



Addressing Citizens' Skills Gaps

SEEDS Workpackage 4
Regio Groningen Assen



Regio Groningen-Assen 2030
nationaalstedelijk netwerk

The Interreg IVB
North Sea Region
Programme

*Investing in the future by working together
for a sustainable and competitive region*



European Union
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Report compiled by **Hero Havenga de Poel** and **Wian Stientra**, RGA, with the help of the SEEDS Partners

Introduction

This report is final report of Working Group 4 of the SEEDS project. SEEDS is a pan-European project, funded by the European Union through the INTERREG IVB North Sea programme. It has partners from six countries in Europe, but the issue on which SEEDS focussed is of importance far beyond, as witnessed by the numerous publications on the issue all over the world.

Aims

SEEDS knew that the blight of abandoned land and buildings had serious negative effects on local economy and growth, and on community wealth and well-being. Thus the main aim of SEEDS was to promote the temporary re-use of vacant land and buildings as an important and legitimate part of longer-term planning and development, and as a tool for stimulating regeneration and sustainability at local, national and European levels.

Objectives

SEEDS has been working towards promoting a durable double legacy of improved planning policies that are flexible enough to allow temporary re-use, and transferable re-use strategies. These policies and strategies were tested through on-the-ground examples in a range of countries. This could only be achieved by establishing dynamic partnerships between developers, owners, planners, commerce chambers and citizens. The recommendations of SEEDS are being promoted across the North Sea Region (NSR) through its Re-use Charter. Transnational results needed local impacts as a cornerstone in order to be sustainable. Thus SEEDS used temporary re-use as a catalyst for local investment and skills development opportunities for local people through small and medium enterprises, local entrepreneurs, and start-ups.

SEEDS has ambitious goals. The project understood that if its impact was to continue to resonate, mobilisation such as this must carry on beyond its lifetime. Building on the networks and partnerships developed through SEEDS, the project intended to leave a lasting legacy. This legacy will strive to propose, promote and lobby for new co-ordinated spatial planning policies and frameworks, and ensure short-term re-use becomes an important and accepted aspect of long-term planning, development and local economic growth.

In order to manage the work of this Interreg IVB project SEEDS -dealing with temporary use of buildings and land - five Workpackages were formulated. This is report is the work of Workpackage 4, which aimed to deliver transnational spatial planning policy on land re-use, by developing, transferring and mainstreaming proven strategies.

Methodology

This Workpackage deals with addressing citizens' skills gaps, in order to allow for economic growth to be fulfilled through re-use. This is an important element of SEEDS project's overall goals.

In order to find these answers, a questionnaire was published through the internet (see the Appendix). There were respondents from all over the SEEDS partnership map, from the Netherlands, the UK and also from Sweden. This made the geographical reach quite a bit larger than just one part of Europe.

We learnt many things from the questionnaire, and naturally our first questions were about the project name and its place and country. The answers were supplied by:

1. Open Lab Ebbinge, Groningen, the Netherlands
2. Mien Toentje, Groningen, the Netherlands
3. Living with Nature, Sheffield, United Kingdom
4. Sheaf/Porter Pocket Park, Sheffield, United Kingdom
5. Skansberget-Linnéstaden, Gothenburg, Sweden
6. Bunkeberget, Gothenburg, Sweden
7. Skansbergets Odlarförening, Gothenburg, Sweden

We will now discuss the questions one by one, with the responses that followed. At the end, the main findings will be discussed.

If you are a community leader, a volunteer, a participant, a local resident affected by or involved in a re-use project, please describe any skills you have learnt as a result.

The Open Lab Ebbinge considered itself as an organisation that has seized an opportunity to use the temporary space that was available on the derelict plot in that area in the inner-city of Groningen. It offered the perfect chance for a company to branch out into a different industry, namely the hospitality industry. It has added very important skills and made the business more resilient and less dependent on one industry.

