of individual and society (or community) then emerges through this process of building up from the former to the latter. On the other hand, critiques of the notion of community often carry out the same process in reverse, pointing out the inadequacies of referring to the collective when individuals are overlooked as a result. The question of how to attribute social capital to communities or individuals faces this problem. While there are many subtle analytical critiques of community (such as Cohen's), there is a need to apply the same rigour to concepts of the individual. The central contention of this chapter is that discussions of social capital could be enlivened by understanding how the actions of people, including those amongst whom we carry out research, are *inherently* social and performed, being continually placed within networks of social relations. Our goal then is not to switch between the analysis of a separated, rationally-minded individual and a super-organic or aggregated collective but to investigate the ways in which attitudes and actions are meaningful in themselves, and act out the sociality which is often sought at the level of the community. We draw on

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<sup>1</sup> To be fair, Bourdieu's concepts of social capital and symbolic violence, used by Shucksmith (2000) to critique the concept of community, must be understood as part of his broader theory of practice in which individuals are viewed as internalising the social field through their habitus. Bourdieu is highly critical of rational action theory.

anthropological and feminist research that questions the universality of the concept of the individual (STRATHERN, 1988; KONRAD, 1998; CARRIER, 1999; BUTLER, 1997; MAHONEY AND YNGVESSON, 1992; NIGHTINGALE, 2006), and we will return to this later.

#### RESEARCHING SOCIAL CAPITAL IN A MULTIDISCIPLINARY AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Our European Commission research project ('RESTRIM') (LEE, *et al.*, 2005) encompassed diverging ideas about social capital that often hinged on the issues of individual and community analysis outlined here. One way of distinguishing between concepts of social capital is to contrast an approach inspired by Emile Durkheim, focusing on the social solidarity that produces the 'glue' to bind members of a society (e.g. PUTNAM, 1993), with a Weberian approach that examines the divisions within society, and particularly the mechanisms by which individuals are able to accumulate various sorts of capital (e.g. BOURDIEU, 1984). In the latter, social capital relates to the possibilities that individuals have for establishing or cementing themselves within social networks, in order to attain personal 'advancement' or maintain social distinction. The former, by contrast, emphasises the collective means of improvement that can be undertaken by groups that are able to operate successfully together. As a large and multi-disciplinary team of social scientists, it was inevitable that people within our group would conceptualise social capital in different ways. While these did not necessarily correlate exactly to the two simplified models, the models were useful in understanding where our various interests came from. What also became clear was that different models of social capital would be most relevant in analytical terms in different empirical circumstances. The issue for the project thus became the extent to which we should maintain coherence in our overall approach to social capital, and it is to this that we now turn.

The discussions of the RESTRIM research teams followed a similar diversity of approaches to social capital. We refrained from imposing a single, all-encompassing definition of social capital, partly so that the teams could follow their own theoretical interests, but also, and perhaps more significantly, so that the differences between the research areas and themes could be explored in a more sensitive way. For example, Cecchi wrote for our project that 'social capital is the result of the use of resources – that might have been used in a different way – whose benefits can influence the performance of the community for a long period of time' (CECCHI, 2004). This frames his subsequent interest in the relationship between the provision of public services and local social structures. Social capital is understood as a phenomenon that can be invested in, as public services can provide a model for collective action that can be adopted by local actors. The collective aspects to social capital are emphasised by this approach. Similarly, Lehto and Oksa grounded their project chapter in an idea of social capital as the ability to collectively exploit a set of resources, which in themselves can include group working (Lehto and Oksa, 2004). In the same way that Cecchi discussed how social capital is formed through the provision of services and yet is also required in the negotiation of those services, Lehto and Oksa argued that local resources are transformed through the presence of positive social relations: social capital is both a resource and a way of using other resources.

