

## Event focus and introduction:

Working effectively with communities of place will be a key part of success for LINK members as we move into 2024. Recent developments in the way politics and media report and exploit issues mean that communities of place are being pitted against communities of interest and the environment is in danger of becoming a battleground.

LINK's 2023 Congress brought LINK members together with 2 networks of communities of place, [Community Land Scotland](#) (CLS) and [Coastal Communities Network](#) (CCN), to explore how we, as communities *of interest*, can work with communities *of place* to achieve our shared visions of healthy ecosystems with vibrant communities across all of Scotland. Our idea was to look at the way we work, learn from some of our members and from our colleagues in CLS and CCN.

Our aim was to discover and discuss ways of working with local communities and be inspired to take new approaches. We also explored opportunities for funded projects to work with communities of place and future environmentalists.

Our challenge was how can we bring communities of all sorts together to create irresistible change?

## Main session

Congress started with a context setting introduction from Deborah Long, LINK's CO. This has been an informative year and we've had to learn a few lessons. The Scottish Government's consultation on HPMA showed that although 55% of those who responded to the consultation on Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) were supportive, what happened during the consultation was pretty devastating. This is because the science tells us that the protection of species and habitats is the cornerstone of future healthy ecosystems. The public support this, showing in a recent poll that 80% of those asked would support Scotland's Marine Protected Areas being fully or highly protected. The Scottish Government and Ministers were putting forward a mechanism to help Scotland work towards the [Global Biodiversity Framework](#) target of 30% effective conservation areas at sea, and the Bute House Agreement included commitment to establish HPMA's in at least 10% of Scotland's seas. But the consultation took us back to the drawing board.

Why did this happen? A fundamental element to this was that without a communication plan, supported by case studies of success, negative, frightening and false stories began to dominate. Another important element is that we are all suffering consultation overload, Government included, and as a result consultations are often rushed and not sufficiently thought through. A capacity crunch is affecting us all: Scottish Government, eNGOs and local communities. Witnessing this is what led us to our Congress theme. With the nature and climate emergencies, we cannot afford to let this happen again. We realised we need to revisit how we communicate hope, positive action and benefits for future generations.

In addressing the nature and climate crisis, there are a number of outcomes we urgently need to progress: effective measures at sea to protect and restore our remaining biodiversity, effective protection on land and halting perverse subsidies and actions that take us backwards on land and at sea. We need instead agricultural subsidies and forestry grant schemes that deliver for nature and climate and not against them, land reform, upland management and licensing that protects vulnerable upland ecosystems and increases their resilience to ongoing change.

But to reach these outcomes, we need a new approach that involves everyone to build irresistible change. We need to work with and support our own members who are already effectively engaging at local levels and we need to work with other networks, who are the communities on the ground and with whom we can pool and build resources, platforms and capacity in order to reach mutual goals on climate and nature action. Learning from those successes and finding new collaborations and activities will help us create a much bigger and more engaged public space where politicians and policy makers have no option but to listen to the science, the experts, the communities and young people who all want to see change.

### Workshop sessions:

Our context set, we worked in 3 workshops. Three member bodies: [John Muir Trust](#), [Scottish Wildlife Trust](#) and the [Common Ground Forum](#) initiative, which is supported by a number of LINK members, shared their experiences and examples of successful ways of engaging with local communities. The lessons they learnt and the successes they shared are all now forming part of our next steps.

**Workshop 1:** Mike Daniels, Head of Policy and Kevin Lelland, Director of Development and Communications: *The John Muir Trust experience: Working with communities*. Mike and Kevin talked about the history of Trust and working with communities through land reform and buy outs for example, the challenges of community working in crofting and deer management and finally the methods and approaches they were adopting in re-imagining Strathaird

**Workshop 2:** Elouise Dalziel, Living Seas Policy & Engagement Officer: *Supporting community voices in marine policy*. Elouise reflected the experiences of the Living Seas team at the Scottish Wildlife Trust in working in partnership with many communities across Scotland, to make oceans more accessible to more people and to also support community voices in joining marine policy discussions. We saw examples from the [Snorkel Trail Network](#) and the [Oceans of Value](#) work.

