

RGS-IBG Annual Conference, Manchester 2010

New and Emerging Rural Researchers Session

Paper 5

Title: **The Role of Private Landownership in Facilitating Sustainable Rural Communities in Upland Scotland**

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Abstract: Private sporting estates dominate Scotland's uplands, and their owners have greatly influenced those living and working on their land. While the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 appears to promote the removal of landowners who do not actively enhance community sustainability, its impact on landowner-community dynamics has received little attention. In addition, there is minimal discourse on the contemporary 'estate community'. In an attempt to reverse these knowledge gaps and contribute to Scottish policy on 'sustainability', in-depth interviews with key opinion leaders in land management and rural community development were conducted, generating a rich understanding of the threats and opportunities facing rural communities and private landowners in upland Scotland. These include the negative stereotyping of private landownership, financial insecurity and wider pressures of government policy and climate change, which restrict landowners' potential to embrace innovation, boost rural economies, and provide integrated landscape management. The rural 'estate community' suffers from depopulation, service decline, diminishing rural employment, and affordable housing problems, with under-utilised social capital. There is a need for partnerships and engagement between estate businesses and communities. This research continues to explore the potential of private landowners as a 'force for good' by investigating examples of 'good practice' for estate community sustainability.