For the Mien Toentje project, the first skill they gained was 'patience'. That patience was needed to learn to talk and walk like 'they' (government, corporations etc.) do. It is a very important skill to be able to place yourself in 'their' world of thinking and trigger them to run for your idea, almost as if it's their own. Communication skills, but also persistence, humour, and sometimes having a big mouth are important. Believing in your story and ideas is important, in order to sell them. It is also important to make a plan that helps others as well. In Mien Toentje's case, not only their own organisation but the entire neighbourhood (including the students) and the local government has profited and learnt from their activities.

Living with Nature mentioned that it has learnt how much diversity there can be in communities and also that what works for one won't necessarily will in another. Also that it takes time to build trust and capacity within communities.

Sheaf/ Porter Pocket Park learnt three things, namely:

1. Good communication skills - the importance of using clear and non-technical language during consultations and meetings with local people, businesses etc.
2. Patience! It takes time for people to adapt to the prospect of change. It is important to give plenty of clear information over a period of time to help people adjust and welcome an idea.
3. Not all people will be supportive of a scheme, no matter how 'good' the scheme is deemed to be by the majority. Empathy skills and knowing how to handle confrontation and complaints are useful.

The project Skansberget-Linnéstaden learned about the communication between different parts in the city, and how much room there is for improvement.

From Bunkeberget we discovered that the learning effect has been quite limited, because stakeholders (mainly volunteers, but also local government officials) were involved only for short bouts of time.

The Skansberget Odlafrörening gained many practical skills, for example on pest control with rats. To grow vegetables in such an environment is very difficult, but they learnt to manage. In addition to this, despite its reputation, the neighbourhood is friendly and that constructive work can take place, without too much effort.



How were these skills acquired? Was it learning by doing, or by working alongside experts, or did you take part in a course, or was it some other way?

Open Lab Ebbinge made a point of saying that it learnt exclusively by doing exclusively, making up the plans as they went along.

Mien Toentje mentioned that most of the time it was learning by doing, just by seeing and feeling what is right. Also, it has been important to speak to people who could contribute something in one way or another, adding to the collective experience.

At Living with Nature, the learning through experience part counted very much. This was almost the same for a different English project, namely for the Sheaf/Porter Brook case. They

mentioned that these skills were learned mainly by 'doing' this type of work over a number of years and also by talking to other people who already have this experience.

Skansbergets Odlaresörening said that they have been exchanging experiences with each other, among each other. Some know more than others.

From the answers to this question, learning by doing seems to be a common element and something that should not be overlooked as an experience for others wishing to work on social skills gaps and/or temporary use.

If you don't feel you learnt anything, what would you have liked to have learnt from your involvement?

There were no real answers to this question. The Open Lab Ebbinge mentioned that the learning process is part of the journey they want to take, learning as you go along.

The other respondents just left this question empty or replied that they were happy with what they had learnt.

Think about the skills you have learnt - based on this, would you have liked the project to have been done differently?

The Ebbinge Open Lab responded that all went well, and that a lot of fun was had. Based on that, there was no need to change anything.

Mien Toentje discussed that they loved all the work that other initiatives undertook in parallel (for example the Sugar Factory, or the efforts of the Social Department of Groningen). Mien Toentje spoke of 'synchronicity', and that it offered many opportunities for mutual enhancement of the individual projects, creating interesting synergies.

Living with Nature mentioned that it would probably have been good to deliver the project over a longer period, such as five years instead of three. Some things and processes just take a lot of time, and this would have resulted in a higher quality project and stronger communities. This was an interesting comment, and it made us consider also to include such projects in an earlier stage for next projects, i.e. right at the beginning instead of only halfway.

Skansberget/Linnéstaden mentioned that they would have liked to have been less finance driven and been able to work more with the best interest of the area in mind.

For Skansbergets Odlaresörening, they were quite certain that nothing would need to have changed and therefore their response was: a resounding no.

All the other respondents did not provide any answer to this question.

What social effects did you observe? For example, did the community become more pleasant to live in because more people know each other, or perhaps people became more involved and felt more empowered. Please be as specific and concrete as possible. Feel free to send along any links to websites if you can do so.

For the Open Lab Ebbinge, it meant people started to get to know the place, and events were organised with this in mind, for example bands and DJs on every Sunday, as well as barbecues, to a set programme. This is similar to what other projects have done, in particular Living with Nature.

