Participation and civic engagement in Scotland: the importance of contributions from older adults

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Abstract

Over a quarter of all adults in Scotland give freely of their time as volunteers and support a diverse range of organisations, activities, services and facilities. Analysis of Scottish Household Survey data elucidates patterns of volunteering among older people in Scotland and the nature of formal and informal volunteering in different rural communities is illustrated by revisiting data from completed research projects undertaken in rural Scotland. Findings highlight geographical differences in volunteering, with rates consistently higher in rural than urban Scotland. Older people, 'young old' adults in particular, are identified as a key reservoir of rural volunteers, supporting civic, recreational, cultural and heritage organisations embedded in rural communities. They also help to run services that meet the needs of diverse groups and people of all ages within the community. The decline in volunteering observed over the past decade coupled with changes associated with neoliberal and localism agendas represent a potential threat to the sustainability of many rural areas, especially those already struggling to delivery key services. Findings point to a need for a better understanding of how older volunteers support civil society in rural communities and what measures could help support rural civic action in the future.

Key Words
Volunteering, Rural, Older Adults, Scotland

1. Introduction

Thousands of citizens across Scotland regularly give freely of their time to support a very wide range of organisations, facilities and activities which provide opportunities for participants of all ages to lead inclusive and meaningful lives. Referred to variously as the *third sector* or *civil society,* the current 'catch all' term to describe organisations with a social purpose, whose remit is to help others and to improve the lives of individuals and communities, is the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector. With a remit to help others, often undertaking roles designed to improve the lives of individuals and communities, the voluntary, charitable and social enterprise sector is large and diverse. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisation recently estimated that, in Scotland today, there are about 40,000 active voluntary organisations. Their activities include, for example, social care, culture and sport, community, economic and social development, health, housing and the environment. Around 1.26 million people – more than a quarter of adults - volunteer every year in Scotland (SCVO, 2020).

An increasing number of these volunteers have been older people (Wardell et al., 2000). Through efforts often led by older citizens, existing structures, activities and facilities have been supported and new ones have emerged, helping to keep rural areas socially, economically and culturally

sustainable. Our argument in this chapter is that older people are particularly active in rural areas and many rural services depend upon this 'grey labour'. This volunteering "increases social and civil participation, empowers communities, and reduces loneliness and isolation" (Scottish Government, 2019a, p.6) but evidence suggests that it may also be under threat.

This chapter explores forms of participation and civic engagement among older people who live in rural Scotland and reflects on how these activities shape attributes of contemporary rural society. It aims to contribute to filling the knowledge gap about the nature and extent of the rural VCSE sector initially addressed by Woolvin (2012) and Woolvin and Rutherford (2013). We explicitly examine attributes of older adults in the rural VCSE sector and consider how engagement with the VCSE changes as people transition through what is known as the Third Age (55-70) and Fourth Age (70+). Recognising Hall and Skerrat's (2010, p.47) observation that "the work of the voluntary sector, in all its guises, is essential to the sustainability and resilience of rural communities" the chapter examines the contemporary volunteering landscape and considers how the presence of an active VCSE ecosystem facilitates participation in community events and activities and, in turn, provides opportunities to rural residents that give meaning to life and support individual and community wellbeing.

The text below is structured as follows. First, we introduce the VCSE ecosystem in the UK with a focus upon attributes of the Scottish sector. Next, we present an account of formal and informal volunteering and wider expressions of participation in civic society across rural Scotland. We then turn to a brief discussion of the projects and methods this chapter draws on, outlining our use of the Scottish Household Survey and three projects based across Scotland in the Western Isles, Bute and East Lothian.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Helping others and improving the lives of individuals and communities: the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) ecosystem

The development of organised volunteering in the United Kingdom was originally associated with newly formed religious and charitable organisations, such as the British Red Cross, that emerged during the nineteenth century; in the twentieth century the UK's voluntary sector became increasingly secular and formalised. The volunteer population grew in the post-war period, "influenced, encouraged and enabled" by the policies of successive Westminster administrations (European Commission, 2010, p.3). The neoliberal political agenda that emerged in the UK in the 1980s has promoted a diminished role for the state and encouraged the development of endogenous solutions to service delivery, either implicitly or explicitly. This was followed in the first decade of the twenty first century by the 'localism' agenda which has further shaped public service reform, pushing for local, often community level, decision making and responsibility for service delivery. Localism, combined with the 'co-production' of services, encouraged "a greater expectation of participation at the level of the individual, family and/or community in the shaping and delivery of public services" (Woolvin and Rutherford, 2013, p.10). These movements have seen the VCSE sector become increasingly responsible for providing goods and services that were once the preserve of the state and the private sector. Some communities have responded enthusiastically to these structural changes, developing a vibrant VCSE sector and in so doing have earned the epithet 'good citizen community' (after Woods, 2005), perpetuating narratives that rural communities should be able to help themselves. Others have struggled to mobilise, secure external funding and plug gaps left by private and public sector restructuring (Skerratt and Steiner, 2011).