These collectivist approaches to social capital reflect a concern with the cohesiveness and 'functioning' of society in a Durkheimian sense. Lehto and Oksa (2004), however, also drew their conclusions on social capital from a detailed discussion of networking in our

case study areas. For us, the extension of the concept of social capital into studies of networks was a significant step. Networks can be seen to emerge in relation to particular issues. The events described by Lehto and Oksa were often of a temporary nature, bringing together people in various formations, who often had differing interests in the event. Other parts of our research also used networks as a key theoretical idea, describing social networks involving the environment (LEE, *et al.*, 2004) and identity (MEISTAD, 2004; HANNON AND CURTIS, 2004). These 'network' accounts resulted in renditions of social capital as being highly tensioned, where local development trajectories may form and split, or diverge and converge with other local, national or international paths. The ability to turn a network towards a particular point of view or goal is of interest here. In doing so, the researchers use a model of 'society' that is some distance from a clearly bounded and homogenous entity. Instead, their focus on social relations bears more in common with studies of agency that come from the work of Max Weber, and Bourdieu's notion of social capital as incorporating the ability to exert influence over others is also relevant here. Importantly, most of these studies emphasize the performance of identity and power within specific contexts. It is these performances that link the individual and the collective.

Also in our research, Stenbacka and Mattsson (2004) maintained that qualities of relationships between groups and individuals can be important in social capital. They perhaps came closest to reconciling the two approaches to social capital outlined here, arguing that while active voluntary associations can contribute as a whole to development processes, connections between actors on an individual level need to be understood in order to ascertain specific effects on different social groups. Age, gender and place-identity (in other words, perceptions of belonging to a place) are the main categories that they find can be factors in determining the relationship between voluntary activities and engagement in the labour market. Their typology of outcomes from this relationship at the end of their report shows an unwillingness to prescribe a single way of understanding social capital. Here again, social capital emerges more as a practice or process than a pre-existing quality.

Applied to the level of our research in its entirety, this perspective goes some way to overcoming some common difficulties with the concept of social capital. The under-theorised nature of social capital means that it is hard to know exactly what is being referred to. By gathering qualitative data on, broadly speaking, associational practices within the case study areas, we produced a set of specific accounts that are grounded within wider social science theory. That the accounts differ in their particular rendition of social capital reflects in equal measure the empirical diversity of the case study material and the theoretical interests of the researchers, both personally and as a group. The choice of themes in the project came about through the relating of the empirical to the theoretical concepts – a flexible process that did not happen once and for all, but was ongoing through the life of the project. This is why we characterise our approaches to social capital as stories: narrative explorations of process and performance, rather than cause-and-effect explanations of difference.

We argued, in summary, that social capital should not be seen as belonging to either communities or individuals but is an aspect of social relationships through which both communities and individuals can be constituted. The notion of social capital, we argued, is best understood as 'a metaphor for the qualities of some social relationships that allow other benefits to be secured through them' (LEE, *et al.*, 2005: 271). Such qualities may include trustworthiness or confidence, or values based in kinship, co-residence, shared

work, or other shared experience. This approach to social capital (which we would hesitate to call a definition) draws attention on the one hand to the social relations and networks in which productive relations are based, and, on the other, to the exploration of metaphor, which suggests narrative modes of research and writing that emphasise process rather than simple cause-and-effect. Inspired by Cohen's analyses of symbolic communities, we seek to unpack the variety of possibilities within the concept of social capital in much the same way as we explore the variety of rural development practices in Europe. Furthermore, this framework opens the way towards a discussion of individual and community in the terms outlined in the previous section. Diversity in rural development practice requires that we try and understand the particular ways that the objects of development – communities or individuals, for example – are themselves produced through discourse and action. We would like to focus here on the notions of person and individual within development processes, the latter defined broadly as described in the introduction. This is intended not as a counter balance to previous attention towards 'community' in rural development analysis, but as a way of re-thinking the whole idea of a community-individual dichotomy.

