'Sense of place' is also significant in the creation of sustainable communities. Place making is already a key notion in the sustainable communities skills policy agenda. However, place is not a fixed, stable, single location, but the sum of its social relations – it is different things for different people. Many research respondents prioritised emotional values and attachments to local places and local people, over formal skills sets. This suggests that, **in determining how best to support skills and knowledge for sustainable communities, simultaneous acknowledgement must always be given to the specific social, environmental and economic conditions of each local community.** In order to do this we need to move beyond 'one size fits all' policy approaches, which are based on either the attainment of universal skills sets, or understandings of 'place' as something which is coherent and fixed.

Springhill Co-housing

Stroud Valleys Car Club

Community Land Trusts and affordable housing

Stroud Community Supported Agriculture

This research is one of 11 research projects commissioned from Universities across the UK, under the ESRC/HCA Academy Joint Targeted Initiative on Skills and Knowledge for Sustainable Communities.

To see how the HCA Academy is taking forward lessons from the research, visit:

http://www.HCAacademy.co.uk/

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Further details of projects, contacts and associated briefing papers can be found at:

http://gs.strath.ac.uk/suscoms

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Homes & Communities ACADEMY

Motivating and Supporting Skills, Knowledge & Learning for Sustainable Communities

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The Centre for Business Relationships Accountability, Sustainability & Society

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Processes of learning are as important as skills

Key Policy Implications

- ➢ Local level development of skills and knowledge for sustainability is essential
- ➢ Skills and knowledge for sustainable communities need to be situated in the everyday lives of people, involving the right combination of **time, people,** and **place**
- ➢ 'Sense of place' is significant in the creation of sustainable communities and in supporting skills and knowledge for sustainable communities
- ➢ Trainers and professional bodies need to create opportunities and support for situated learning on sustainability
- ➢ Policy makers need to incorporate a more contextualised understanding of time and people in place
- ➢ Support should be made available to assist communities build confidence and motivation to become involved and engaged in sustainability initiatives

Full results can be found at: http://www.brass.cf.ac.uk/projects/Sustainable_Lifestyles_and_Communities/sustainable-lifestyles--Sustainable-Communities.html

Key Words

■ Skills ■ Place ■ Situated Learning ■ Networks ■ Social Capital ■ Community Engagement

Background

A lack of appropriate skills and understanding of what skills are necessary has been highlighted as an obstacle to achieving sustainable communities. The Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society (BRASS) set out to examine the role of skills and knowledge in local sustainability initiatives.

Approach

The researchers used a dual strategy. The first stage involved revisiting eight existing case studies exploring various aspects of sustainability. The second stage involved undertaking new research exploring various sustainability initiatives in Stroud in Gloucestershire, resulting in four additional case studies.

TOPICS	CASE STUDIES FROM STROUD	OTHER CASE STUDIES
Food	Community Supported Agriculture	Sustainable Food Procurement in Ayrshire Schools
Housing/Home	Community Land Trusts and Affordable Housing	Cardiff Household Recycling Scheme
	Springhill Co-housing	Social Enterprises and Bridging the Digital & Skills Divide – Free Geek (Portland, USA)
Transport/Energy	Stroud Valleys Car Club	The Brazilian Biodiesel Programme
		Iceland's Hydrogen Experiment (Reykjavik, Iceland)
Community engagement		Forestry for People – Abriachan Community Woodlands
		Ellon Global Footprint Project: using ecofootprints to engage communities
		'Going for Green' – Educating and Engaging Communities in Sustainable Lifestyle Changes (Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales)

Stroud was chosen as the focus for new case study work because it displayed a number of features experienced by many semi-rural communities (i.e. industrial heritage and increasing ageing population) and because of its established reputation for a range of alternative sustainability initiatives.

Fieldwork extended over three months, and included in-depth interviews, participant observation and focus groups to discuss emerging research findings, allowing the researchers to test a skills and knowledge model developed and consolidated from analysis of the 12 case studies and relevant literature. The researchers built a 'virtual community' on-line that gives access to case study material on sustainability focused on the themes of food, transport, energy, home and community engagement. Community Guidance will be issued to assist communities to reflect on their own levels of skills and knowledge in the context of their own particular settings.

In undertaking the research, the team have also produced a substantial review of literature on sustainable communities, skills and local eco-economies, which are available online.

Findings

Policy interventions have tended to be concerned with identifying 'skills sets' for sustainable communities. These skills sets are considered universal and to be attained through formal learning. Skills and knowledge cannot be un-problematically imported from elsewhere through formal education channels alone. By shifting the emphasis from skills sets to *processes of learning*, the influence of local circumstance in the creation of local skills and knowledge become visible. Acknowledgement of local circumstance is also important because of the complex linkages which exist between sustainable communities and the everyday lives of people in place. Here, these factors are characterised as involving the right combinations of *time, people* and *place*.

The skills and knowledge debate needs to be much more closely related to both the process of creating sustainable communities, and the everyday lives of people in place. The development of skills and knowledge for sustainable communities has to happen at a local level. Furthermore, the process of learning is highly significant. Skills and knowledges cannot simply be imported from elsewhere through formal education channels alone. The transfer of skills and knowledge is dependent upon **'learning by doing'** and **'learning by seeing'**.

A 'situated learning' approach recognises the importance of individual learners and the social context in which learning took place. In Stroud, respondents reported that direct involvement in projects could not easily be separated from learning about sustainability and personal values. Knowledge was not acquired first, then later applied. 'Understanding sustainability' and 'getting involved' reinforced each other. There was an individual and social learning process taking place.

> What acts as a potential barrier here then, is not a lack of skills, but rather, the confidence and motivation to become involved

Time has been a neglected issue in the context of sustainable communities. Yet, time management proved to be a key issue in relation to the practical accomplishment of how people manage their everyday lives in the context of sustainability initiatives. The times and places at which sustainability initiatives create opportunities for participation have the potential to link them into people's everyday lives, or generate barriers to inclusion. For example, daytime participation may suit those who are not working or in part-time/flexible employment, but be a barrier to others. Also significant is how people actually talk about time, often how they prioritise time in the context of their everyday lives. For example, talking about how time spent on sustainability initiatives competes with time available for paid employment or family.

The importance of *people* with different skill sets and lived experiences regularly coming together in one place was another significant feature of the research. Many respondents identified the

> The importance of bringing people *together* with different skills sets and lived experiences was a significant feature in all of the case study initiatives.

relationships and local networks between community members as being more important for sustainability initiatives than individual skills. These relationships enable ideas and information on sustainability to be effectively transferred. The regular face-to-face contact that everyday community life affords plays an important role in this process of continued knowledge transfer.