Changes associated with the neoliberal and localism agendas have affected urban and rural areas alike. In rural communities they have evolved in tandem with other changes that are altering the character of rural places and the rural population. Demographic ageing has been most pronounced in rural areas, with implications for demands on health and social care services and the size and composition of local labour markets. Familial spatialities have changed: many older rural adults have no close relatives living locally who they can turn to for informal care and support. Migration dynamics, along with associated population churn, have disrupted idyllic assumptions that posit rural communities as places where everyone knows everyone else. The almost ubiquitous adoption of digital technologies has transformed all domains of life, including facilitating the creation of virtual 'communities of interest' that may have diluted involvement in, and obligations towards the maintenance of 'communities of place' (Wallace et al., 2017). Access to essential services has become more challenging across rural society as private sector premises (e.g. banks, post offices, local grocery shops, pubs) have closed and public services have become increasingly centralised (Rural England, 2017; Scottish Government, 2010).

Rural communities are assumed to express neighbourliness, community spirit and a tradition of volunteering (Wenger, 2001), an ideal environment for a thriving VCSE sector. The rural VCSE sector is certainly active; it has increasingly become responsible for delivering core services that underpin the socio-economic sustainability of many rural areas as opposed to offering activities that supplement those delivered by the public and private sectors. For example, many rural communities themselves have initiated responses to help ensure that those in need of formal and informal care and support, including older people, receive it (Munoz et al., 2014; Skinner and Hanlon, 2016). There are numerous examples of rural community groups taking over responsibility for running local shops and community assets like halls and woodlands, delivering services such as community transport and managing activities such as community-owned renewable energy projects whose income in turn funds local groups and initiatives.

2.2 Rural areas, demographic ageing and volunteering

Demographic ageing is a global phenomenon, most widespread in high income countries (Ezeh et al., 2012; Bloom et al., 2015). Rural areas are experiencing demographic ageing faster than urban ones (Hanlon and Skinner, 2016; Scharf et al., 2016; Edmondson and Scharf, 2015), through a combination of outward migration of young people, declining fertility rates, and in-migration of affluent mid-age and older people. This phenomenon leads to questions around the sustainability of rural ageing for rural communities (Keating, 2008) and furthers what Joseph and Cloutier-Fisher (2005, p. 137) have identified as the "double jeopardy of vulnerable persons in a vulnerable community". This double jeopardy stems from the widespread challenge of maintaining and delivering services in rural areas being compounded by demographic ageing increasing the numbers of older individuals placing demands upon, for example, health and social care services.

However, rather than just being dependents, older people are often sources of volunteer pools which leads to 'older voluntarism' (Colibaba and Skinner, 2019) where "individual, older volunteers' activities and voluntary organisations featuring an older volunteer base provide essential services and supports to ageing communities" (Colibaba et al., 2021, p. 287). Communities which require support to respond to the demands of an ageing population often need to draw from a pool of older individuals to provide support. Burgeoning research around, and within, rural studies has critically engaged with rural ageing and voluntarism (Skinner and Hanlon, 2016), its relation to the overall diversity of human experience in rural communities (Ryser and Halseth, 2014), responses to ageing (Warburton, 2015), community development (Winterton and Warburton, 2014; Skinner and Hanlon, 2016) and more generally sustainability of rural communities amidst such demographic change

(Colibaba and Skinner, 2019; Davies et al., 2018; Jones and Heley, 2016; Gieling and Haartsen, 2017). More recent critical work has focussed on how voluntarism in rural communities does not necessarily represent a form of inclusion, and questions whether it enhances sustainability and promotes community development. It can also be a source of marginalisation for some older people, highlighting, further, the geographic complexity of rural spaces and places and demographic change associated with ageing (Scharf et al., 2016; Skinner and Winterton, 2018; Skinner et al., 2016). Research has highlighted the place of volunteering by older people and the ways in which voluntary organisations focus upon supporting older people (Skinner and Hanlon, 2016; Walsh et al., 2020; Burholt et al., 2013). Such critical views are important as they demonstrate the increasing reality of precarity experienced by many in later life (Grenier et al., 2020), as in ageing rural communities "the demographic reality of ageing rural populations means that most rural volunteers are older residents themselves, often coping with the precarity of age-related health and mobility issues combined with the burden of care and burnout associated with rural volunteering" (Colibaba et al., 2021, p. 290).