#### CROFTING AND BEING A CROFTER ON THE ISLE OF SKYE

Our research on the Isle of Skye in the west of Scotland was based around an investigation of crofting and crofting diversification. Some introduction to crofting is needed at this stage. Crofting has been a significant occupation for Skye residents since the development of crofts in the mid-nineteenth century. Crofts are small strips of land rented or owned by a family unit. Crofts were initially designed to extract money from tenants to cash-poor Highland estates, so a moneyed rent was levied on parcels of land that were too small to provide adequate household subsistence. In addition to maintaining sheep and cattle, crofters were therefore forced to seek out sources of waged income. This frequently involved working for their landlords in the kelp industry or in fishing stations and, after these industries collapsed, through seasonal migration to southern Scotland (HUNTER, 1976). As a result, multiple economic activities have always been a key part of crofting household production.

In 1886, crofters in the seven 'Crofting Counties' of north and west Scotland won permanent and inheritable land tenure rights and guaranteed access to common grazing land, putting in place the system of land tenure that continues to dominate Skye today. A significant change occurred in 1976 when crofters were given the right to buy their crofts, and around one-third of crofts in Scotland are now owner-occupied, mainly in Shetland (interview, Crofters Commission, 2002). Since 1945, rural depopulation and active encouragement by the Crofters Commission (the statutory regulatory body) saw many crofts, particularly in more productive areas, amalgamated. However the character of remote rural and island townships remains one of scattered small individual holdings and seasonal communal grazing (known as common grazings). Today, crofting continues to be a diversified economic strategy with agricultural earnings and subsidies supplemented by a wide variety of other jobs.

According to local respondents crofting has always depended on successful cooperation amongst crofters. Indeed, crofting has locally come to stand as a symbol of 'working together'. With the economic viability of crofting agriculture under threat, it is feared that



the possibilities and strengths of communal activity may be lost. On the other hand, it is possible to suggest that crofting diversification and crofter networks could be mobilised for community development. New opportunities for crofters to work in communal economic diversification schemes may help to maintain areas where crofting is important, thus promoting rural development in the inclusive sense outlined earlier. But the relationships between what we might describe as communal and individual activity are significant in crofting agriculture in a number of different ways. We can initially distinguish firstly the practical work of managing livestock and land, secondly the bureaucratic and committee work associated with crofting, and thirdly the ways that crofting is thought about, spoken about, and represented in discourse as a way of life. In all of these, if we look closely, there is transfer between personal and group activity to the extent that it is unclear where one ends and the other begins. Most importantly, it is the practices of crofting that give it definition and help to demarcate the boundaries of crofting.

Working with livestock, most usually sheep, is largely undertaken alone, although there are tasks which involve crofters coming together periodically. Traditionally, in summer sheep would be gathered at the 'fank', an enclosure in the common grazings, where they would be sheared and generally looked over, and new lambs would be apportioned to their owners. This is still an occasion noted for its sociability, although now those who take part in the gathering of sheep over three or four days are likely to be foregoing work from full-time employment off the croft. Otherwise crofters tend to look after their own animals, and some regret what they see as a reduction in communal activity in crofting. In contrast to when some of the current older generation were growing up, there is very little crop production, such as barley or oats, and local hay and silage production is also rare. With them go any communal harvesting activities. Winter feed is instead bought in from the mainland of Scotland. It is generally recognised that all apart from those involved in crofting agriculture on the largest scale (perhaps having access to more than one croft and keeping upwards of a few hundred sheep) will not be making a significant contribution to their household income, due to the very low prices they are able to obtain for their animals. A number of authors (eg. SMITH, 1992) have argued that crofting tends to be practised now for social and symbolic, rather than financial, reasons.