**Workshop 3:** Helen McLachlan, Head of Marine Policy at RSPB Scotland; Julie Stoneman, Saving Scotland's Rainforest Project Manager at Plantlife Scotland and Esther Brooker Marine Policy Officer at LINK and Associate Practitioner at Centre for Good Relations facilitated a conversation around changing the marine conversation and learning from experience in order to place coastal stakeholders at the heart of enhanced marine protections. They used the experience gained and lessons learnt from the [Common Ground Forum](#) initiative between LINK and ADMG to build productive and mutually beneficial conversations with coastal communities.

These workshops provoked discussions around which the following points were made:

There are some processes we can engage in together: What are called 'place based' responses: how can we help our communities see ourselves in the changes we need to see? And a Just Transition: how can we help build a socially just move to the necessary environmental transition?

In terms of how we do that, we came up with a few actions for us all to consider and deliver:

1. Public support for cross and inter networks' priorities and projects
2. Building joint projects together
3. A whole of Scotland approach: there is a false narrative of urban vs rural emerging. We are in a strong position to prove that wrong with our network reach right across Scotland

4. Adopting the concept of Duthchas, where natural, cultural and community regeneration exist side by side.

There are some challenges in trying to do this. Environmental and social regeneration is suffering a lack of housing and inadequate transport. In tackling the climate and nature crisis, we have to tackle these too, which means we need to support those working in these areas. We need to meet the expectations of communities when communities of all sorts step up the challenge. We need to work out how to support them too at a time when public resources are extremely tight. This will require more difficult conversations and in order to do that constructively we need to equip our staff so they are able to cope with stressful situations and difficult behaviours. And finally we need to recognise that in our communities, democratic decision making, which is the basis of all our work, will create tensions that we need to recognise and resolve.

Our final session was kicked off with a panel Q and A session with all our presenters and workshop leads. The **next steps** that we ended up with were:

1. LINK's role in all this starts with our public positions on key issues around land and sea management, land reform and natural finance for example and around sharing and adopting best practice.
2. We will be developing some joint projects including piloting and demonstrating the art of the possible in change at scale on land and on the coast.
3. We are looking to build on the success of the Common Ground Forum to bring a new approach within our communities on the coast.
4. We will manage our own priorities to ensure we have sufficient capacity and resource to take on this work.
5. We will look at how we can lead the conversations around change at scale that benefits us all, wherever we live and whatever we do.

Communities **together** in action.

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With thanks to our presenters, Josh Doble and Alan Munro, our workshop leads, Mike Daniels, Kevin Lelland, Elouise Dalziel, Helen McLachlan, Julie Stoneman and Esther Brooker, Charles Dundas as Chair, the LINK staff team who organised it all, especially Donna Banks and Leigh Abbott and our member reps for making it so productive and enjoyable.

Taken from notes from Deborah Long, Juliet Caldwell, Esther Brooker, Dan Paris and Phoebe Cochrane.

Also available pdfs of the key note presentations. A summary blog is available [here](#).

December 2023.



# Welcome to LINK Congress 2023

Communities in action



Scottish  
Environment  
LINK

The voice for Scotland's environment

# Today's agenda

1345	Welcome: LINK Chair, Charles Dundas
1350	Our Challenge: LINK CO, Deborah Long
1400	Keynote: Alan Munro, Coastal Communities Network: elevating coastal and island voices in environmental protection and restoration
1420	Keynote: Josh Doble, Community Land Scotland: working together to achieve social justice and environmental recovery through land reform, community wealth building and a Just Transition to Net Zero
1440	Keynote Q and A
1500	Break
1530	Workshop session 1: Choice of 3 workshops
1600	Workshop change over
1605	Workshop session 2: Choice of 3 workshops
1640	Keynote & workshop lead Q and A
1700	Wrap up: LINK CO, Deborah Long
1715	Free time
1830	Welcome; dinner is served