Mien Toentje reported many social effects through starting their vegetable garden. The land is on a lot of about 3000m² owned by a housing company which was hit by the building crisis. The land was donated for free for the next couple of years. This usage in turn spurred on local inhabitants to become more active, on another plot of unused land. It was turned into a real 'backyard', with more vegetable plots, a football field, a playground and even a dog field

All this resulted in a more pleasant environment to live and play, with more green, edible surroundings and more interaction between the citizens. Also, there was more understanding for the financially weak, by creating a transparent and local food chain, which includes more (even locally sourced) vegetables, fresh fruit and herbs. The entire area has been uplifted. The results have been documented on www.toentje.nl.

The Sheaf/Porter Brook has noted stronger and greater trust within the community. A number of people have been heavily involved and have learnt and developed a lot as individuals but for the benefit of their communities. Currently the project is working on building on the results of other projects such as the Nursery Street Pocket Park and the Flood Defence project, where it is noted that:

1. the area is a more pleasant place to live because of this new green space
2. the space is used by lots of different people at different times - local residents, office workers at lunchtime.
3. the community has a defined area that is 'theirs' and which they can be proud of.

Skarberget-Linnéstaden points out that the impact probably could have been increased by working to a more fixed schedule.

Bunketberget points out that the hill now has seating and bins in one colour, making a definite difference. There are a few tables and play things as well, suggesting to people that you can spend some time there. Such small measures add a lot of positivity to the area and really liven things up.

Skansbergets Odlaresörening reports better cohesion in the neighbourhood and has become a meeting point for everybody who visits the area. This is also documented through the website www.skansodling.se, which has many pictures of community events happening there.



What economic effects have you noted? Are there any new businesses, have any new jobs been created? Have people found themselves better able to find work or training as a results of being involved in this project? You don't need to express the effect in numbers, but if you can do so, it would be great!

Bert-Jan Bodewes remarked that he could fulfil the tasks of making the open space that is called the Ebbing Quarter (formerly the Ciboga field) more well known, meaning city development (predominantly housing) was more easily possible after he leaves (currently estimated 2020 or so). The side effect for Bert-Jan Bodewes is that he could start operating a café, which has been good business so far.

For Mien Toentje, they remarked that right now they are working with thirty volunteers and two coordinators, with the volunteers from all walks of life. With exchange of knowledge, information, network and wisdom they help each other! There is also a small-scale communal kitchen, for which Mien Toentje delivers fresh food. Also, Mien Toentje is starting a small shop and possibly also a restaurant, which will enable people to gain entrepreneurial skills. This is to be done together with a developer for temporary use (Carex - www.carex.nl), helping it to run better as a business. The spin-off from the local restaurant

is expected to be bigger even than just this, because it will enable the organisation to grow. It is anticipated the size of the gardens will triple and thus increase the net effects. They are aiming to create approximately 40 new jobs as a result.

The Living with Nature project has noted some limited economic effects, among the volunteers themselves. Their increase in confidence and skills from being involved with the projects has landed them jobs. With the skills they acquired they found it a lot easier to access the labour market, providing a worthy workforce for local businesses. Although the project itself labels these effects as limited, it provides much more than many projects that have been set up especially to improve stakeholder access to the labour market.

At the Sheaf/Porter Pocket Park, the biggest benefits are seen at local shops. They benefit from people using the park, for example sandwich shops, newsagents and other small businesses. Their business has

improved from the increased access to the park. Its unique features attracts special interest groups, too, adding to the enhanced economic activity in the area, because it brings in people from outside the immediate vicinity. At a very local level, the park offers possibilities for community events, providing a central space and a recognisable destination.

The Swedish project Skansbergets Odlaforening does not know of any positive economic effects; responses from other projects were not received.

What other (positive or negative) effects do you know of?

Not everybody responded to this question.

Mien Toentje did however and described as positive effects the good vibe for the city and an example of thinking in a different way. This yields many positive reactions, from other cities in the Netherlands, too. On the negative side, imitation is part of the price of success, along with people trying to latch on to the success of Mien Toentje without actually being part of it.

