

Understanding community water governance: What shapes decision-making?

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Introduction

Increasingly, the government and state bodies in Scotland expect communities to be involved in planning, shaping legislation, policy implementation and monitoring outcomes across water domains. However, community involvement in water governance (CWG) lacks conceptual clarity, hampering efforts to involve and empower communities in governance. Little is known about:

- ❑ The underlying assumptions, expectations and outcomes of involving communities in governance.
- ❑ The ways communities relate to, value and make decisions about water.

Methods

In order to better understand CWG, my PhD aims to:

- I. Map and categorise the potential roles of communities in water governance (completed: literature review and 11 'water walks')
- II. Explore how practitioners and institutional processes shape CWG (ongoing: interviews and observations)
- III. Understand CWG from the community perspective (starting summer, 2020: focus groups to explore how communities understand CWG and what influences their interactions with water and practitioners).

Results

Following a review of UK and international literature I mapped the forms of CWG that are most prevalent across water domains including: (i) community ownership where communities own water infrastructure, and/or water resources, and (ii) community democracy where communities are involved in decision-making (Figure 1). In Scotland, most emphasis in policy and practice is on community democracy, and although practitioners see some aspects of ownership as necessary, it is particularly challenging.

Figure 1: Categories of CWG (Adapted from Bakker, 2008)

Mode	Domain	Brief examples of CWG
Community Ownership	Drinking/waste water	Water infrastructure Personal water efficiency and quality technology; Water cooperatives Water resources Communal water rights; Collective provision of irrigation
	Flooding	Private protective equipment; Ownership of flood features
Water Democracy	Drinking/waste water	Water supply infrastructure Consumer service measures; Customer councils; Participatory budgeting Water resources Community catchment associations; Citizen science
	Flooding	Community resilience flood groups; Early flood warning systems

Figure 2: Example of potential misalignments (Adapted from Sharpe, 2007; Dean, 2017)

Water users as: passive/active managers		
Water user as passive non-manager (water user as passive recipient of services)	↔	Water user as active manager (water user manages own water use and demand)
View of problem-solving and relationship with water users: technical interventions/dispersed approaches		
Technical interventions (focus on technical interventions on behalf of water users)	↔	Distributed approaches (focus on joint working with water users)
Water user as: antagonistic/solidaristic		
Water user as antagonistic (predominantly concerned with promoting own interests against others)	↔	Water user as solidaristic (interdependent members of a collective oriented towards collective ends and the common good)
Water user as: customer/citizen		
Individual customer (user is a consumer of a commodity and can use resource accordingly)	↔	Community member (user is part of a community and has collective responsibility for water)
Space for CWG: prescribed/negotiated		
Prescribed space (who participates, and about what determined outside and imposed on community)	↔	Negotiated space for CWG (conditions are negotiated by the community)
Rationale for CWG instrumental/normative		
Instrumental rationale (CWG to meet legal requirement; improve costs, improve policy goals)	↔	Normative rationale (CWG to reduce marginalisation; improve sense of community; democratise policy making)

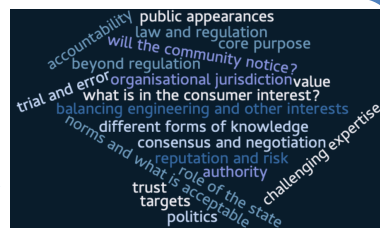
Different perceptions can exist both in and between practitioner groups and organisations regarding: who communities are and what are their interests, how communities should be involved, and underlying rationale for CWG. These can lead to often unacknowledged tensions that hamper efforts to influence CWG.

Figure 2 provides some examples of categories of understandings where misalignment can occur when trying to encourage CWG.

Future

I am currently analysing my interview and observational data which focuses on how practitioners experience and influence CWG. The next phase of my study starts in summer, 2020 and explores how communities relate to water, practitioners and state bodies responsible for water in Scotland. This will give insight into how CWG can be encouraged.

CWG can challenge organisational practice and institutional settings. This word cloud highlights some of the concerns experienced by my informants.



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