

# Motivating, engaging, leading and supporting skills and knowledge for sustainable communities: An introduction to the research



## Policy Context

The concept of 'sustainable communities' has received increasing attention over the past few decades. It is closely linked to the wider goal of sustainable development and the UK government's 'place-making agenda'. In the UK, the Sustainable Communities Plan (2003), followed by the Egan Review on Skills for Sustainable Communities (2004) and most recently, the Sustainable Communities Act (2007), have raised the profile of sustainable communities and the skills debate at a policy level. They have contributed towards helping us understand what sustainable communities might look like:

"Places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer quality of opportunity and good services for all" (ODPM, 2005).

At a local community level, a lack of the appropriate skills and understanding of what skills are necessary to create and maintain sustainable communities has remained a significant obstacle. This was highlighted by the Egan Review and subsequently resulted in the creation of the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC) in 2005. The mandate of ASC is to ensure that there are sufficient people with the right skills to create and maintain sustainable communities.

## Research Objectives

The Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society (BRASS) at Cardiff University aims to develop an innovative and interactive approach to better understand how communities can make progress towards sustainability. A one year research project is being undertaken on 'Motivating, Engaging, Leading and Supporting Skills and Knowledge for Sustainable Communities - Applying Models of Sustainable Localised Economies'. The project is jointly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the ASC.

A key aspect of the research will involve developing a model to assist communities to identify those skills, training and knowledge that are needed to support them in this process. The model will be constructed from the analysis of existing case studies focusing on four key areas of sustainable production and consumption: energy, food, home-based services and transport. These areas were recently identified by an EU study as having the highest environmental impact.

## Research Questions

The key questions that the project will seek to address are:

1. How can communities be **engaged and motivated to participate** in developing strategies, actions and activities at the community level in relation to key sustainability issues such as energy, food the home and transport? What role can skills and knowledge transfer play in facilitating this process?
2. What **demands** are likely to be made on the existing skills and knowledge base of people and organisations, to make progress towards sustainability? How can these demands be identified, managed and effectively addressed?
3. How can communities **identify** their current patterns of skills and knowledge base in relation to addressing key specific sustainability issues? How can communities be **best supported** to ask the right questions to determine these patterns, their future requirements, and the right ways to fulfil those needs?
4. To what extent can a 'modelled approach' be used by local communities to assess their existing skills and knowledge base, and identify future needs/requirements? How can a model assist communities to identify these patterns and likely responses in order to address sustainability issues/concerns? Can communities be supported to become more sustainable through upskilling, training, education and knowledge transfer through the use of a model and associated guidance?

## Research Strategy

The project draws upon a range of different empirical methods and compliments new research initiatives with existing BRASS outputs. It will be designed to build upon and add value to existing research and integrate this with new thinking, ideas and knowledge in the development of the skills and practices required for the pursuit of more sustainable communities. This is being taken forward, primarily, through the use of a case study approach.

A key innovation of the project includes the creation of a **virtual community** which provides a snapshot of the key characteristics and sustainability issues/concerns that are likely to exist in English communities. The virtual community will allow the research team to highlight a number of issues that communities consider important in terms of addressing sustainability. Key phases in the development of the 'virtual community' will include a literature review, case study analysis and key stakeholder interviews.

The knowledge and understanding gained from the development of the virtual community will be used to develop a new **model focused on skills for sustainability**. This model will be developed for communities in such a way that it will enable them to explore existing data and information specific to their own case, in order that they can then determine for themselves:

- Current patterns of sustainability and objectives for future sustainability in relation to the four areas (energy, food, the home and transport)
- Gaps in skills, education and knowledge, engagement and leadership
- Needs for increasing existing skills and training
- The most effective interventions and routes to obtain and provide training and education for sustainability



As part of the process of identifying the most effective and relevant approaches, this stage of the research will also be supported by a series of interviews with key individuals and community stakeholder groups. Once developed, the model will be piloted in one selected community and if necessary, revised accordingly. Data generated from this research will be tested against the model to provide information and guidance on specific areas of intervention and action needed across the four areas. The focus will remain on enhancing skills, training and knowledge transfer. This process will provide lessons on how to promote sustainable consumption practices. The findings will be used to produce '**Guidance for Communities**' providing details of the framework, tools and techniques and case studies.

## Consultation and dissemination: expected outputs

A series of activities will be undertaken and outputs produced to ensure use of results and recommendations by relevant target groups (community, policy makers and other relevant stakeholders). Key outputs include the interactive on-line virtual community and the model focused on skills for sustainability with 'guidance for communities' providing details of how to use the model. Other planned outputs include policy briefings and media outputs. The project results will also be disseminated to relevant scientific audiences through presentations at conferences, submission of articles to relevant scientific journals and contributions to scientific journals. The findings from this project will be made available on the project website at:

[www.brass.cf.ac.uk/projects/Sustainable\\_Consumption\\_and\\_Production--Sustainable\\_Communities.html](http://www.brass.cf.ac.uk/projects/Sustainable_Consumption_and_Production--Sustainable_Communities.html)

**For further information** on this project;  
**contact:** Dr Julie Newton, Lead Researcher  
**Email:** newtonj2@cf.ac.uk;  
**Tel:** 02920 876562  
**Web:** [www.brass.cf.ac.uk](http://www.brass.cf.ac.uk)