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SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE 2006: EUROPEAN SKILLS CASE STUDY RESEARCH SUMMARY 1

This research study by ECOTEC Research and Consulting was commissioned to inform the Sustainable Skills for the Future Symposium organised by the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC) in November 2006.

For further information on the European Skills Symposium please see Skills for the Future 2006: European Skills Symposium Summary 2.

KEY MESSAGES

There is widespread interest in and commitment to creating and maintaining successful places.

If the approach is to succeed there are a number of issues that need to be addressed.

- **A European-level debate** on developing the generic skills to create and maintain sustainable communities must be generated.
- Member states need to **develop clear structures and strategies** to enable them to identify the need for generic skills and then address the need in a coherent way.

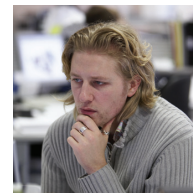
- **Strong leadership, an effective multidisciplinary and integrated approach and personal commitment** are fundamental to the successful delivery of outcomes and should therefore be the focus of skills development activity.
- **Learning by doing** is an effective approach to skills development. It is important that skills and knowledge are shared effectively between those involved in delivering sustainable communities.
- **Community participation and ownership** need to be built more strongly into the process for designing and delivering sustainable communities.

INTRODUCTION

Good governance, strong leadership and partnership working are at the heart of creating and maintaining sustainable communities.

This research takes a pan-European perspective and draws on evidence from seventeen Member States to identify common issues. It aims to inform knowledge and debate at a number of levels by asking the following questions.

- What are the skills needed to create and manage successful places throughout Europe?
- What are the skills and training needs associated specifically with good governance models and effective partnership working?
- Is there any evidence of a skills gap and what barriers exist to overcoming any gaps?
- What strategies and actions are in place at national, regional or local levels to promote skills development and capacity building amongst policy-makers and practitioners, and amongst communities themselves?



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

An essential element in creating and maintaining sustainable communities is the ability of urban development decision-makers, planners and practitioners to overcome hurdles. The capacity to respond is determined by the following principles.

Finance – investment needs to be addressed and resourced appropriately; funding can come from private and public sources in the form of grants or loans.

Governance – the institutional framework for building and maintaining sustainable communities is essential as well; where does competence lie and what are the responsibilities of various actors and stakeholders?

Skills – what capacity, knowledge and skills are needed for building and maintaining sustainable communities?

SKILLS NEEDED TO DELIVER SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

A Multidisciplinary Approach - A key feature of the Sustainable Communities Approach is that it

emphasises the importance of strong multi-disciplinary working. Actors from a range of occupations and professions need to work together to develop integrated solutions to the design and development of new places.

The Occupations Involved –

A wide range of occupations are involved. Across the EU the terminology used to describe the occupations/roles varies; in the UK the ASC has identified 100 professional occupations that contribute to sustainable communities. A number of these can be classified as ‘core occupations’.

Achieving a Skills Dividend -

Previous research has indicated that there is a ‘skills dividend’ to be gained from equipping core occupations, associated occupations, residents and citizens with the capacity, generic skills and knowledge to enable them to play their part in delivering a sustainable community.

The ability to work together and relate to other professions is crucial. This multidisciplinary and collaborative approach is a key driver of demand for enhanced generic skills.

The wider range of generic skills, behaviour and knowledge that support this approach are: inclusive visioning, project management, leadership, brokerage/ brokering, stakeholder management, team/partnership working, financial management and appraisal, analysis and evaluation, communication, and conflict resolution.

Ensuring that these skills are available is not taking place at a European-wide level; rather it is taking place at a Member State level. There are two barriers to establishing sustainable communities and the associated skills issues as a priority. These are: firstly, terminology – across Europe there is no common terminology for the concept of ‘sustainable communities’; and secondly, current priorities – the European agenda is very much about economic development and innovation.



ENCOURAGING GENERIC SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

There is a range of government agencies and organisations that are involved in skills development. A number of these have the potential to develop more focused provision around skills for sustainable communities.

