

The Carnegie UK Trust Annual Rural Convention 2007



September 24th and 25th, Aviemore

Summary Report

The Annual Rural Convention is now an important fixture in the Carnegie calendar. It is an occasion for bringing together all the partners who are engaged in the Rural Action Research Programme, some of the members of the Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development, other funders and academics. This year the event took place in Aviemore and our RARP partners from the Aviemore Destination Management Organisation provided a local context for our discussions.

The purpose of this summary report is not to capture everything that happened, but to act as a 'memory spark' for those who attended, in service of a healthy community of practice which is actively evolving to better support learning between and beyond its members. In particular, conversations begun at the convention continue on-line and the 'hub' threads best capture our generative themes and ongoing inquiries.

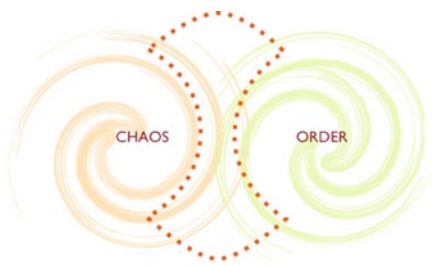
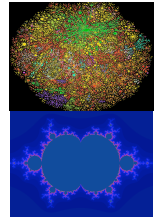
In addition to the participant-generated dialogue, this year's convention explicitly sought to

- build on the publication of the Carnegie Commission report (the 'petal' model)
- expand a sense of co-ownership of our collective work and its potential to make a difference well beyond ourselves
- inform the Carnegie trustees as they consider the Commission's recommendations: "the creation and structuring of opportunities for people to network, communicate, mentor, and learn from each other to help capture and formalise the hard won knowledge about successful rural development" (from Convention Programme).



Convention design and guiding principles

Eighty people from five nations with centuries of experience between them...calls for an approach to convention design that embraces complexity, diversity and multiple perspectives. Nick Wilding shared the following guiding principles underpinning the convention facilitation.



Balance Structure and Flexibility

... enough structure to allow us to move forward with our key purposes for the event; enough flexibility to allow for creative chaos - the spice of life emerging from unexpected encounters, rich seams of conversation that need to continue beyond their allotted space, and to leave open the opportunity to collectively discover a whole which is greater than the sum of the constituent parts.



Hold open space for dialogue, creativity and connection

... dialogue can be understood as moving beyond 'surface' conversation or chat, toward deep, attentive listening and speaking with clear intent. The convention was an opportunity to build and deepen relationships. Facilitation approaches such as the early morning tours, World Cafe, Open Space and other exercises were intended to help with this.



Encourage critical friendship and inquiry

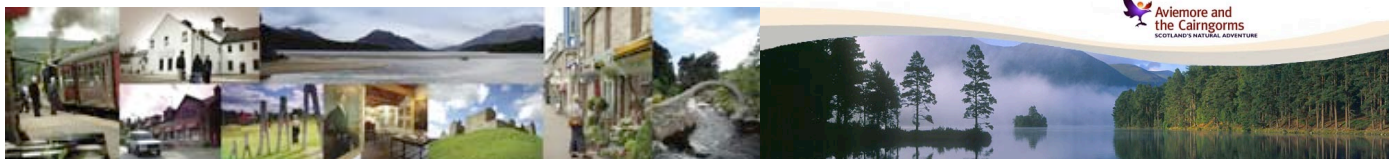
A 'Rural Action Research Programme' implies that action research values, approaches and stances become embedded in our working practices and relationships. A central action research practice is that of being a 'critical friend'; having the courage to speak from our experience, and inviting critical, caring challenge in the spirit of genuine learning and discovery. This spirit of curiosity, awareness and engagement can help to generate a strong 'container' for conversations that matter.



Trust our collective capacity to unleash our highest potential

... understanding trust as a central enabler for all the above.

Key session summaries



Monday morning:

Aviemore and Cairngorms tours; CLT presentation

Monday morning was about connecting - with local folk, other convention participants, and with the purpose of the convention, including an input on Community Land Trusts from Bob and Jonathon. Thanks to Alan Rankin from Aviemore Destination Management Organisation for his time and energy pulling together a comprehensive taste of the work of partner organisations. Thanks also to our local hosts Johnnie Grant and colleagues at Rothiemurchus Estate; Duncan Mackellar from Grantown on Spey; Jonathon Gatenby of Aviemore Business Association; Ian Murray and the residents at Boat of Garten; John Rainy Brown at VVABS, Aviemore; Dave Fallows and colleagues from Newtonmore/Kinguissie; and David Kinnear and colleagues at Alvie Estate.



Monday afternoon:

Open Space: trusting participants to set the agenda

After a short introduction to the Open Space technique of collaborative agenda-setting, a robust programme emerged that set the convention abuzz. Many sessions were content to document their outcomes within the conversation participants if at all; as convention facilitator I noticed the following dynamics and emerging 'generative themes':

- most RARP theme groups decided to take time to meet with each other, and continued to discuss how best to up the quality of their collaborative working/impact;
- several high-energy sessions featured folk who were sharing their practice - for example, I sat in with Hazel and Bob from Cornwall as they shared their infectious enthusiasm for transformational ways of working that draw from complexity (or 'ecological') thinking;
- a session on 'putting the research back into action research' drew a lot of attention, speaking directly to peoples' desire to take responsibility for ensuring that our collective experience is better shared, inquired into, and integrated in the next phase of the RARP process;
- several folk, including many who hadn't come across this way of working before, specifically mentioned to me afterwards how well the Open Space process worked as an element of the convention. Others, especially those who were new to the event, may have benefitted from more input about this way of working.