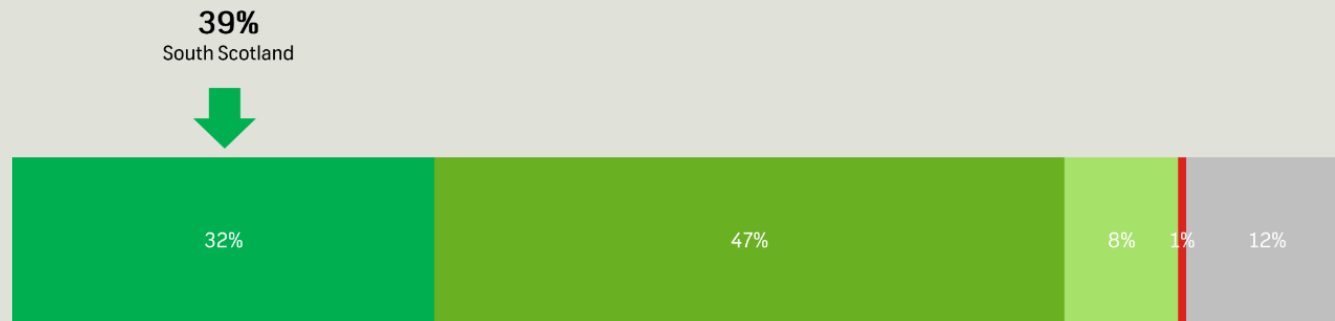




# Today's challenge

# Learning lessons

About 80% think that Scotland's MPAs should be "fully/ highly protected"



- FULLY PROTECTED: no extractive or destructive activities are allowed, and all impacts are minimized
- HIGHLY PROTECTED: only light extractive activities are allowed, and other impacts are minimized to the extent possible
- LIGHTLY PROTECTED: some protection exists but moderate to significant extraction and impacts are allowed
- MINIMALLY PROTECTED: extensive extraction and other impacts are allowed while still providing some conservation benefit to the area
- Don't know

Q9. In general, which of the following categories do you think Scotland's MPAs should fall under?

