

DTA Scotland Annual Conference & AGM 2015 Report

DTAS15: Where enterprise and creativity start...

For two days at the end of August 200 community activists from all over Scotland – and a few from elsewhere - gathered in Inverness for DTA Scotland's 12th Annual Conference: "Assets, Enterprise & Creativity". The conference brought together Scotland's experts on community-led regeneration, along with the development trusts and community organisations and groups looking to deliver innovation and sustainable change on the ground.

Sharing their knowledge, skills and experiences, learning from one another and other practitioners, celebrating each other's successes, commiserating with the difficulties some have faced and overcome, development trusts, large and small, rural and urban, from the mainland and islands, demonstrated clearly how the movement is leading the way in community empowerment, asset ownership and creative responses to meeting their communities' needs, and supporting those communities to achieve their aspirations.

'Never underestimate what a community can do when it has a clear drive & vision'

From this opening remark by Sandra Holmes of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) to the closing plenary session where Locality's Hugh Rolo stressed the power and benefits of communities in determining their own futures, DTAS15 showcased the fabulous achievements, without trying to sugar-coat the often significant challenges along the way, of communities and development trusts.

Members as varied as the Isle of Luing Development Trust to Glasgow's Lambhill Stables, helped demonstrate the diversity and breadth of the work that Scottish development trusts are now engaged in. Visits to Findhorn Ecovillage and the Muir of Ord's community learning centre allowed delegates to explore in more depth two very different approaches to asset-based community empowerment, from organisations with very different histories and communities. Indeed, it was a delight to see, in our 12th year, the growing maturity of our movement and membership evidenced by the increasing range of members' activities, enterprises, and social impact.

It was also a pleasure to welcome speakers and workshop hosts from outwith Scotland who provided inspiration and ideas. From George Boyle, talking about how Fumbally Exchange <http://www.fumballyexchange.com/> helping creative community innovators shine across Ireland, and the extremely popular Visual Business Planning Session from Andy Perkin, our guests demonstrated that creativity and enterprise are flourishing amongst communities elsewhere, who can both teach, and learn from, community anchor organisations in Scotland.

And that much is happening in Scotland was highlighted by the comments of the Minister for Local Government and Community Empowerment, Marco Biagi, MSP during our opening plenary,

'These are remarkable times in Scotland to be an active citizen. We have almost unprecedented levels of participation and engagement from people in communities the length and breadth of the country and the Scottish Government wants to build on the enthusiasm that people have been showing and get them more involved in local decision making, so that we can release, at a local level, the energy that comes from employing those talents, and allowing communities to guide the changes and improvements that they want to see in their local areas.'