2.3 The Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector in Scotland

It is useful at this point to offer some definitions of terms that will be referred to below within the Scottish context. Volunteering is something an individual does by choice, "a choice to give time or energy, a choice undertaken of one's own free will and a choice not motivated for financial gain or for a wage or salary" (Scottish Government, 2019a, p.19). *Formal* volunteering is "the giving or time and energy through a third party, which can bring measurable benefits to the volunteer, individual beneficiaries, group and organisations, communities, environment and society at large" (Scottish Government, 2018, p.202). *Informal* volunteering is "unpaid help given as an individual directly to people who are not relatives" (Woolvin, 2012, p.2). Participation is understood as 'getting involved' by, for example, attending events, supporting local activities and supporting fundraising efforts. Each of these activities are expressions of community engagement. Patterns of volunteering within the VCSE sector vary between age groups and by gender; in contemporary Scotland, mid-life and older adults volunteer more than younger adults and women are more likely to volunteer than men (*c.f.* Woolvin and Rutherford, 2014; Philip et al., 2003). There are also geographical variations, with a tradition of volunteering being especially strong in rural areas (NCVO, 2019). Philip et al. (2003) reported that about 30% of those aged 65-74 years in rural Scotland had given time for charitable and other local groups in the preceding year (based on an analysis of 1999 and 2000 data from the Scottish Household Survey), a rate almost a third higher than for the same group living in non-rural Scotland. Rural areas across the Global North have aged faster than urban areas (Philip et al., 2012; Office for National Statistics, 2018; Currie and Philip, 2019). In Scotland, with population of approximately 5.5 million, those aged 65 and over now make up 19% and this has increased by a third over the last three decades (National Records of Scotland, 2021). The median age of those living in Scotland is 42 but this ranges from 38 in large urban areas to 47 in accessible rural and 51 in remote rural Scotland (*ibid.*). Demographic attributes and historic patterns of rural volunteering suggest that there is a large pool of potential volunteer 'grey labour' available to support the VCSE ecosystem across rural Scotland.

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) is the umbrella group representing the VCSE sector. It reports that the Scottish voluntary sector encompasses about 40,000 organisations, about half of which are formally registered and regulated voluntary organisations. Their combined annual income is about £6 billion. About 1.4 million people volunteer every year, contributing to the well-being of people and communities nation-wide. Voluntary organisations are very diverse, ranging from "small local grassroots community groups, arts and sports clubs, pre-school day care and village halls to culture and arts venues, and major housing, health and social care providers" (SCVO, 2020, p.3). SCVO also report that about a quarter of Scottish charities do not have any paid staff. However,

107,432 individuals were employed in the sector in 2018, three quarters of whom were based in urban areas. The sector with the largest number of paid staff is social care (48,209, 45% of all paid positions) and, combined, the housing, culture and sport and health sectors employ another third of the total. Rural Scotland has a higher number of formally registered and regulated charitable organisations per capita than urban Scotland; 43.7% of all such voluntary organisations are found in rural Scotland yet rural Scotland is home to less than a quarter of the nation's population. The number of charities per 1000 people in 2018 was 5.2 in Scotland's predominantly rural local council areas and 3 in predominantly urban areas. Most Scottish charities, 4 in every 5, work at a local level and most have an annual income of less than £100,000 which infers that the scale of their activities is small.

Sitting alongside activities undertaken by the 'formal' VCSE sector are a myriad of informal voluntary activities, actions undertaken by individuals to help others such as informal lift giving, grocery shopping for an elderly neighbour or a group of neighbours organising a beach clean-up. Combining estimates of formal and informal volunteering reported in the 2018 Scottish Household Survey, Volunteer Scotland (2021) suggest that 48% of adults in Scotland have volunteered in the previous year, contributing 361 million hours of help and £5.5 billion to the Scottish economy. However, behind these seemingly positive attributes, the voluntary sector was facing a number of challenges by 2019. Two decades of austerity politics was managed through the reduction of funding from central to local government and this led to the starvation in resources at a local level, severely weaking the role that Local Governments could play. This particularly affected the voluntary sector, which had relied on Local Authority grants in various forms to feed their activities. Voluntary organisations started to become fearful for their future (Wallace and Beel, 2021).

3. Research Questions and Methods of Research

To explore forms of participation and civic engagement among older people living in rural Scotland three questions have been developed top guide our research. These questions have either never been addressed in the literature or have not been tackled with respect to the contemporary situation:

Research Question 1: What is the pattern of volunteering among older people in Scotland?
Research Question 2: How has the pattern of volunteering changed over recent decades?
Research Question 3: How does volunteering take place in different rural communities?

Our hope in interrogating these questions is to start to develop a better understanding of how formal and informal volunteering shape attributes of contemporary rural society.

The first two research questions are addressed using quantitative longitudinal surveys. Our quantitative research uses data from the Scottish Household Survey to review overall trends of volunteering between 2011 and 2018 and, focussing on 2018 data, examine age and urban-rural attributes of volunteering and wider civic participation. The Scottish Household Survey (SHS) is an annual, cross-sectional survey that has collected information about the composition, characteristics, attitudes and behaviour of private households and individuals from across Scotland since 1999. It is the most authoritative source of information about adult volunteering in Scotland. Produced annually since 1999, it has consistently evidenced that volunteers are most likely to be female, hail from higher socio-economic and income groups, live in less deprived areas, be healthy and non-disabled, be either in self-employment, part-time work or in education, and live in a rural

area (Scottish Government, 2019b). Here our new analysis of weighted SHS data[1]. has allowed the development of a more detailed account of older, rural adults' engagement in the VCSE ecosystem than has been presented in previous research.

