

Building a Movement: Community Development and Community Resilience in Response to Extreme Events

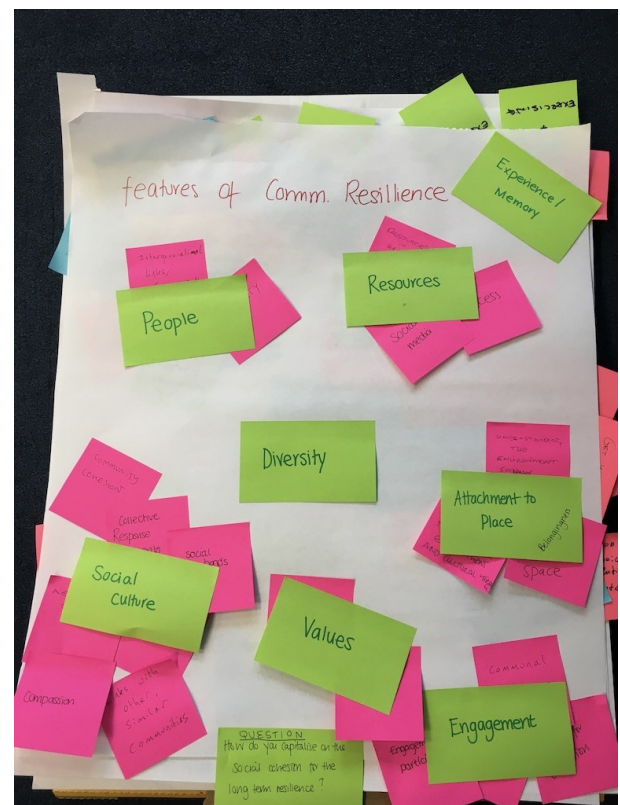
This project aimed to develop understanding of the current enactment of community resilience in Scotland through gathering multi-generational, multi-event scenario perspectives and combining these with insight from communities, the voluntary sector and statutory organisations. This was explored through collaborative discussion, knowledge sharing and key interviews. Through building a narrative of these experiences we contribute to a greater understanding of community resilience and form the foundations for sustainable, positive changes in people's lives and communities.

Background/Context

During times of uncertainty the concept of resilience offers promise in preparing individuals and communities for challenges, both expected and unexpected, while providing the foundations for developing more radical changes to improve people's lives. This project explored the readiness of communities, governments, academics and partner agencies at national and international levels to support and promote community resilience within the context of extreme events, as defined by the community members themselves.

In Scotland, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 aims to give community bodies greater ownership or control of land and buildings, and to strengthen their voices in decisions relating to public services, and has been a key policy drive from the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government's Resilient Communities Strategic Framework and Delivery Plan for 2017 – 2021 is an initiative aiming to create "communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe". Among its strategic aims are to empower communities to address any resilience issues that affect them, enabling them to take measures to "prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies, in a way that complements the work of the emergency responders". Given the challenges of climate change, Brexit, austerity etc., Scotland is experiencing and will experience hazards and risks that push communities to the limit, with resilience and the ability to adapt key elements which will determine how our society reacts and develops.

The project involved two workshops, supported by briefing papers and dissemination activities, and empirical research in the form of qualitative interviews. Workshop 1 focused on defining what is community resilience in the face of extreme events, with workshop 2 focusing on better understanding how we improve connections between academics, policy-makers and community groups interested in community resilience to extreme events. After the



At **workshop 1** ‘flooding/major weather events’ and ‘Brexit/willed or political events’ received the most backing as the core extreme events Scotland is currently facing. In terms of identifying the key elements of community resilience, participants were most engaged with discussions around ‘experience and shared memory’. Participants identified that we already have research evidence and/or local knowledge of the importance of shared identities of value and power and how people have attachments to places as ‘their’ community), with communal spaces and symbols an important feature. However, we know less about the differences between urban and rural resilience, the dynamics of establishing a shared narrative and the temporality of resilience (and the need to research this over the long-term). Best practice was deemed to involve clear future plans for communities, with the creation and celebration of shared identities. There is a need to learn from failure and to communicate this knowledge for future generations. Thinking more widely about community resilience, in the final open-floor session of the workshop, participants identified the need for longitudinal evidence and research and a recognition that there is a temporal ebb and flow to community resilience. Also, extreme events are constantly happening and while there is considerable knowledge that comes together in events like this, so many people are doing similar work and not linking/sharing and this knowledge is potentially being lost.

At **workshop 2**, it was discussed that to improve links between communities and policy we need: resources (money, time people) over the long-term; two-way communication (listening to what both communities and policy/statutory bodies need); building trust; identifying who are the relevant people and groups across the various groups involved; valuing, hearing and learning from community knowledge and past experience; and understanding the ‘why’ change is needed as well as the ‘what’ change is needed. Participants then identified that: long-term planning and support mechanisms; strategies for prevention form a range of threats; real local democracy; co-production of solutions; and credible communication strategies were all currently missing and hampering improved links between communities and policy. To tackle this, it was felt that we should have: communication strategies in the ‘community’; more funding for community groups and initiatives; strategies for balancing interest of small community groups and large corporations; recognising possible antagonistic relationship between community and authorities (e.g. police); access to support services e.g. crèches to allow volunteering; mapping of what is happening in terms of community and responsive services; local emergency planning officer/response teams to coordinate the information-sharing with communities pre-event and help with response efforts; remove the jargon; policy templates, need to regularly updated; presence of community resilience groups and emergency response teams at community events so local people know who to contact with questions/concerns; and local emergency planning officers who are in touch with local issues/concerns.

Three Key Points/Implications/Next Steps from Research

Ensure there is physical space for community groups to share their experiences, memories and knowledge. There is need for the creation, or maintenance, of sustainable community centres that can be used to hold meetings, events and provide space where the community can develop their identity.

Continue to utilise, support and promote local community knowledge. Each community has different needs, resources and experiences and we need to encourage and nurture relationships between researchers, policy makers and communities in order to identify what these are and how they can be best utilised to build resilient communities.

All community projects must have an element of co-production in them from the beginning which will include local community members, policy makers and other key individuals or organisations that are identified as important to the community.

1. Project website: <https://extremeevents.stir.ac.uk/projects/building-a-movement-community-development-and-community-resilience-in-response-to-extreme-events/>

This research was funded by the National Centre for Resilience.

You can find out more about the NCR on their website, <https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/ncr/>, or by following them on Twitter [@ResilienceScot](https://twitter.com/ResilienceScot)

If you would like to receive more information about the Centre and its activities, or if would like to get involved, please contact nationalcentreforresilience@glasgow.ac.uk