

Understanding community water governance: What shapes decision-making and what are the outcomes?

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1. Introduction

Communities are considered to be important for water governance. In Scotland, communities manage water in their homes and businesses, and also use and influence the water environment. Governments increasingly expect communities to play a role in water management in legislation, planning budgets and monitoring outcomes.

Despite growing interest in community water governance (CWG), there remains a lack of conceptual clarity amongst academics, policy makers and practitioners. Different conceptions of community, water and governance are all in use (ranging from community ownership to increased involvement in decision making, engaging with different water issues – quality, flooding, drinking water, and with diverse ideas about what 'community' is). Central to all conceptions, is the presumption that CWG will lead to more sustainable and equitable outcomes, as an integral aspect of 'good governance'.

In order to enhance understanding about the conceptual, organisational and practical aspects of CWG, this PhD aims to examine (i) what shapes decision-making, (ii) how communities relate to water, and (iii) how does CWG contribute to more sustainable and equitable outcomes.

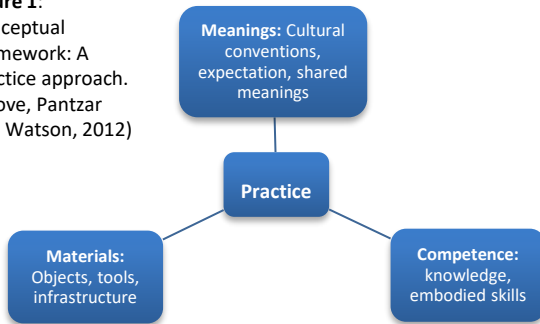
2. Insights from the literature

- It is often presumed that community views can be understood and implemented relatively unproblematically through providing the right structural opportunities (for example forums for participation and consultation) and information provision.
- Understanding community views and decision making processes tends to focus on economic and psychological theory which emphasize the importance of information provision, behaviour change and take an individualist approach.
- Work in water and energy consumption (Shove and Walker, 2007; Browne, 2015) show that understanding communities perceptions and values is more complex, and information does not lead to action.
- A practice approach is an alternative approach to understanding community water governance (see Figure 1).
- This approach is useful because it highlights collective or 'socially mediated' factors which shape decision making.
- Most practice theory studies have focused on domestic water use, however we think it will also help understanding community involvement out with the home and in organisations who shape CWG.

3. A practice approach

Figure 1:

Conceptual Framework: A practice approach. (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012)



4. Phase 1 of research

- Aims: to understand how practitioners and communities are currently involved in the water sector in Scotland, and what the hopes and expectations for community engagement are.
- The research aimed to understand practitioners' experiences of the water sector, and how their 'practices' (Figure 1) influence how communities are conceptualised and ways in which communities can play a role in water governance
- 12 semi structured interviews with organisational representatives who play a role in water governance, and shape how communities are involved in the water environment (Scottish Government, SEPA, Customer Advice Scotland etc.).
- Tried and tested a 'water walk' methodology with interviewees.
- Thematic analysis of transcripts using MAXQDA qualitative data software.

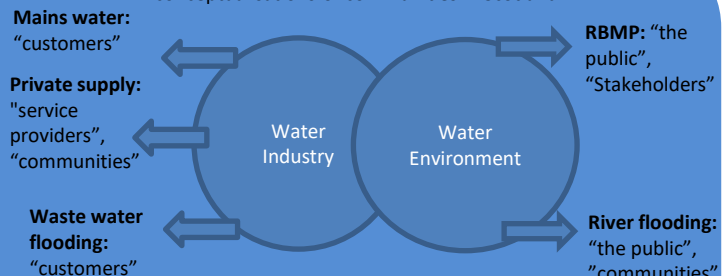
5. Preliminary findings

- Water governance in Scotland is configured by the division of 'water industry' and 'water environment'. These demarcations each have different visions of communities and engage with them in different ways (Figure 2).
- Each demarcation of water has its own practices (Figure 1) related to communities. It is important to interrogate how these practices may influence the role of communities in water governance.

Mains water: "Customers are remote...[...]it's the whole of Scotland you're serving. It's all a bit remote [...] [asking customers for their priorities for improvements] gives us one idea of, 'oh, ok, we're going to have to spend this much here and this much here.' That's one way to prioritise relative weights of expenditure."

River flooding: "The public are your communities. You're only as strong as your communities. If your communities aren't strong, then you're not a strong organisation. You're just working like a robot. That's the way I see it. It's the way I've always seen it."

Figure 2: Water governance demarcation and their associated conceptualisations of communities in Scotland



- Interviewees hoped to work with communities in a deeper, more engaged way, however were unsure about how best to do this. They thought that though making water and infrastructure more visible (e.g. through advertising) that communities may engage with water differently (See Next steps below).

6. Next steps:

I am on maternity leave for 9 months from December. Upon return, I will undertake stage 2 of research, doing ethnographic work in the area of water governance with communities. I would like to explore the idea of water visibility, and how the 'invisibility' of water (infrastructure) affects how people relate to it.

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