The third research question draws upon qualitative research from three studies undertaken in rural Scotland to illustrate features identified in the SHS data and to provide further insights into the ways in which older rural adults participate in, and engage with, their communities. Two of the projects were explicitly concerned with topics aligned with processes and outcomes of rural demographic ageing: Philip and colleagues' ESRC funded Retirement Transition Migration research (See: Philip et al., 2013; Philip and MacLeod, 2018) and Maclaren's doctoral ethnographic research (See: Maclaren, 2018, 2019). The third study, undertaken by Wallace and Beel studied volunteering and cultural heritage in the Outer Hebrides (See: Beel et al., 2017; Wallace and Beel, 2021).

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative - Patterns of volunteering in Scotland

Most recent SHS data indicate that about a quarter (26.5%) of the adult population in Scotland provided unpaid help to groups and organisations in the last 12 months when surveyed in 2019. As shown in Figure 1, rates of volunteering in rural areas have been consistently higher than those in urban areas since 2007 but, overall, rates of volunteering seem to have declined. Scottish Government (2019a, p.26) observed that "historically, rural areas of Scotland have had significantly higher adult volunteering rates compared to urban areas". Yet while much can be said about national volunteering rates, a detailed analysis of rural volunteers and older volunteers in rural areas proves difficult. In many survey-based studies sample sizes are simply too small for such specialized subpopulations to be extracted for analysis (see Smith, 2019), and booster samples or separate, focused studies are rare. In our own analysis of weighted SHS 2018 data, there are only 523 rural volunteers of whom 208 are over the age of 55.

In this section we aim to provide an overview of the landscape of volunteering in Scotland in order to contextualize the case studies that follow. We hope that by exploring some national patterns of volunteering, identifying urban/rural as well as age group patterns, and drawing albeit limited conclusions about older rural volunteers, this overview will allow the reader to situate our detailed case studies in the context of the wider pre-Covid Scottish volunteering milieu.

Figure 1. Volunteering rates in urban and rural Scotland, SHS 2007-2019.

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[1] The Scottish Household Survey (SHS) is an annual, cross-sectional survey that provides robust evidence on the composition, characteristics, attitudes and behaviour of private households and individuals; it asks questions of a random sample of people in private residences in Scotland. The SHS 2018 data we analyse reports attributes of a sample of 9661 Scottish adult residents. Weights are applied to all data presented here.
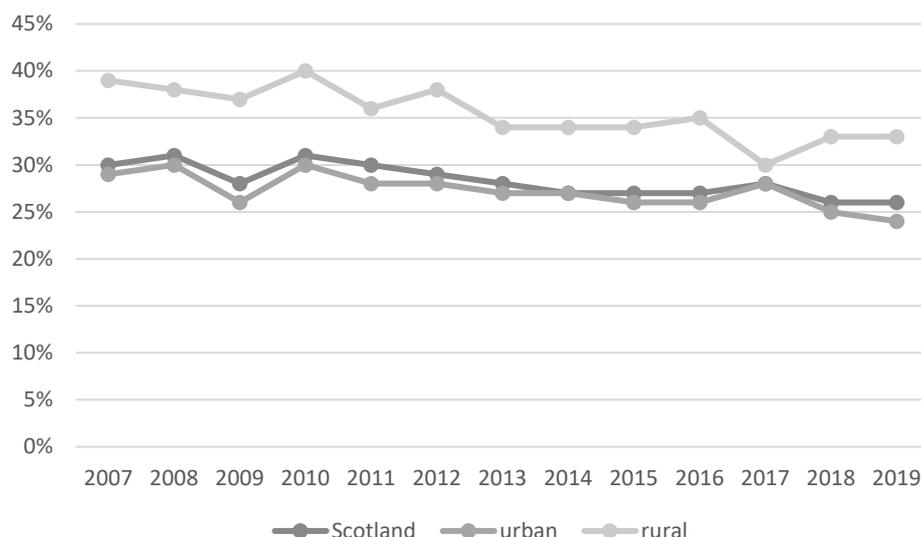
Source of data: Scottish Government (2019).

Figure 1 confirms the findings of Woolvin and Rutherford (2013) who reported higher volunteering rates in rural than urban areas, even when income and other demographic differences were controlled for. This is consistent with Scottish Government reporting on SHS volunteering data over the years and most recent findings published by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (2021).

Also from the Scottish Household Survey, we know that in 2018 adults in Scotland in the 35-44 age group were the most likely to volunteer (33%), followed by those aged 45-59 and aged 60-74 (both 28%). Those aged 75+ were the least likely to volunteer (19%), with those in the 25-34 age group (21%) being the second least likely. We also know that, except for those aged 75+, women were on average more likely to volunteer than men across all age groups.

In order to look at both age and urban/rural status, we update Philip et al.'s (2003) analysis and compare their figures from SHS 2000 with our analysis of SHS 2018 data (Table 1). As reported above, there has been a nationwide decrease in volunteering rates across Scotland since 2007. Older rural adults remained more likely to volunteer than their urban counterparts. Volunteering rates among rural 55-64 and 65-74 years olds were the same, with about a third reporting they had volunteered in the past 12 months. Urban rates follow a similar trajectory except for the 64-74 age group which saw an increase in volunteering by five percentage points. This pattern aligns with attributes of older volunteers reported in the literature which suggests that individuals in the retirement transition and recently retired age groups are more likely to volunteer than those in the oldest age group. Although rural volunteering rates in the 75+ age group were lower than for other age groups, they increased between 2000 and 2018 by five percentage points. A similar increase in volunteering was observed for the over 75s in urban areas, although the proportion of those aged 75+ who volunteered in urban Scotland in 2018 was still lower than the rural rate. Interestingly, while rural volunteering rates for the 55-64 and 65-74 age groups remained stable over time, they decreased for those under 55 by six percentage points. This is not the case for urban volunteering rates where there was no change for those under 55 between 2000 and 2018.