In one sense, then, the story is of a marginalisation of crofting agriculture, livestock, and production from the land. Those who continue to take part in crofting, both young and old, often describe crofting as a 'hobby' because they recognise that it is not economically viable in its own right. Yet in doing so, they by no means downplay the importance that the practical aspects of crofting continue to have. On one level this is a case of the enjoyment and well-being that it brings, and a flavour of this was conveyed by one informant, who kept 300 sheep, in conversation with us:

- There's too much administration, complications in it, which are complicated and as I say when the financial reward isn't there, you've got to enjoy doing it. You've got to enjoy the lifestyle of doing it. So I enjoy it because where we are here, to me there's nothing better than spending a day walking out in the hills with your sheep dogs.
- Walking out on the hills without the sheep dogs, or at least without the sheep, it wouldn't be the same?
- It wouldn't be the same, no. OK you would maybe get a little bit of enjoyment but it certainly wouldn't be the same. When I go out on the hill, obviously with binoculars and you're looking to see how the sheep are, and you're going to see some sheep that you

haven't maybe seen coming in at the last gatherings or whatever, so you've got a lot of interest when you are out there.

Here the relationship with the animals is key. The crofter is by no means alone in the hills, being in a close communicative relationship with the dogs and paying similarly close attention to the sheep. Such person-animal relations cast a different light on the idea of the crofter working without others; rather, the crofter is busy dealing with others who, we could suggest, are no less social for not being human. In addition, the day spent walking in the hills has a work purpose, despite the relative lack of economic return from crofting overall. It is a day in the company of animals and the surroundings of a work environment where there are practical things to do which are carried out with the skills of walking and looking. There is an implied distinction here with leisure uses of the hills, emphasizing the strong work ethic of crofting. The activities of crofting therefore persist beyond changes in its structure and context. It is certainly 'in decline' in many senses, as described by Macdonald in her study of Gaelic and crofting culture on Skye (MACDONALD, 1997), but it is still also carried on by the simple practices of walking, being with the dogs, and looking after the sheep, and in the domestic routines that accompany them. These may include growing vegetables either for the home, the market, or simply to share with neighbours – a practice which some locate in longstanding communal relations.

The speaker here also emphasises the 'administrative complications' of crofting, the bureaucracies which are shared with farming elsewhere in the European Union, and this is the second facet of individual and community relations we would like to explore. While crofters are eligible for the livestock and land subsidies that are also available to farmers, they also have their own set of administrative procedures related to crofting itself – day to day management of the common grazings, land tenure issues, and representation of the 'crofting community' to various other organisations, for example. This set of crofting social relations tends to be all-encompassing and can be seen as overwhelming by those involved in it. The administrative form-filling can even be threatening, as one crofter suggested:

Crofting is such a small activity, for somebody to have four or five cows and 20 or 30 sheep and to have the paperwork that goes flying about backwards and forwards. What happens is this bureaucracy is being policed more and more and people feel quite threatened because there is the threat that if everything is not hunky-dory you are open to huge fines.

Such social relations are distanced, in the sense that Anthony Giddens has described, as the crofter is dealing with entities far from the realm of direct social experience (GIDDENS, 1991). This is the case even where employees of the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD), or other organisations live and work locally, as they often do. Crofters can be curiously individualised by these administrative relations, replying to a large organisation as a single person and without reference to others. This mode of communication resonates with the assertions of a loss of communal activity and indeed community spirit that we will return to shortly. But these relations can also be subverted to some extent by the crofters, as they bring in other family members to help with the form filling or as they discuss their problems with those in

a similar position, thus mobilising close relationships to help deal with distant ones. In many senses, then the practices of crofting that brought the community together and gave it meaning are shifting as collective harvesting makes way for collaborative, if unwelcome, form filling.

A long history of external advocacy also exists, with Highland migrants and extended family networks forming Highland Societies in British cities and campaigning on behalf of crofters in the late nineteenth century. The formation of the Scottish Crofters Union in the mid 1970s was an attempt to bring an organisation into being that would by contrast act as an internal advocate for crofting, though it owes its political and intellectual force to the urban-based Land Leagues campaigning groups of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (MACPHAIL, 1989). While the initial aim of the Scottish Crofters Union was to give collective voice to the concerns of crofters, infighting and dwindling grassroots support eroded its power base and has led to a recent rebranding as the Scottish Crofters Foundation.