Base: All Respondents Unweighted Total: Total=1018

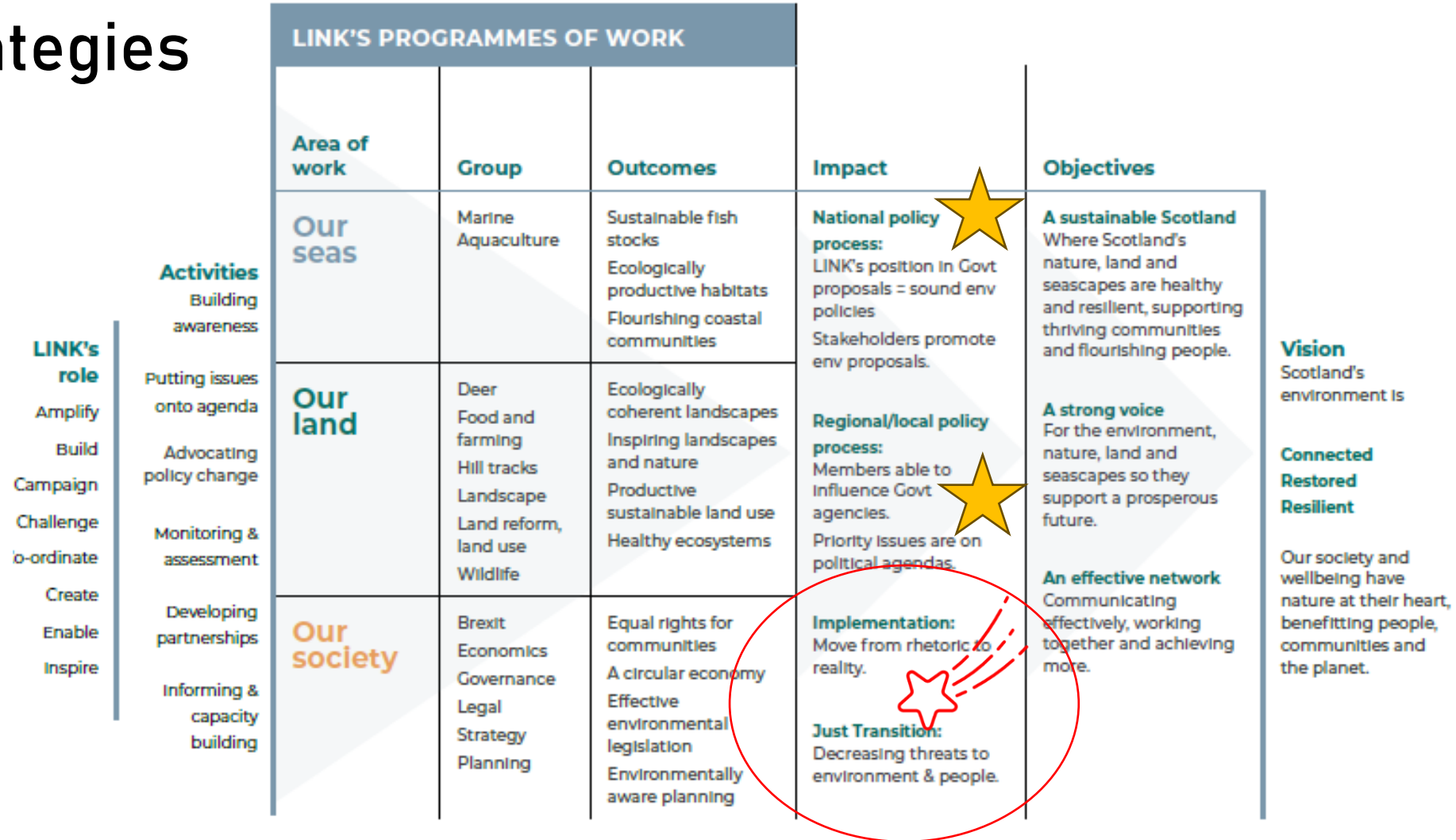
**Survation.**

‘we are committed to working with coastal communities, fishers, aquaculture, tourism and all affected sectors to enhance marine protection in Scotland for the benefit of all.’

‘although.....we remain firmly committed to the outcome of enhancing marine protection.....[the proposal as consulted on will not be progressed.](#) [That means that we will no longer seek to implement HPMAs across 10 per cent of Scotland's seas by 2026.](#).....

Cabinet Secretary Mairi McAllan,  
June 2023.

# Our strategies to date





# A third approach



Scottish  
Environment  
LINK



## SNORKEL TRAILS



Being realistic....



(c) Pexels @Pixabay



Scottish  
Environment  
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Scottish  
Environment  
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The voice for Scotland's environment



# A strong voice



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## = irresistible momentum for change

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# Working together to achieve social justice and environmental regeneration

Dr Josh Doble  
Community Land Scotland  
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Tarras Water, Tarras Valley Nature Reserve, Langholm



FEARANN  
COIMHEARSNACHD  
NA H-ALBA

COMMUNITY  
LAND  
SCOTLAND

## Discussion points:

- Background to Community Land Scotland
- Communities of place
- Collaboration between communities of interest and place
- Thriving Community Partnerships
- Shared vision for the future



Abriachan Forest Trust, Inverness





# Community Land Scotland

- Community Land Scotland was established in 2010 to provide a collective voice for community landowners in Scotland
- We have over 120 member organisations across Scotland, ranging from community landowners of major crofting estates in the Western Isles to inner city community hubs in diverse communities
- Community landownership is driving community wealth building and local wellbeing economies around Scotland
- We have members engaged in large-scale renewable projects, landscape scale ecological restoration, building and managing significant local housing projects, building local infrastructure and fostering vibrant local businesses
- Our vision is for the community ownership of land and buildings to be a significant driver of sustainable development across the whole of Scotland
- There is no shortage of appetite from communities to take on land and assets, but that ambition is being stifled by weak legislation and regulation as well as uncontrolled market forces



# Our priorities

- Empowered communities of place who have ownership over their land and assets, and agency over their future
- Robust land reform legislation which meaningfully diversifies landownership in Scotland and results in significantly more community landownership
- Land reform as an intrinsic part of a social and environmental justice agenda
- A just response to the climate and biodiversity crises which builds a more equitable and sustainable future for everyone



A frozen Arisaig Bay, with the Isle of Rùm in the background, Arisaig Development Trust





Crofters from Borge and Annishadder Township,  
Isle of Skye

## Communities of place

- A local community is often called a community of place. Being geographical, it may host a wide range of more narrowly defined communities of interest.
- They may have a formally recognised body to represent their interests, such as a Community Landowner or Development Trust which comprise democratically elected and locally accountable members.
- In communities where these do not exist, local community councils could act as local community representatives although their powers to hold assets are limited.
- Ideally communities of place have a body that commands broad respect as a result of their democratic appointment, accountability and capacity to articulate the community's voice.