Table 1. Formal and informal volunteering rates (%) by urban and rural and age groups in 2000 and 2018.

	Age group	Participated in formal volunteering in last 12 months		Participated in informal volunteering in last 12 months
		2000	2018	2018

Rural	under 55	41	35	42
	55-64	33	34	39
	65-74	33	34	46
	75+	17	22	27
Urban	under 55	26	26	39
	55-64	24	22	40
	65-74	23	28	42
	75+	14	18	27

Source: Authors' analysis of SHS 2018; Philip et al.'s (2003) analysis of SHS 2000.

A sizeable proportion of the Scottish population also undertake informal voluntary activity (39%). Such activity might include helping another person (but not a relative) with shopping, bills, car or home maintenance, household chores, babysitting, advice or support with completing forms or writing letters, providing transport, to improve a skill or be more active, or even to just keep in touch with someone at risk of being lonely. These seemingly minor activities make a huge difference to individuals and communities, and the ways in which informal volunteering support and enhance the lives of people of all ages should not be underestimated. Rates of informal volunteering are higher than formal volunteering but follow a similar pattern across age groups and urban/rural locations.

Not all volunteers make an equal contribution; some provide support more frequently and devote much more of their time than others. Maltman et al. (2019) developed categories to classify the 'intensity' of volunteering recorded in successive waves of the SHS: low intensity (less than 5 hours per month), medium intensity (6-15 hours per month), and high intensity (16+ hours per month). We have used this categorisation in our analysis of 2018 SHS [2] and examined 'intensity' of volunteering by age. Urban and rural differences are unremarkable, and the sample size is unfortunately too small to interrogate the older rural volunteers separately. Despite these limitations of the data, we confidently identify a 'civic core' of volunteers – 18.5% of high intensity volunteers delivered 67.6% of all volunteering hours in Scotland (Table 3 and 4). This phenomenon is markedly amplified as we move up the age groupings. Not only were those in older groups volunteering more frequently than their younger counterparts, but the high intensity volunteers (28.2% of those who volunteer) contributed 79% of all volunteering hours provided by the 65-74 age group.

While the general characteristics of the volunteer are known, it is much harder to pinpoint those of the older, rural one. Notwithstanding the problems of sample size for analysis of such a specific subpopulation, we do know that rural areas had much higher volunteering rates across all age groups. The 'civic core' contributes the most effort and it is markedly bigger in older groups. Given that the average age of those living in rural Scotland is higher than that for the nation as a whole we speculate that volunteering efforts of older rural adults have the most impact. Moreover, the volunteering rates in Local Authority areas classed as 'predominantly rural' were almost all notably higher than those classified as 'predominantly urban'. Our own case studies, to which we turn now, fall into such predominantly rural Local Authority areas where volunteering rates are especially high. These include the Isle of Bute (located within the Argyll and Bute authority), islands in the Outer Hebrides (in the Western Isles/Na h-Eileanan Siar authority) and East Lothian on the mainland.

Table 3. Percentages of volunteers by volunteering intensity and age group (hours volunteered in past month).

	Scotland	under 55	55-64	65-74	75+
<5 hours	55.5	61.4	48.3	41.0	44.1
6-15 hours	26.0	23.6	30.6	30.8	29.7

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[2] We report percentage of volunteering 'intensity' as a proportion of volunteering adults only as this was the sub-set of the SHS data we worked with.

16+ hours	18.5	15.0	21.1	28.2	26.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors' analysis of SHS 2018.

Table 4. Percentages of total hours contributed by volunteering intensity and age group (hours volunteered in past month).

	Scotland	under 55	55-64	65-74	75+
<5 hours	9.8	12.7	8.5	5.0	7.1
6-15 hours	22.5	25.3	24.7	16.0	20.1
16+ hours	67.6	62.0	66.8	79.0	72.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors' analysis of SHS 2018.

The quantitative findings point to general patterns of volunteering among older people in rural areas. However, in order to understand the attributes of older rural volunteers in more detail, to answer our third research question, we now turn to present findings from more detailed qualitative research.