The other aspect of administrative or bureaucratic social relations that involve crofters are the committees that function to organise many aspects of local crofting and crofting estate management. Grazings Committees meet approximately monthly to discuss affairs relating to the common grazings, the shared land of the estate that crofters keep their livestock on. They might include the timing of the sheep gathering, fencing and land management, and relations with other organisations such as the Crofter Commission, the Scottish Crofters Foundation, the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD), the local council, and of course the landowner. Such committees are perhaps the clearest example of where communal activity does take place in crofting, with regular meetings and discussion of issues of common concern. They are undoubtedly a significant part of the local political scene, and provide a means of forming views on various matters as well as gathering and disseminating information.

However, it is also clear that there are issues about participation in these committees, and about how decisions are actually made by those on them. Inevitably the Grazings Committees and the Scottish Crofters Foundation (formerly the Scottish Crofters Union) only contain the crofters<sup>2</sup>, with the concomitant that other sections of the local population are not included. They are almost always men despite the key role that women have played in managing livestock and grazings particularly as men have sought and obtained paid employment. Some informants did raise this as an issue of concern in local political life, while recognising that there are many opportunities to 'get involved' in, for example, Community Councils (sub-municipal residents' committees) or various development initiatives. But to some extent, the situation can emerge where Grazings Committees are dominated by 'local' (and male) people, and other groupings are more influenced by 'incomer' (in-migrant) residents, who are sometimes represented as not understanding the local way of life. This, of course, raises questions about who constitutes 'the community' in different contexts.

The centring of 'community' within the Scottish Executive's rural policy initiatives is apparent particularly in recent 'community right to buy' legislation, which allows 'communities' to register an interest and have first refusal if an estate comes onto the market (Scottish Executive, 2003). The provisions of this Act require that an interested group rep-

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<sup>2</sup> Non-crofters can join the SCF as associate members.

resents all facets of the 'community'. Thus it has appeared to us that many crofting townships are unwilling to exercise their right to buy their common grazing as it would allow non-crofters a say on crofting matters. This example again highlights the importance of *practice* to crofting as an identity. While crofting may be changing, there is a sense that the sharing of common grazings activities as well as the shared burdens of paperwork and multiple economic activities distinguish crofters from other members of the community. A crofting identity cannot be claimed outside the realm of performance of crofting practices.

The actual way decisions are made in these parts of crofting life is also interesting. It was suggested by some informants that the activities after the official session of the Grazings Committee are very important, where crofters, and particularly those who are understood to be at the centre of crofting life, speak to each other informally and form a consensus in a different kind of way – perhaps later at night in a more sociable context. Again from one perspective we could identify issues of exclusion here, but of course we have to recognise the significance of the social bonds between crofters and crofting families that often go back many generations. We had a small insight into this mode of operation during a series of feedback meetings that we held in the villages on Skye where we carried out this research. The meetings themselves were for the most part relatively quiet affairs, but, being aware of the possibilities for after the meeting, we provided 'refreshments' for the attendees and were able to continue a whole series of interesting discussions after the formal proceedings. Here we have the question of 'when' the community can be said to exist: whether it is during the official session of a meeting, perhaps with representatives from all the appropriate sectors, or later, in the informal gathering of long-standing friends, co-residents and family members. The error might be in trying to pinpoint a single notion of community, outside of the sets of social interactions that people move through in different circumstances during the course of their lives. Furthermore, while these contexts are extremely important to the working of 'a' community, there are other people who due to other obligations or personality clashes are excluded from these informal mechanisms of decision making. Perhaps the most egregious example is the almost complete lack of women at these gatherings, as much due to the need to return home to household obligations as to the traditional male dominance of the grazings committees. The question arises of whether there are other 'communities' in which women are able to play a fuller part.