# The importance of communities of place

- Communities of place are rooted in specific places and are invested in making them economically, environmentally and socially sustainable and resilient
- Communities of place can respond more quickly and with more agility to ecological change in their areas
- We need place-based responses to many of the challenges we face (alongside considerable systemic change)
- Local communities need to see themselves in significant land use change – it will endure and be sustainable when local communities are invested
- Land use change requires viable, sustainable communities
- Integration of wider policy imperatives – Just Transition/CWB/land reform/repopulation
- Communities of place provide the basis of land reform legislation – community rights to buy and the Scottish Land Fund



Tree planting at North Harris Trust – community landowner taking part in an ambitious Local Biodiversity Action Plan to restore native woodlands through herbivore control and planting



# What matters to communities of place?



Talla na Mara, art and entertainment centre, The West Harris Trust

- We have to understand the long history of exploitation around Scotland to understand how and why communities of place may respond to current opportunities and threats in particular ways
- Each community of place has different requirements – but some consistent themes emerge
  - Depopulation and survival of local amenities
  - Housing – availability and cost
  - Healthy environment
  - Thriving local cultures
  - Working transport systems
  - Green, circular, local economies



# Collaborating on projects of significant land use change



Natural regeneration at Trees for Life, Dundreggan Estate, Glenmoriston

- Communities of interest providing capital, expertise and networks
- Communities of place providing local experience and knowledge, local consent and support, a viable economy and community to sustain projects
- Models of communities of interest robustly supporting the sustainable development ambitions of communities of place:
  - Tarras Valley Nature Reserve – Woodland Trust/John Muir Trust
  - West Harris Trust – John Muir Trust
  - Isle of Eigg – Scottish Wildlife Trust
  - Knoydart Foundation – John Muir Trust
- Communities of interest becoming rooted in a community of place and providing tangible benefits for local people – Trees for Life
- These successful examples are often focused on ecological regeneration



# Communities of place and communities of interest working together

- Communities need to see themselves in land use change and future land use patterns
- Genuine dialogue is needed to understand community aspirations, experiences and capacity
- Local knowledge and culture needs to be understood and respected



A community deer drive as part of the Black Hills regeneration project, Knoydart Foundation





# Thriving Community Partnerships: a potential model for collaboration

- There is an opportunity in natural capital or ecological regeneration projects to more equitably share the opportunities and risks, as well as any wealth from Scotland's natural resources
- This model would be a compromise when communities of interest cannot support full community ownership by a community of place – as in Eigg, Knoydart, Langholm etc
- A formal agreement between a community of place and a landowner/investor/charitable organisation when there is a significant land use change
- We need to move beyond the notion of community benefit to the idea of thriving communities in a partnership model delivering across a range of fronts and characterised by community agency
- It is for communities to say when they feel the arrangements are right for them
- These partnerships should include agency in decision making over major land use decisions which impact local communities and sharing financial and non-financial benefits from land and asset ownership





# What principles underpin the TCP

- Community agency in decision making is advanced. Agency means that communities have a voice that gives real power in determining their future, in partnership with other stakeholders and with landowners in particular
- There are wellbeing benefits (financial and non-financial) accruing to the local community
- Local economic leakage is reduced as far as possible with local businesses and suppliers preferred for delivery of goods and services
- Local economic social cultural and environmental rights are advanced including the respecting and sharing of “indigenous” aspects such as language and traditional ecological knowledge
- Community cohesion is strengthened – fostering sustainable and enduring communities
- Principles of Free Prior and Informed Consent here are understood and met – bottom-up participation and consultation from the beginning



