

The changing role and future prospects for Internal Drainage Boards in the emerging governance context of Natural Flood Management in England

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This project seeks to understand the changing role and future prospects for English Internal Drainage Boards (IDB) within the context of a policy transition toward 'Natural Flood Management' (NFM) on the one hand and greater emphasis on localising responsibility for flood financing and management on the other. Since the 1930 Land Drainage Act IDBs have had permissive powers for flood management works with part-funding from local landowners and residents. Many IDBs began as 'clubs' of landowners, and their primary objective was generally to deliver an improvement in agricultural productivity. Hence IDBs have frequently been portrayed as representing sectional interests (Hodge and McNally, 2000) and as being resistant toward environmental and conservation objectives. Equally, contemporary approaches to NFM, which seek to mitigate flood impacts by allowing (often rural/agricultural) parts of the catchment to flood, might also seem antithetical to the original objectives and interests of IDBs. This has led to conflict in rural lowland areas between the Environment Agency and local landowners/residents who feel, for example, that recent severe flooding (winter 2013/14) has been exacerbated by approaches to NFM that 'sacrifice' rural populations to protect downstream/urban areas (Emery and Hannah, 2014). Current government policy (Defra, 2011), through the discourse of community empowerment, seeks novel ways to encourage greater local responsibility and funding for flood management. This is essential to identifying policy initiatives in flood risk management and prevention that are required under the Floods Directive. In this context, this research presents a timely and important opportunity to re-appraise the role of IDBs, which remain relatively unknown and seriously understudied from a sociological perspective (Gearey and Jeffrey, 2006). Accordingly, this PhD project will conduct qualitative comparative analysis of 2-3 geographically and institutionally diverse IDBs to critically explore: their relationship to local communities and other flood management organisations; their engagement with the discourses and practices of NFM, and; the extent to which their funding structure could provide a new model for community-engaged NFM.

Entry requirements

Applicants are normally required to have a bachelors degree in a relevant discipline at upper second class or above (or equivalent), and a masters in a relevant discipline (or equivalent experience).

Funding

This project is eligible for the competition for ESRC scholarships at the University of Birmingham: see

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/postgraduate/dr-fees/ESRC-research-council.aspx>

These scholarships are available for UK and EU applicants only. Applicants wishing to apply for this funding should contact the School or supervisor by January 5th 2015 at the latest.