Tuesday morning: emerging themes

The emphasis on Tuesday morning was digesting our generative themes from Monday's Open Space. We achieved a collective sense of how best to make use of our time by clustering around themes according to their 'resonance', gauged through a rapid 'listening survey' exercise.

1. Framing (plenary)

A clear consensus emerged to explore in more depth the how we might better learn together, and make a difference locally and nationally. It's worth noting that this focus represented an evolution from the original purpose of the morning as stated in the convention programme:

- Shaping the future of our 'learning community', including proposals for how might Carnegie Trustees respond to the Commissions' call for a Centre for Rural Community Development
- Maximising our collective impact on policy shift: how can we pull together to shift national debates... and resources... towards a RARP agenda?

We began by hearing a short narrative from Tony Pender, re-iterating the experimental nature of this programme and the opportunity for rural development across the UK and Republic of Ireland which RARP represents, affirming that trustees were actively looking to consider input from convention participants in their forthcoming meeting in November. Several folk then contributed further 'framing' observations that helped us to sense both the wider context of our work, and to develop a living sense of the qualities and perspectives present in the room.

2. Reflecting (open space)

In the spirit of Monday's Open Space, we took forty-five minutes to discern in the ways we felt most helpful how best to respond to our collectively agreed purpose (learning and impact). The convention took coffee; two large-ish groups coalesced as well as multiple smaller groupings. It seemed to me that this was a powerful moment in the convention as insight began to crystallise and find expression.

3. Closing (plenary)

Our final 45 minutes navigated the close of our time together, and had real qualities of dialogue and a sense of an emerging community of practice. Alongside this, I heard three foci:

- a passionate voicing of to maintain support for pioneers of transformational approaches 'at the edge';
- a call for greater clarity about the RARP action research process, roles and purpose; and
- an appreciation of the diversity of perspective and potential for genuine innovation in rural community development praxis communities across the UK and Republic of Ireland.

The session was concluded with synthesizing contributions from Tony Pender, Kate Braithwaite and Charlie McConnell. The vibrancy and quality of postings to the RARP hub in the days following the convention are testament to the catalytic quality of the final morning.

On reflection, I sense our RARP system becoming more conscious of itself as a living organism full of diversity, potential and life. Will this crystallise new forms of action and research over the next year or so?

Evaluation Postcards

Before participants left, we were all invited to write a postcard evaluation. We will forward cards to you if you submitted one for your 'home' organisation; we will forward cards for Alan and colleagues. Feedback for Kate, Kirsty and Nick is reproduced below:

Kate, Kirsty and Carnegie UK Trust

Love to see a monthly paper newsletter on whats happening!
Daniel (Cybermoor)

People are desperately looking out from the rock pool and hoping to extend their really useful local work – finding a way to network and learn from this is imperative

Carnegie
"Just do it"
But
"it doesn't just happen"

Really enjoyable and challenging event. The potential is exciting if we get it right. I look forward to helping in any way I can.
Regards,
Steve Clare, DTA

Seize the moment

Kate, Kirsty
Thanks for all – great event, debate – energising.
Venue great, good food and bed! Hosts great too.
I'd like to see the good practice captured (how about 10-20 examples for each petal leaf?)
I'd like to see the skills being applied to a 'pilot' course for emerging practitioners, based on a reflective applied mentored practice approach!
Kirst – thanks for all arrangements – big job
Rory (???)

Carnegie
Keep up the good work – be innovative

Carnegie
Address the mechanics of maximising the potential of the RARP at local and at macro level and deliver it through a translational learning mechanism

Carnegie
Please create/sustain ...
A benevolent space that:

- Supports and empowers change-makers
- Sows seeds of fire through 'viral learning'!
- Links evidence to policy
- Seeks influence

But is not A CENTRE (To me this implies ownership and control of the agenda, constrains not enables impact/influence)

To Carnegie

- Improve knowledge and management of RARP
- Talk to other – eg. CRC on RDP networks
- Don't necessarily make final binding decisions in next 2 months – more time needed?

To Carnegie
A great big thank you for having me at your conference. I hear an extraordinary variety of ideas and hope that I was able to make a contribution

Will use the asset blog more (agreed by the asses's group on Monday)
Will help with COTE conference. Thank you for the opportunity to meet such a great group of people.

Carnegie
Thank feedback for the people of the plank (????)

Carnegie
Please can we meet somewhere less deadening/conventional. Can we do some practical talks together eg cooking meals, developing and performing a short plays, talk, photos video link ups, a radio programme, more visits

This was a little ahead of where I am at this stage. I made some good contacts and learnt a lot, not least of how much I have to learn about community projects.
Deborah

Many thanks for organising the event. I think it went v.well – lots of energy as well as the setting out of an agenda for future work.