# What might any 'benefits' be?

- An agreement for community benefit returns that include a percentage share of the gross profits of income from the asset
- A transfer of land/ assets to the community to deliver community aspirations (e.g. housing, local infrastructure or service development - Tayvallich)
- A right of pre-emption for the sale of all or any part of the land to the community under CRtB
- For significant projects the creation of a local management board - local operational responsibility and appointed local residents
- A local community seat on the main Board or Trust Board of the partner



Turbine at Coigach Community Development Company, Coigach



# A shared vision for the future of Scotland



House building on the Isle of Eigg

- We are all working toward transformational systems change – either ecological or social and political
- The transformation of our system of landownership to a more equitable and just future goes hand in hand with ecological regeneration
- Our land has been degraded by over 300 years of concentrated ownership
- More people connected to the land and who care deeply about its future
- More land use decisions made by local people rather than distant shareholders



# Work we have to do together

- Demonstrate the potential and strength of our collaboration and shared vision
- Strongly support each other's core issues
- Identify potential projects and challenges – work on them together
- Breakdown down the false dichotomies stifling collaboration:
  - Rural communities of place vs urban communities of interest
    - We need a whole Scotland approach – through examples of collaboration
  - Communities of place vs nature regeneration
    - Communities leading where they can and supporting where they can't
    - Dùthchas: culture, heritage, community and the environment are intimately linked



Atlantic rainforest, Glenan Wood,  
Cowal Peninsula





# Scotland's Coastal Communities Network

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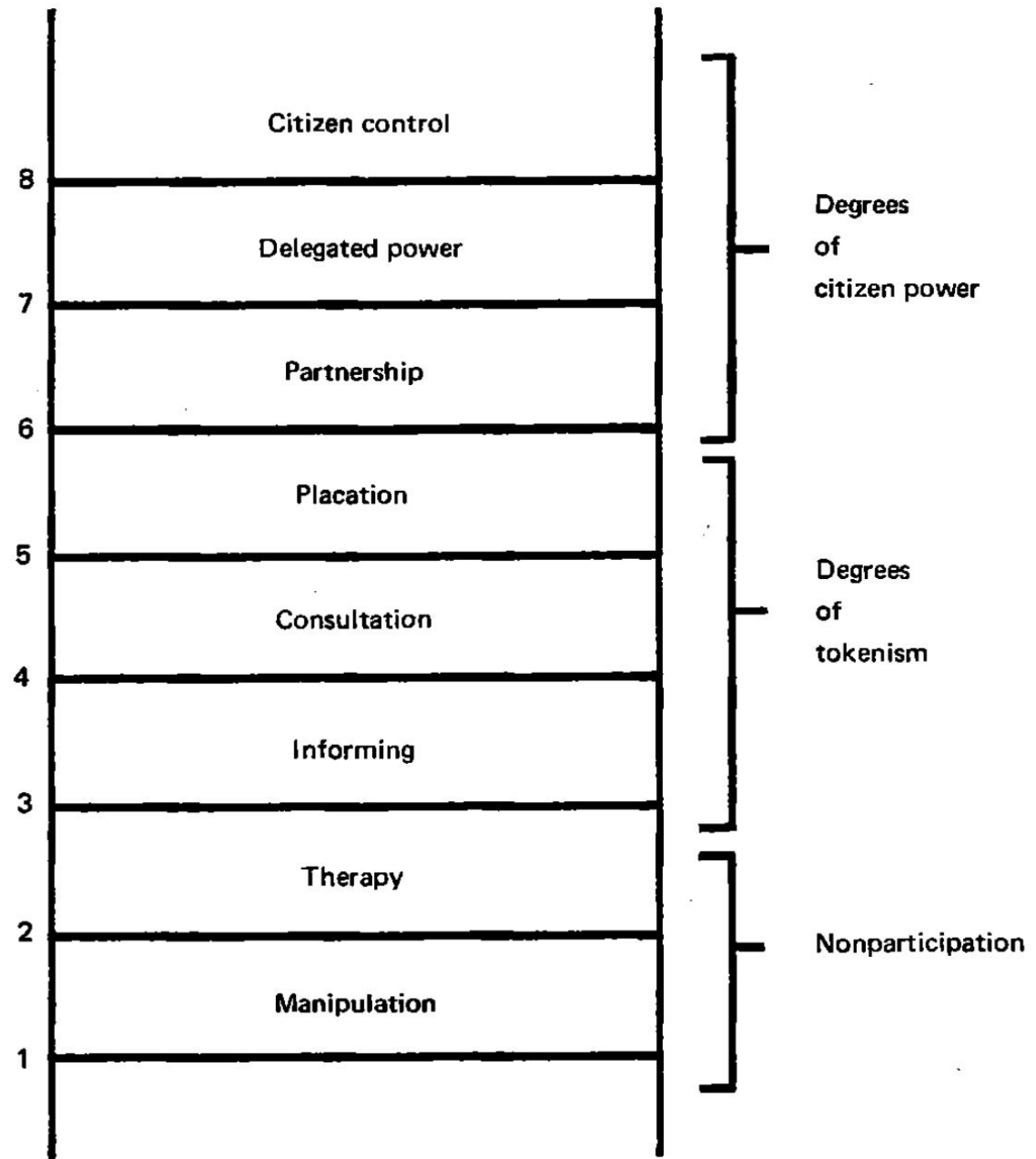