4.2. Qualitative - Volunteering in rural Scotland: evidence from the Isle of Bute

Responses to the household survey conducted on the Isle of Bute as part of the Retirement Transition project provide details of how adults on the island contributed to the production of civic or public goods through volunteering for a variety of groups and organisations. A third of respondents lived in households where at least one adult was a volunteer for at least one group or organisation. The names of groups reported in survey responses were coded to align with categories used in the SHS. Volunteering was most common in groups falling under the *local community or neighbourhood groups*, *physical activity, sports and exercise, hobbies and recreation* and *culture and heritage*. Two thirds of the volunteers were aged 55 and over. Those in the 65-74 age group were twice as likely as the 'young old' and 'older old' to be volunteers. Most of those who volunteered for *local community or neighbourhood groups,* which included a community land company, a social enterprise, the community council[3], a village improvement group, village hall committee, the local Rotary Club branch and the local branch of the Scottish Women's Rural Institute, were aged 65 and over. Numerous Community Development Trusts, Community Housing Trusts, Community Interest Companies, and social enterprises that run local services and facilities have been created across rural Scotland in the past decade or so. These organisations are playing an increasingly important role in supporting the resilience and sustainability of rural communities. Based on evidence from sources such as the SHS and data generated through research such as the Retirement Transition project, it is clear that the voluntary efforts of older adults are essential to their success. Volunteering for *culture and heritage* groups on Bute, such as the local museum, natural history society, Highlands Games organization, and conservation trust was dominated by the over 55s. People of all ages were involved in supporting the organization of groups in the *hobbies and recreation* category, with those aged 75+ the most likely to be involved: examples of supporting a local art club, horticultural society, astronomy group, musical groups and a bridge club were reported.

Volunteers fulfil a wide range of activities including, for example, holding positions on a group's committee, campaigning, fundraising and generally helping out. 2018 SHS data report that men were slightly more likely than women to act as a committee member or as a trustee, and older adults were much more likely than younger adults to hold such formal roles in groups and organisations.

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[3] In Scotland, Community Councils are the lowest formal tier of government.

Office or administrative work was also most likely to be undertaken by those aged 60 and over. Men and women of all ages reported that they would generally help out as required. Older adults on Bute were most likely to be involved with *care work (e.g. providing meals, cleaning and dressing)* and this was commonly through the local branch of the Red Cross who provided a meals on wheels food delivery service on the island.

Philip and MacLeod (2018) noted that there is an environment on the Isle of Bute in which island residents can easily participate in leisure and other social activities. Those who get involved in various types of community and civic activities contribute to both the recreational and amenity value of the island, creating and sustaining valued place-based attributes. Opportunities to participate and become involved in the running of a wide variety of groups and organisations creates a milieux that long term and more recent residents value. As a woman who had lived on Bute most of her adult life and who was interviewed during the Retirement Transition research observed; *"Bute is the kind of place that if you want to be a part of groups, it's still quite easy. You can be a part of as many groups as you want or you can be your own person"*. This milieu exists because many older adults give freely of their time to support the operations of a wide variety of groups and organizations that provide facilities, services and support to others. In turn this provides opportunities for local residents to participate in civic engagement and foster social interactions, continue to thrive.

4.3. Qualitative - Volunteering in the Outer Hebrides: heritage and community

The Highlands and Islands of Scotland have had traditionally high rates of volunteering (Beel et al., 2017). Our research in the Outer Hebrides between 2013 and 2018 bears this out. In these remote and scattered communities, membership of the historical associations was at very high levels. Such groups (Commun Eiachdriadh) formed the hub of many small settlements where members met on a regular basis to compile and consolidate the local heritage, much of which was intangible, taking the form of place names, recipes, rolls of honour and lineages associated with crofts and fishing boats. Communication and local knowledge was required to keep these associations alive. This passion for local heritage sprang partly from an indigenous commitment to the Gaelic language tradition and allowed incomers to the islands to continue to their local community by committing themselves to heritage group activities.

The historical associations provided more than history for their members. They often established museums in former school buildings, no longer required for their original purpose because demographic change meant there were not enough children to keep them open. From these community spaces cafes were opened, shops were created and, in one village, even a petrol station constructed (people had to travel many miles to find such a facility otherwise). Some also operated prolific publishing operations. Much of this work was undertaken by volunteers, who also staffed the various facilities (Wallace and Beel, 2021). Even cemeteries were organised through community co-operation. Communities coming together as volunteers led in some cases to bids for community ownership of assets such as property and land, something made possible under Scottish Land Reform legislation. Successful bids require considerable mobilisation of community resources over a number of years (McKenzie and Fiorna, 2013). People living on islands and remote mainland locations perhaps form these kinds of community enterprise due to the fact that they have to help each other because, otherwise, there are no services or facilities available. Such communities are often resourceful in their use of self-help solutions, for example by rigging up their own broadband transmitters where these were lacking (Wallace et al., 2015). Heritage formed a common interest, especially for older community members, whose memories and tacit knowledge was valorised.

4.4. Qualitative - Rural life, ageing and voluntarism - stories from East Lothian

Older people in rural East Lothian also mobilised around community networks. Fieldwork undertaken in North Kirkton[4] in 2017 illustrated the way in which both informal and formal volunteering were embedded in everyday life. These connections were often seamless and incidental. For example, Robert, aged 70, had been an accountant by trade and had regularly 'done the books' for several of the villages' various voluntary groups. The interviews with him were continually interrupted by other community members calling him on the phone. What Robert's story illustrated is people are 'infrastructure' (as Simone (2004) phrases it) in rural communities like North Kirkton: they have the social and economic capital to get things done and are willing to take the time during their day to network, liaise and share information. Interviews with many older residents of North Kirkton illustrated the networks of voluntarism that exist and the dense network of ties through which they work. Robert himself had never intended to hold formal voluntary positions but his professional qualifications as an accountant meant his expertise was sought out and he was co-opted onto various committees. This example also illustrates how formal and informal forms of volunteering intermesh in practice.

