



# **Radical approaches to rural community development**

---

**James Derounian**  
**University of Gloucestershire**

# About me

---

- Practitioner (30 years) & academic (18)
- Community Development [CD] background
- Crossover between teaching and CD
- Empowerment, facilitation, capacity building...
- Practical academic: teach-consultancy/research
- Principal Lecturer & National Teaching Fellow



## Overall research aim

**“To determine the skills and knowledge that rural communities will need to become more resilient and adaptive to change over the next twenty years.”**

# The 'unusual' suspects

---

- Action research for Carnegie (UK) Trust
- Motives, skills of radical rural community activists
- [How] do they link to CD 'infrastructure'?
- How can formal-radical links be fostered?
- What do activists show re. rural resilience in the C21st?
- Based on rural England [IR separate study]

# Research focus

---

- People apprehensive about the future, about change...so how can rural communities become more adaptive and resilient up to 2030?
- Single-issue activism: responses to climate change, e.g. Transition Towns & Community land Trusts
- 'radical activists': Those "who actively seek to create innovative solutions to enhance and sustain their community."  
(Fishbourne et al 2009 page 11)

# Research subjects

---

- **Interviews with 8 'radical activists' engaged in**
    - Rural housing provision
    - Community transport
    - Renewable energy creation
    - Climate change remediation
    - Innovative service delivery
  - **Focus groups: 30 Community Development Workers**
  - **Plus parish council clerks – online forum**
-

# Barriers to community adaptation

---

- Entrenched attitudes & resistance to change/innovation
  - Inadequate infrastructure (e.g. buses)
  - Ltd (parish) council support
  - Lack of funds & short-termism
  - Ltd mass mobilization
-

# Ingredients for community adaptation

---

- **Determination**
- **Leaders/leadership**: demonstrating commitment & clarity about the aims of an activity/project
- **'Selling'**: convey key messages to different sections of the community and 'sell' the benefits of an activity
- **Communication**: chair meetings, listening skills, writing, radio interviews, tact and diplomacy, managing conflict
- Identifying and responding to **real needs**/locally generated priorities

# Ingredients for community adaptation

---

- Building on people's **self-interest** e.g. community transport
- Community development workers bridging representative democracy and more participative processes e.g. community consultations and informal networks.

# Skills for rural activists & communities

---

- **Communication** – within/without a community; convey information to ‘win hearts and minds’ (‘marketing’)
  - **Project management**
  - **Leadership skills/keeping to task**
  - **Flexibility-adaptability**
  - **Coordination**
  - **Harnessing local knowledge & resources ABCD**
-

# Qualities for radical rcd

---

- Persistence
- Charisma
- Determination

# Training for rural activists & communities

- **Networking opportunities** – ‘strategic opportunism’
- **Easy/accessible training** – online, tele-conferencing
- **Training for the local context**
- **Training in engagement techniques** – PfR
- **Leadership development** – mentoring (OAPs)/across villages
- **Sharing Good practice**
- **Combined training: professionals & activists** – mutual benefit

# References

---

- Fishbourne, S. Derounian, J. & Vincent, P. (2009) Skills and knowledge needed in the near future by English rural communities Draft Report, Action with Communities in Rural England, Cirencester
- Moseley, M. (1999) Innovation & Rural Development, Inaugural Lecture, Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education, Cheltenham
- Vuarin, P. & Rodriguez, M (1994) Innovation & communication within LEADER, LEADER magazine (7) pages 13-16
- Rogers, E.M. (1995) Diffusion of Innovations (4<sup>th</sup> ed.), The Free Press, New York