Perhaps the most obvious sphere in which notions of the individual and community are made unclear, however, is that of how crofters – people involved in crofting – understand themselves and their relationships to their fellow crofters and the land in which they work. Claims to a collective heritage are fairly common and relatively straightforward. Our questions of how one particular person got into crofting usually were answered by reference to a family history of fathers or parents, grandfathers, or relations by marriage. From there discussion often progressed to changes in crofting over the years, but the sense is one of continuing the activities of people who have worked on the land previously, and who continue to do so in the surroundings as fellow crofters. Yet there can be an ambiguity in references to the single person and the collective. To take another example, one crofter talked about the history of landownership in his estate, referring to the sequence of owners that have come and gone over the years. He then went on:

And I think myself, as, you know, a crofter in a crofting community, and I don't think, nobody was ever that really bothered about who actually owned the land. As far as I am concerned it doesn't really matter whose name is on the estate. As far as I am concerned all this land about me here is ours, I was going to say "it's mine", I mean, that's how I look at it.

Note the way the speaker here contextualises himself within references to a collectivity: 'myself... in a community', 'I don't think, nobody', and 'this land about me here is ours, I was going to say "it's mine"'. We could interpret this as the power and ability of this individual to speak on behalf of the community, and we need to be aware of power claims here. But to us it also suggests a decentring of the individual, not so much an attempt to be 'the voice' of the collective as a recognition that the person constantly acts and thinks in relation to others, and that no clear separation between them can necessarily be drawn. If anything, there is a contrast being made between the linear succession of individual landlords, who do not closely relate to the land and people, and the crofters who are far more grounded in these social and environmental relations, and who, by their activities, carry on crofting as at the same time a personal and collective tradition.

A further aspect of this is the ways that the people we have been describing as 'crofters' often describe themselves. The example given above is one of the very few cases we have of someone saying 'I am a crofter', or words to that effect. The singular and personal usage is very rare. Far more common are variations on the constructions: 'I am involved in crofting', 'My father did crofting all his life' or '[they are] still working the croft'. 'Crofters', in the plural, is used fairly often: 'we are crofters', or 'she knew that Alistair's people were 100% crofters' are examples, or even in the third person singular: 'he was more of a crofter than I was.' There is, it seems, a reluctance to directly use the first person singular for 'crofter', to describe oneself as a crofter. Again, one way to interpret this might be to accept the 'decline of crofting' idea, in which the real crofters from previous generations are no longer around, and so to assert oneself as a crofter would be to deny the changes that have taken place over the decades. At one stage we asked an informant directly: 'Do you see yourself as a crofter?' The long and involved answer began 'Crofting really now... crofting 100 years ago and crofting now, there is just no resemblance'. Present-day crofters may be reluctant to place too strong a claim on their identities as crofters because they are acutely aware that in many circumstances they no longer participate in key practices considered central to a crofting community.

But another possibility is to think more about the notion of the person being conveyed in these ways of talking. It is primarily an idea of *crofting* rather than of *a crofter*. Emphasis is on the activity rather than the identity, and so personhood is derived from what is done ('doing crofting') rather than simply whatever one's self-ascribed status might be ('a crofter'). If status is conveyed through activities, there is no need to proclaim oneself as a crofter, and indeed, to do so might be to underplay the importance of the activities themselves. But if such activities are displayed publicly, perhaps embodied in livestock and the land itself, and even carried out communally, it will be quite clear who in your surroundings is or was a crofter, and therefore can be described as such. This is different from proclaiming that your own activities constitute crofting, especially in a context where unduly putting yourself forward – 'putting your head above the parapet', we were told – is not the usual manner of doing things.

## THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL CROFTER

If we accept this reasoning, there are more implications for what we might have thought of as the 'individual' crofter. At this stage we can learn from work in anthropology on the history of the concept of the individual in Western thought, and what some alternatives to that concept might be. Carrier (1999) draws on a famous essay by Marcel Mauss (1985) to question the universality of the individual in the sense of an entirely autonomous and unconstrained person. Such a person, Carrier suggests, was partly the product of Scottish Enlightenment thought (including that of Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and David Hume) in regard to the emergence of new political and economic relationships which emphasised the security brought by the capitalist market and the state over that of enduring social relationships of kin, residence or patronage (CARRIER, 1999: 35). He also recounts ethnographic work by Marilyn Strathern who, by contrast, shows that for her subjects in Papua New Guinea, the starting point for personhood is the sociality, or the quality of being social, that is within the person as well as the collective (STRATHERN, 1988: 13). The self is thus understood socially and contextually. A person is very much 'dividual' rather than an individual, because he or she appears as being within various sets of, for example, kinship relations and other obligations that produce certain affects in specific others. Carrier transposes these ideas back to the West to suggest that it is in fact the idea of the individual – one set outside these everyday social relations, and functioning instead merely according to the market and the state – that is historically divergent from the norm. His analysis then investigates the history of friendship as a 'natural sympathy', as Adam Smith put it (CARRIER, 1999: 28), in contrast to the social ties and obligations that we all have.

Along these lines, feminist work has similarly questioned the rational, autonomous individual and instead shifted the focus to the performances that create subjectivities (BUTLER, 1990; 1997). Subjects are always formed in the context of society and power and it is only through the repetition of identity that subjects such as 'crofter' become socially recognised. Here subjectivity refers to the production of subject positions – the repertoire of possibilities into which people are recruited, temporarily and often unwittingly. These subject positions are not stable and are (re)produced in the contexts within which identity claims are made and performed. Thus subjectivity tends to become stabilised through complex combinations of psycho-social and socio-spatial processes (BUTLER, 1997; MAHONEY AND YNGVESSON, 1992; MASSEY, 1994; NIGHTINGALE, 2006; KONRAD, 1998). Gender is an excellent example. Defining the subject position of 'woman' is very difficult, but those defined (at birth) as biological females are swiftly recruited into subject positions that are constituted around notions of 'woman' (BUTLER, 1990). It follows that autonomous individuality is only one of a number of possible forms of personhood that a subject may adopt, or indeed be co-opted into.

Of course, sociological theory also tends to portray the individual as inherently social, and embodying the social world, and Bourdieu's concepts of social, symbolic and cultural capital with which we began this discussion must be understood as part of his broader theory of practice and his use of the concepts of habitus and social field, with which he explores the dialectical relationships between structure and agency. For Bourdieu, the social world is embodied within the individual's habitus, the product of cumulative socialisation and interaction with the field, which disposes them to act in certain ways and to think in certain ways. The crofters' practical land-based activities, their

social and communal relations, even their ideas of self and identity are viewed then both as the field and as elements of the habitus within each actor. This is far from the idea of the individual as an entirely autonomous and unconstrained person.

There is, no doubt, a particular history of crofting and older clan-based rural social relations within the Scottish Enlightenment concept of the individual that Mauss originally wrote about and Strathern, Carrier and other feminist writers have returned to since. Such an account is beyond our scope here. But we are most certainly not writing about crofting as any kind of 'pre-modern' personhood or social category. As Carrier suggests, the notion of Western individuality is at the very least strictly delimited in practice within certain historical, class, gender and other boundaries, or as feminist writers would express it, performed within power laden contexts. In other times and other places we are surely all involved in different kinds of sociality to the autonomising and decontextualising facets of 'the individual'. Crofters and crofting here function merely as an archetypal example.

To summarise, it now seems reasonable to say that any one crofter contains within themselves the social and environmental relations of crofting that they are involved in and it is only by performing an identity 'crofter' that the individual continues to be recognised as such. It is insufficient to say that the individual crofter chooses to take part in a communal heritage by crofting. Rather, we need to understand how personhood in crofting, the person themselves, we might say, is inherently a locus of concerns comprised of practical activities, social and communal relations, and ideas of the self and identity. We have described each of these three aspects in this paper not to separate them but to try and bring them together within our understanding of social life, in order to overcome the dichotomy of individual and community. We could take inspiration in this endeavour from the well-known tying together of land and people in crofting areas, often expressed in the Gaelic language of the region (MACDONALD, 1997: 100-101) but not limited to it, as our informants demonstrated to us in English. Inhabiting, and indeed dwelling (INGOLD, 2000), are inherently social processes, and it makes no sense to inhabit the land individually.