Sheaf/Porter Pocket Park noted that over time the improvements made to the site should result in a general economic uplift of the area especially where improvements to housing stock are also taking place. Moreover, the park gives a local focus for the community and has become part of their local identity as a part of Sheffield.

The other projects did not list anything.

Thinking about acquiring skills, accessing training or work, or any other local impact arising from the project, do you have any further comments for us to consider? Please leave your contact details if you want us to get back in touch with you.

Jos Meijers of Toentje commented that the approach that they have been taking can be an example of city planning. “We’re integrating small businesses, food and play in a community in collaboration with local government, and giving citizens a say in local planning”. Furthermore, he pointed to the involvement of creative minds, like designers, artists and general pioneers. With the link to governments, there is a connectedness to all involved parties so everybody can work as they should.

Another comment came from Sweden, where the project Skansberget-Linnestaden said that EU-funded projects are often very finance-driven with continuity difficult to maintain after the funding period draws to a close and the project effectively abandoned. They would like to see more continued responsibility.

Living with Nature in Sheffield spoke about engaging with children and young people, and that through direct engagement with them the next generation would have a better appreciation of the value of community-led green space regeneration.



Main Findings

In analysing all the responses, and taking into account the knowledge we have built up of the pilot projects through visiting them, it is clear that much of the decision making is based on hard data, and that the social effects are often not considered.

These social effects are also notoriously difficult to quantify and therefore difficult to measure. That also means, unfortunately, they are unlikely to be used as policy indicators.

However, such social effects are very important for the overall liveability of an area, either cities or rural areas. The responses clearly indicate a greater sense of cohesion in those areas that have been enjoying temporary projects, and this must be a great encouragement to all for further stimulation of temporary use.

Among the skills learnt are communication (which is a recurring theme throughout the project), valuing diversity and also practical skills. All these skills are important citizen skills and contribute to better levels of social cohesion. From the developers'/owners' perspective, communication is probably also an important point in drawing in more of the local inhabitants and creating a more attractive proposition.

In achieving new skills, all the respondents noted that they were all acquired in practical ways and through learning by doing. This makes us aware that ample space should be allowed for experimentation, and that it is not formal learning that is needed; rather that informal (and unstructured) knowledge acquisition is preferred. Learning by doing is a very important aspect of bridging the social gaps, which allows everybody to acquire skills at his/her own pace and in his/her own manner.

This point is strengthened by the responses to the question as to what people would have liked to have learnt. There were almost no responses here, pointing again to knowledge acquisition is on an as-is-needed basis

and not with a pre-set curriculum. Changes are not really needed in acquiring such knowledge; it is important to create an atmosphere conducive for learning, and for closing social gaps.

The respondents noted many social effects, some about the entire operation of a small business such as for the Mien Toentje project, others on how to make an area more well-known (Open Lab Ebbinge). In such cases, social and financial skills often go hand in hand. A greater trust can also be a social effect (noted in the UK), as well as how to make an area an attractive proposition for people to spend time in that area. All in all, the skills have resulted in a more pleasant environment to live and play, with more interaction between the citizens.

The main thing that was noted about the economic effects is that they are almost an unexpected bonus of a project, and projects do not seem to be set up primarily to achieve such economic goals. But, the economic effects have been visible and have been wide-ranging and very diverse in our cases. They run from running a viable business to creating and preparing volunteers for paid jobs. Their increased skills and confidence were never why the project started in the first place, yet they added a big economic effect to the neighbourhood, just like sandwich shops that have started to prosper after visitors were drawn through the area.

It would seem that businesses with a low barrier to entrance (such as cafés, tourism) are the ones to profit the most in the short term, followed by other economic activities (housing development for example) in the long run. Such economic development is not predictable, yet it could serve others involved in such projects. A rule in this case is that by making an area attractive it will draw people in, and those crowds of people create economic value. These effects have quite a lot of spillover into neighbouring areas.