Numerous examples of encounters, spontaneous offers of care and support and informal voluntarism were observed in North Kirkton, illustrative of practices and networks that created a 'landscape of care' (Milligan and Wiles, 2010)[5]. One such network was found among churchgoers, consisting primarily of older people (and as members of the congregation would remark, a group that is *'getting older still'*). The church offers an institution where an organisational community exists both spatially and socially and through which landscapes of care emerge through, for example, offers of a lift to and from church being made to those who did not drive. Practices of care were also found to extend to friends and family. A number of those who participated in the research recalled they had moved to North Kirkton for this very reason, to be available to look after family, either their young grandchildren or their own older parents. Low level 'keeping an eye on one other' actions, seemingly mundane everyday practices, are important within the context of rural ageing. They form part of the story of growing older in a rural context for those who give and receive informal support, are a layer of the rural ageing experience directly linked to the informal volunteering landscape reported in the SHS and are an important facet of what older people think it means to age in a rural place.

The development of spontaneous landscapes of care via informal volunteering helps to create age-friendly communities (World Health Organisation, 2007; Lui *et al.*, 2009; Centre for Ageing Better, 2017), responses to demographic ageing advocated in public policy. Both the UK and Scottish governments have developed policies that advocate age-friendly communities; examples include 'Active Ageing' (Department for Work and Pensions, 2015; see also Jones and Heley, 2016) and 'Planning for a Scotland with an Ageing Population' (Scottish Executive, 2007; see also Joint Improvement Team, 2014). These policies would not work without the informal networks of care that already exist within communities, networks that rely upon older adults voluntarily giving their time to help others (Milligan and Wiles, 2010).

Extending the notion of 'people as infrastructure' (Simone, 2004) within a landscape of care provides an example of how older people can be supported to continue living in rural communities as they age and how integral voluntarism is to allowing older people to age 'in place'. There is an argument to be had about the assemblage of the village, ageing, rurality and voluntarism that has provoked these situations to emerge and a political argument to be had over the value of living in rural spaces

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[4] North Kirkton and names used are pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.
[5] 'Informal care' has been reported in rural studies literature for older people and beyond (Newhouse and McAuley, 1987; Kay, 2011; McKenzie *et al.*, 2010; Orpin *et al.*, 2014).

as 'good places to live' (Scottish Government, 2018). It also highlights how North Kirkton, and the other places referred to in this chapter, might be considered 'good citizen' rural communities where social capital expressed through voluntary actions is harnessed for wider community benefit (Woods et al., 2007). However, not all rural communities have similar levels of social capital and in consequence they may be unable to develop an environment that supports age-friendly communities from within.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter has explored forms of participation and civic engagement among older people who live in rural Scotland and, in so doing, we have contributed to addressing the knowledge gap about the nature and extent of the rural VCS sector. We set out to address three research questions in this contribution. Below we reflect on how these questions have been addressed, discuss the implications of our findings, note the limitations of our research and point to opportunities for future work.

The first question asked what are the patterns of volunteering among older people in Scotland? Our findings illustrate the importance of both formal and informal volunteering for older people, especially those living in rural areas. We have shown that rural areas had higher rates of volunteering than urban areas and this was higher in the older age groups. We have highlighted the fact that older residents are a key reservoir of volunteers: indeed, volunteering in rural Scotland depends on a 'civic core' of older people, most of who may be described as 'young old'. This 'grey labour' helps to make sparsely populated rural areas with remotely located and attenuated services sustainable for these populations. The second questions asked how have patterns of volunteering changed? We have identified a general decline in volunteering across Scotland over the past decade in all age groups, and in urban and rural areas. However, rates of volunteering remain higher in rural areas than elsewhere.

In response to our third question - how does volunteering take place in rural Scotland? - it is clear that there are key actors within rural networks who participate in multiple and overlapping ways that include both formal and informal styles of volunteering. These volunteers support civic, recreational, cultural and heritage organisations embedded in rural communities and help to run services that meet the needs to diverse groups within the community. Combined, these efforts help create sustainable communities and help to form 'landscapes of care' that allow those of all ages, but older community members in particular, to lead meaningful lives in rural places.