Finally, the changing discursive and legislative framework of crofting also has implications for this nexus of inhabitation, crofting and identity. The degree to which one land based activity is seen as crofting, while another is not, varies between areas and townships. We witnessed discussions at the Scottish Crofters Foundation annual conference in 2005 on what activities constitute crofting, in which some delegates promoted camp sites and self-catering cottages, while others queried the inclusion of fruit and vegetable production and cited the distinction between stock based agriculture (crofting) and horticulture (gardening) (see also MACINTYRE, 2005). In legislation crofting is presently defined as agricultural activity, though the Crofting Reform Bill coming before the Scottish Parliament in 2006 will change that to include any economically productive activity. If crofting identity is tied to a particular set of land based activities (such as grazing sheep), and acts as a marker of social distinction between crofter and non-crofter, then we can imagine situations where tension between institutional discourses on crofting (as *any* economically productive activity) and local understanding of crofting (as agriculture) will occur. Given the emphasis on crofting as a set of historical and communal practices, we anticipate that such tensions will be significant.

In the earlier parts of the paper we demonstrated how in academic work the concept of community is often unpacked and its assumptions examined. To do the same with the other

side of the community-individual pairing is necessary in order to describe how social life is actually experienced, and it is to this end that we have presented our material on crofting. We now conclude by returning to the subjects of social capital and rural development.

#### CONCLUSION

If, as persons, crofters are intrinsically social and take part in communal life which is other than just the sum of individual action, what lessons might we draw for understanding social capital and rural development? We can start by returning to the idea of networks that we outlined earlier, in the suggestion that social capital is articulated through networks of social relations. Focusing on a network is a useful way of avoiding the reification of a homogenous and bounded rural society, and can thus overcome some of the problems with over-simple renditions of community in rural research (MURDOCH, 2000; LEE, *et al.*, 2005). But there may be a danger in replacing the community with a model of equally reified autonomous, rationally-motivated people – individuals – who are free to choose their associations with others. This is the idea of networking as commonly idealised in the business world, and is far from the social actors who inhabit Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. Rather, we should try and understand the means by which networks play on long-standing associations and obligations, and are infused with power relations between included and excluded. Crofting involves a variety of activities, from working on the hill, to sitting in committees, to taking part in discourses on tradition, culture and development, which all involve different kinds of associations. The point for rural development research is that it might be worth starting with these activities – starting with the empirical material, in effect – and tracing the networks of association that emerge from there, rather than being on the hunt for only those networks which appear to have a direct development benefit.

Our work on crofting diversification bears this out, as there is a wide range of networks on Skye that are based in crofting relations: Bed and Breakfast networks, horticultural and other food production groups, and in-shore fishing operations, for example (ÁRNASON, *et al.*, 2004). One step further removed are activities that explicitly or otherwise draw on the model of communal working in crofting, and here we have development networks for branding the region, and reactions to exogenous development projects, including a wind farm proposed for a common grazings in one part of the island. Here we see the value of understanding social capital in metaphorical terms, where the meaning of one activity can be transposed into that of another.

Finally, if networks are not made up of individuals but rather of fully socialised people in their own right, we might do well to pay attention to the way they themselves understand the world and their relations to it. A crofter seemingly alone in the hills is, as we have seen, grounded in a realm of relationships with animals, people, the land, and even the market and the state. Without denying the utility of surveys and large-scale interview studies, we suggest that starting with the performances and practices of the person him or herself is both a useful analytical approach and gets close to the experience of life and society that, ultimately, rural development research is concerned with. Through such an analysis we can come closer to understanding the mechanisms of social capital and how it is that policy entrepreneurs are able to tap into, or fail to find the heart of particular communities.



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