I felt plenary sessions were too conceptual for me. Bit too hard to follow (I am not an academic...). Also tension between grassroots and policy makers. Are we about changing policy or supporting innovative work?

Dear Carnegie UK Trust

It has been the greatest of pleasures – thank you. We are on this learning journey together, and from the chaos will emerge something. That 'something' will be the right thing and for all the right reasons. Again, thank you!

Carnegie
I feel different streams are at different places and I have some concern that information sharing between streams could be too late to have an impact on some streams.
I enjoyed the convention and will take a lot back.
Ps. I hope you only have to read these comments and not type them all up!

I liked the focussing on making a positive difference at a community level, and working with using existing policies and 'friends' within various organisations.

Carnegie
Making the petal work for Carnegie
Thanks for the chance to meet these wonderful people
Please keep support for the people at the edges!
I'm sure this is where new ideas for deep change come from.

Tell the consultants to do more for the partners in each stream.

Nick as convention facilitator

Personally I am active rather than reflective

Prefer structure

But – great facilitation and open space worked really well

Good, creative, inventive, challenging. Well controlled.

Nick

Generally very positive but a danger on the last morning of process overcoming substance

Facilitator

Clear, gave us time and responsibility to act for ourselves

Fac

- V.Active and Engaged
- most involved facilitator I have come across
- A little too much jargon used – often obscured the point=BUT we are all quietly of that
- You're very good at your job

NIC

Good job – perhaps unavoidably, go over old ground for members to vet spleens – thats fine, but I feel we need to have the room/session/conference with more ideas and a place for new territory.

Rory (???)

Group work fine but need more chance to speak one to one with commissioners/key staff

Great bunch of people. The facilitation was a little too loose. Wandering around looking for like-minds was wasteful of time. More structure would have been useful

It would have been useful to establish "expectation" at outset and check near end whether these have been achieved

Hi Nick

Great facilitation, not easy with so many people!

Daniel

I think you did really well in bringing such a great group together. Very difficult to pull out concrete tasks though. Thanks and well done

Nick

Great stuff – suggest more tangible cap tone methods and feedback

I found the agenda setting process very helpful ensuring everyone should feel able to contribute and take away information and knowledge that they value.

Great facilitation. Liked open space

Dear Nick

Another welcome example of the fine things that you are capable of. Your ability to allow everyone the space, opportunity and responsibility in equal measure is a talent. Thank you so much.

Great facilitation. Would have liked a bit more structure in last session.

Nick (Facilitation)

I didn't feel comfortable in the whole group/plenary session, that because it doesn't suit my ways of thinking/reflection/ expression.

Difficult job – well done

- Think about len interruption to re-re clarify
- Think disability

Nick

I found the facilitation directional and polite. You really helped me to think with purpose.

Thank you, Daniel Aynsley

This was a new process for me. At times it felt like a religious service but in spite of an allergy to these I coped.

To facilitation

- Thanks – it worked, chaotically, but it worked
- Sometimes too much touchy feely facilitation jargon – but there you are!

Convention design

Monday am:

- connect & 'tune in'**
- with this place
 - with each other
 - with our collective intent for this convention



Monday pm:

- Open Space**
- share experience
 - deepen inquiry
 - co-create the agenda

Tuesday am:

- innovate & evaluate**
- co-design an inspirational 'learning centre'
 - tune our collective potential to influence policy
 - offer each other feedback, and evaluate the convention



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Tony Pender Carnegie UK Trust Vice Chair
Kirsty Robb Carnegie UK Trust Co-ordinator, Rural
Nick Wilding Convention Facilitator
Chris Higgins HIE Commissioner
Malcolm Mosely University of Gloucestershire Commissioner
Alan Barr SCDC Evaluator
Caryl Agard The Social Business Company Guest
Crispin Moor CfRC Guest
Anthony Hodgson IFF Commission facilitator
Paul Henderson Consultant Skills
Rory MacLeod Communities Scotland Skills
Sarah Fishbourne ACRE Skills
Bryan Collis WCVA Skills
Frank Rennie Consultant Remote
Tony Kendle
The Eden Foundation Remote
Juliet Rose
The Eden Foundation Remote
Jane Stoneham
Sensory Trust Remote
Lars Stenberg
Sensory Trust Remote
Viv Lewis
Northern Uplands Remote
Geoff Brown
Northern Uplands Remote
Jacquy Box
VAW Remote
Danny Kilbride
VAW Remote
Hazel Stutely, Health Complexity Group Remote
Dave Aynsley Police/TR14ers Remote
Marisa MacDonald Pròiseact nan Ealan Remote
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Paul Green Cornwall RCC Community Planning
Catherine Corcoran Tipperary Institute Community Planning
Paul Delahoy 'Devon Heartlands' Community Planning
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Jim Sumberg NEF Assets
Jonathan Brown Land for People Assets
Bob Paterson Community Land Trusts Assets
Steve Clare Development Trusts Association Assets
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Philomena De Lima Consultant Inclusive Communities
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