Our findings could be interpreted as painting a positive picture of volunteering promoting rural cohesion. However, evidence of several threats to the VCSE landscape are apparent. There is evidence that fewer people volunteer compared with a decade ago, with implications for the delivery of a wide range of services the VCSE sector delivers. As we have shown, volunteering in rural areas in particular is kept alive by the 'young' old. Rates of volunteering decline as individuals progress through their 70s therefore we cannot assume that an ageing rural population creates a larger pool of volunteers. The ageing of already older rural populations might stretch the VCSE sector beyond capacity as more individuals require support at a time when the number of volunteers is declining. In addition, continued cuts to local authority funding which in turn have reduced the amount of grant funding available to community groups might create more gaps in rural infrastructures, ones which volunteers alone cannot fill. With an increasing older population and changing generational cultures, what will the formal and informal landscapes of care look like 20 or 30 years from now in villages like North Kirkton? Are the next generation of older adults going to be as concerned with looking out for their neighbours, as exemplified in support for the meals on

wheels service on Bute, as today's older people? If more of our lives are lived online, will we continue to look out for our neighbours and continue to support local heritage initiatives – important spaces for the preservation of Gaelic language and culture - in the Western Isles? Alongside threats to the VCSE landscape we must also acknowledge that cohesive communities where formal and informal volunteering is the norm do not exist everywhere. The capacity of a rural community to develop and sustain a VCSE sector depends on many things including, for example, population size, age profile, distance from urban centres, economic characteristics, social capital and openness to innovation. For decades the VCSE sector has balanced social, economic and environmental needs but "it has been heavily stretched in the years leading up to the [COVID-19] pandemic as the onus of responsibility for provision of many local services has fallen back onto communities themselves" (Phillipson et al., 2020, p.4). The scope and scale of third sector activity across rural Scotland is wide (Woolvin,2012) including owning and managing community assets (e.g. buildings, land, woodlands, fishing rights), and providing and running community owned services (e.g. community shops, pubs, transport). A cynical interpretation sees the neighbourliness, community spirit and tradition of volunteering that stereotypically characterise rural Britain becoming an excuse for the state assuming rural communities will 'do it themselves'. We suggest caution: portrays of idyllic rural communities should not be used as a smokescreen which obscures the reality that rural *and* urban communities need services and facilities whose provision cannot be left to volunteers alone.

The threats and challenges noted above have been overshadowed by the new crisis posed by the Coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns this entailed from March 2020 onwards. The inaccessibility of many services during lockdown and the forced residential immobility as people were made to work from home, found themselves furloughed, sick or shielding and required to 'remain local' meant that communities were thrown back on their own resources. This resulted in an explosion in formal and informal community volunteering – at least in some rural communities. For example, the community action co-ordinated by the Grampian COVID-19 Assistance Hub involved statutory services such as the police and third sector organisations including the Red Cross working alongside approximately 350 other groups to help 4000 people with food box deliveries, welfare visits and other assistance. There were far more volunteers than were actually needed, a ratio of about 3:1. In the village of Insch, the volunteers were organised through a Facebook page initially and their activities included collecting prescriptions, shopping, general care of vulnerable community members and dog walking services, often providing vital support to older adults who were shielding. Again, there were twice as many volunteers as were actually called upon (Wallace et al., forthcoming). Similar initiatives sprang to life in other parts of the UK (Coutts, 2021). With the COVID-19 pandemic bringing profound changes to the day-to-day functioning of society, have the rural VCSE sector and the individuals who are essential to its successful operation demonstrated an ability to withstand, adapt and innovate? It is not clear if this outpouring of voluntary activity was sustained much beyond the first lockdown in 2020 and the later easing of COVID-related restrictions and return to work. Was this a temporary response to an emergency or a sign of a general revitalisation of community life? Current labour shortages may mean that surplus time needed for the volunteer economy dries up and with a likely return to austerity and rising prices will people be so willing to share their time and resources in future? Questions such as these around how rural places will emerge from the pandemic are ones that we will need to face in future (Maclaren and Philip, 2021).

All research has limitations, and in our case at least two issues limit our interrogation of volunteering in contemporary rural Scotland. Although the SHS represents a significant resource for understanding broad trends and changes of time with respect to volunteering, the rural sub-sample is small which hinders more sophisticated urban – rural – age comparison than we were able to report here. Our suspicion is that there are certain types of community that foster volunteering and

civic participation and others that do not, but we could not show this using the quantitative data available. A limitation of our qualitative studies, aside the fact that they were studies where accounts of volunteering emerged alongside other topics during interactions with participants and they were not designed as comparative studies, is that they describe volunteering and civic action in rural areas where these traditions were rich and embedded. They were cemented by the fact that these were attractive, self-selecting and rather privileged communities where respondents often chose to live (having retired there) and were cemented with ethnic, linguistic and historical connections. We did not consider rural areas where there were lesser degrees of volunteering, where people did not want to move to or were depleted by out-migration and thus left with limited human capacity to support a VCSE sector.

Limitations notwithstanding, our research study points to the importance of understanding the role of older people in rural communities as both care givers and care receivers, given the demographic greying of the rural population. It indicates that a research-informed understanding of the way civil society works in rural areas is key to their sustainability. In the face of the roll back of the state and the likely curtailment of welfare spending in the future, it is important to understand both the strengths and limitations of the Third Sector in rural communities as a resource. Policies to facilitate and support this kind of rural civic action would be important to manage this sustainability, but it is also important to investigate why it might be declining at a time when it is needed more than ever. There is considerable scope for further research, quantitative and qualitative, exploring the evolution of the VCSE sector in rural Scotland and in other national contexts.

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