National Governments play a key role, and it is important that responsibility for skills development is recognised and co-ordinated. A national policy framework offers the advantage that it promotes a common and consistent approach across a country. It also provides a structure within which a national skills strategy can be developed. A key challenge for a centralised approach is that it is relevant to the issues faced across a whole country.

Decentralised systems allow the flexibility for regional/local responses to specific skills issues. Where there is a more decentralised structure of government, responsibility for sustainable community policy and delivery is more locally and regionally focused. Regional/local

authorities can have a decisive influence over the direction and form of local development policies in relation to skills development for those involved in delivering local strategies.

Non governmental institutions are also key partners. It is important to ensure that Member States recognise the role that these different institutions can play and the contribution this can make to addressing the skills gap. Attention must be given to reviewing the effectiveness and impact of initiatives so that lessons can be learnt and fed into future developments.

There is the opportunity for universities to play an important role in supporting skills development, and this is happening in some countries.

Across Member States, the extent to which universities can or do play a role in promoting and encouraging multi-disciplinary approaches and generic skills development varies.

In some countries universities are clearly contributing to skills development and are being responsive in developing new

courses and adapting existing programmes to meet skills needs.

GOOD PRACTICE IN SUCCESSFUL PLACE MAKING

There are some important skills issues and challenges that need to be addressed if the agenda is to be delivered effectively. **For this to happen, the empowerment and buy-in of people at all levels is crucial.** Since successful place-making is genuinely multi-disciplinary, cutting across sectors and professions, it requires a joined-up approach incorporating economic, physical and social issues. To respond to this challenge the people who work in Europe's towns and cities need to be capable of innovative thinking and delivery, thus raising the standards for a sustainable future.

Nine detailed case studies have been used to show that places are benefiting from their past experiences of place making, building on established partnerships, and developing the necessary skills and positive relationships with their communities. The following messages have arisen from the case studies.

- Though stakeholders are increasingly aware of the sustainable communities agenda, its profile needs to be raised further if the approach is to succeed and the skills gaps to be addressed.
- Strong leadership, an effective multi-disciplinary and integrated approach and personal commitment are fundamental to the successful delivery of outcomes, and should therefore be the focus of skills development activity.
- Learning by doing is an effective approach to skills development. It is important that skills and knowledge are shared effectively between those involved in delivering sustainable communities.
- A balance needs to be achieved between physical intervention and the social and cultural dimensions.
- Community participation and ownership needs to be built more strongly into the process for designing and delivering sustainable communities.
- There is considerable scope for lessons and good practice to be shared more widely at regional level, country level and across Europe.

CONCLUSION

There are a number of skills issues and challenges relating to successful place making.

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- It is important to follow a long term course.
- There are no 'quick wins'. It requires a long term strategy to realise the vision of a sustainable community, and this presents some challenges.
- It has been difficult to achieve and manage a balance between addressing immediate problems and longer term regeneration /sustainable goals.
- Associated with this, the choice to invest in long term projects without immediate tangible benefits can be difficult to defend at a political level.
- It is difficult to 'policy proof' approaches to sustainable development in a situation where spatial development policies of (central) government are prone to change. It is also difficult to ensure the long term maintenance and management of sustainable communities.

Different approaches to developing generic skills have been adopted. There is considerable scope for training approaches to be shared and transferred. 'Learning by doing' is particularly effective in helping individuals develop generic skills. A partnership and multidisciplinary based approach to training has enabled participants to develop

a greater degree of mutual understanding on issues related to sustainable communities and the role of different professions. There is the need to capture place-making knowledge more systematically and translate this into skills and training materials.

ASC ABOUT NEXT STEPS

One of ASC's priorities in the 07/08 Business Plan is to build on the symposium to further develop capacity and learning across Europe on the skills agenda. In the coming year ASC will be developing international partnerships and establishing a strategic approach to skills intervention for the future.

ASC is the national focal point for EUKN - www.eukn.org/eukn

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