A last thought that came through the questionnaire, is that continuity is important. It is important to involve many generations in a project, project, so the next generation can continue to carry the torch begun by the preceding one. It is also important to try to find continuity in funding streams, so projects can remain solvent and work on doing what they do best: building bridges and creating additional economic value, often in areas where there is very little. This point also came out in the questions on the skills learnt and the concluding comments of respondents, that is to say, continuous involvement (in money, but also in kind) is very important. Social skills gaps don't respond very well to the short time scales of projects. They need plenty of time to ripen and come to fruition. From the research, it is clear that SEEDS has contributed to the decrease of any social gaps, by letting people develop skills and knowledge that they didn't have before hand. Also, economic growth is apparent in all cases that have been contributing to this research project. Yet again, this points to the versatility of temporary use projects and the many uses that it can have.

Skills gaps in the field of employment, social cohesion, access to healthy food, starting and running a small business as well as communication are all important skills gaps that have been addressed and solved through the temporary projects that have been studied.



Appendix 1: Questionnaire as published online

SEEDS - Addressing citizens' skills gaps

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1yzv2gRS13i1xi...>

Which city and country is it based in?

Learning, effects and impact.

In temporary projects, a great deal of learning is involved. We have already learnt a lot about what the SEEDS partners and organisations have learnt. In this case, we are particularly interested in finding out what the involved citizens have learned and what the result was on the local economy. Of course, you may have partners in your projects that have acquired knowledge, too.

If you are a community leader, a volunteer, a participant, a local resident affected by or involved in a re-use project, please describe any skills you have learnt as a result.

How were these skills acquired? Was it learning by doing, or by working alongside experts, or did you take part in a course, or was it some other way?

If you don't feel you learnt anything, what would you have like to have learnt from your involvement?

Thinking about the skills you have learnt - based on this, would you have liked the project to have been done differently?

Effects and impact

Temporary projects often have a greater effect and impact than originally foreseen. Finding a solution for an empty building or an empty piece of land can very well be the start of a more substantial project, with profound impact.

Sometimes economic impact can also be noted, for example employment, new businesses, increased prices in property and so on.

The next two questions deal with these effects.

What social effects did you observe? For example, did the community become more pleasant to live in because more people know each other, or perhaps people became more involved and felt more empowered. Please be as specific and concrete as possible. Feel free to send along any links to websites if you can do so.

What economic effects have you noted? Are there any new businesses, have any new jobs been created? Have people found themselves better able to find work or training as a results of being involved in this project? You don't need to express the effect in numbers, but if you can do so, it would be great!

What other (positive or negative) effects do you know of?

Are there any other (positive or negative) effects that you would consider relevant?

Thinking about acquiring skills, accessing training or work, or any other local impact arising from the project, do you have any further comments for us to consider? Please leave your contact details if you want us to get back in touch with you.



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Lead partner: South Yorkshire Forest Partnership UK

Sheffield City Council
E: team@syforest.co.uk
T: +44 (0)114 257 1199

Emma Johansson

Goeteborg Stad SE
E: emma.johansson@ponf.goteborg.se
T: +46 (0)31 365 58 22

Project Manager: Sara Parratt-Halbert

South Yorkshire Forest Partnership UK
E: sara.parratt-halbert@syforest.co.uk
T: +44 (0)114 257 1199

Ulrich Schenck

Lawaetz Foundation DE
E: schenck@lawaetz.de
T: +49 (0)40 3999 360

Director: Tom Wild

South Yorkshire Forest Partnership UK
E: tom.wild@syforest.co.uk
T: +44 (0)114 257 1199

Bettina Lamm

University of Copenhagen DK
E: bela@life.ku.dk
T: +45 (0)3533 1796

Gerda Roeleveld

Deltares NL
E: gerda.roeleveld@deltares.nl
T: +31 (0)88 335 77 09

John Henneberry

University of Sheffield UK
E: j.henneberry@sheffield.ac.uk
T: +44 (0)114 222 6911

Hero Havenga de Poel

Regio Groningen Assen NL
E: havenga@regiogroningenassen.nl
T: +31 (0)50 316 4289

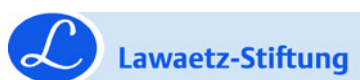
Sabine Gheysen

VLM BE
E: sabine.gheysen@vlm.be
T: +32(0)50 45 81 27



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Göteborg**

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