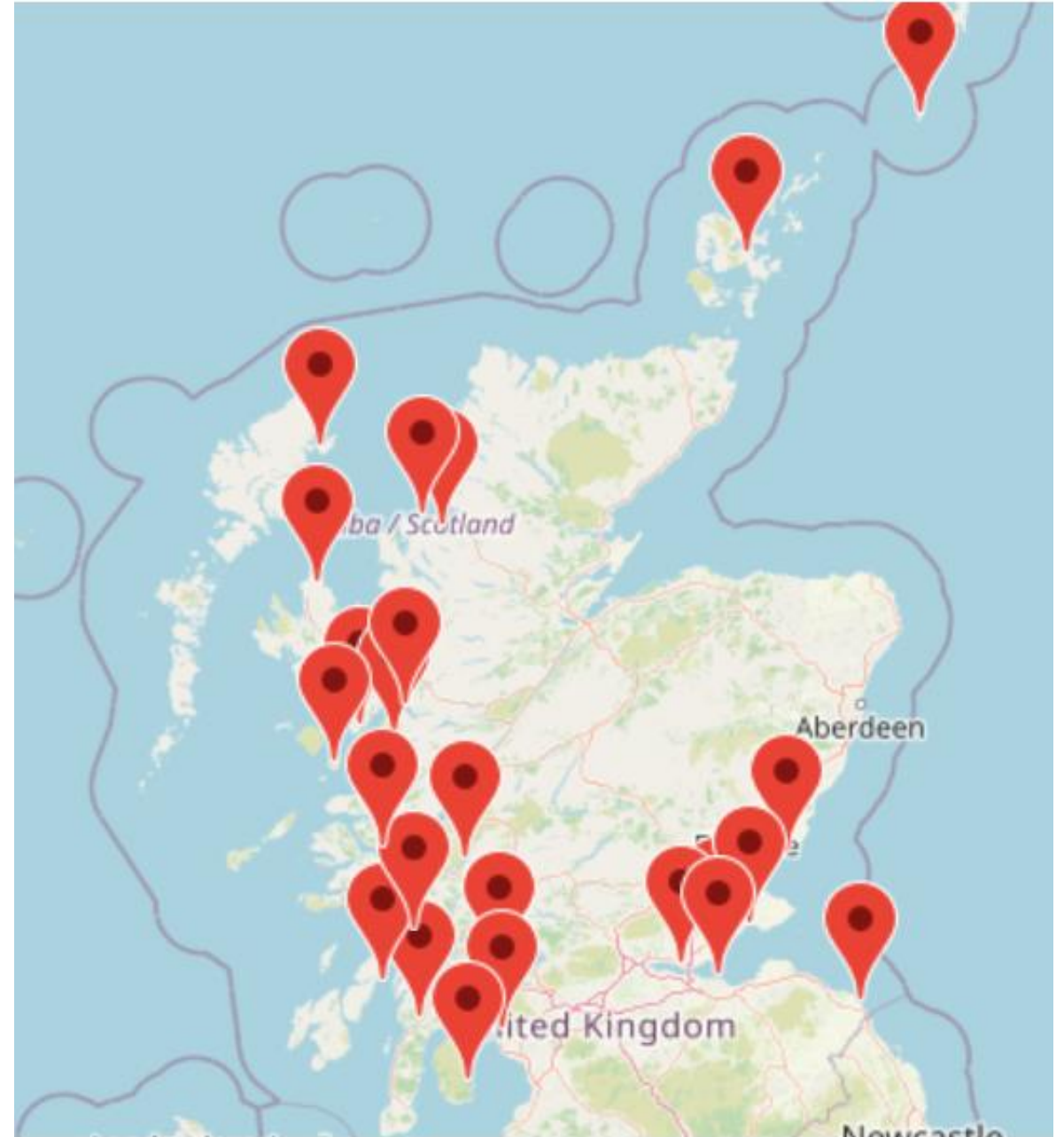
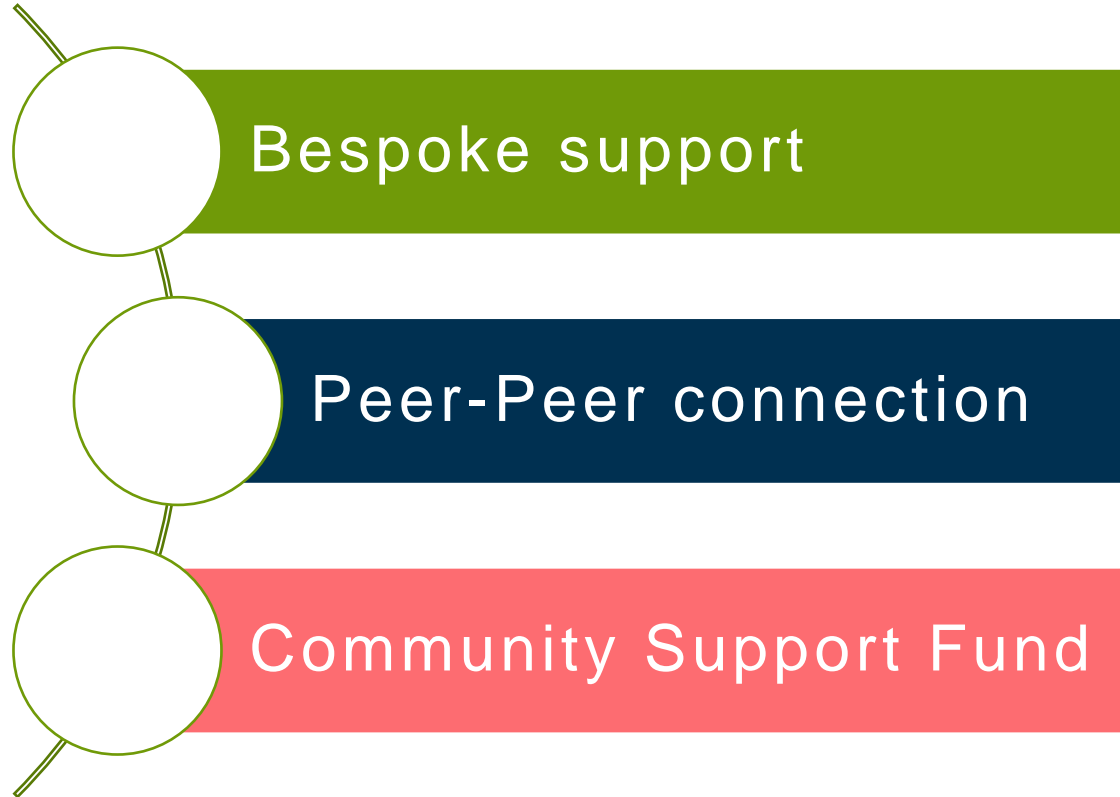
# The ladder of citizen participation

The Ladder features eight “rungs” that describe three general forms of citizen power in democratic decision-making:

- 1) Nonparticipation (no power)
- 2) Degrees of Tokenism (counterfeit power)
- 3) Degrees of Citizen Power (actual power).



# Fauna & Flora Scotland Programme



# Thank you!

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