



# Skills for Sustainable Development: necessary but not sufficient?

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Malcolm Rigg

Policy Studies Institute



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Policy Studies Institute

# Sustainable Development commitment

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*The European Union is firmly committed to sustainable development.*

- *It is a key principle of all its policies and actions*
- *aims to create a society ... based on freedom, democracy and respect for fundamental rights*
- *fostering equality of opportunity and solidarity within and between generations*
- *It will work for the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth ... a highly competitive social market economy ... and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment.”*
  - *Declaration on Guiding Principles, 2005*

# Balancing diverse and often conflicting issues

## ■ *ECONOMIC*

- *How do we generate wealth?*

## ■ *SOCIAL*

- *How can we improve the quality of life especially for those living in poverty?*

## ■ *ENVIRONMENTAL*

- *How can we reduce our greenhouse gas emissions?*
- *How can we conserve the environment?*
- *How can we minimise the depletion of natural resources?*

## ■ *INTERGENERATIONAL*

- *How do we balance "needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."*

# Values – UN Millenium

- *Freedom from hunger, violence, oppression & injustice*
- *Democratic and participatory governance*
- *Equality and Equal rights*
- *Respect for diversity of belief, culture and language*
- *Natural resources managed in accordance with SD*
- *Current unsustainable practices to change*
- *Shared responsibility for managing worldwide development*

# Complex Agenda

- *Requires effective international and regional agreements*
- *Skills agenda needs to evolve in response to challenges*
- *need to ensure society has capability to address and agree how to proceed in face of differences in interests, values, development levels*
- *Context important often requiring multi-level decisions*

# Major disagreements in progressing SD agenda

- *Dominant values of Western societies include*
  - competitive individualism
  - material success
- *Differences reflect differences in interests, especially economic ones*

# Private enterprise perspectives

- *SD in its broadest conception can sit uncomfortably with private enterprise*
  - poverty reduction off private sector agenda
  - historically depletion of natural resources treated as cost to society not business.
  - private enterprise more likely to favour some actions rather than others
    - carbon capture rather than fossil fuel reduction
  - Importance of broad SD agenda is its focus on *unintended consequences* of actions for society as a whole

# Learning and skills

- *Widely acknowledged that learning does not or should not take place outside context of values*
- *According to OECD, sustainable development depends “critically on the competencies of all of our population – with competencies understood to cover knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.” (OECD Education Ministers)*
- *UK government “All learners will develop the skills, knowledge and value base to be active citizens in creating a more sustainable society” (DfES, 2002)*

# UK government conceptualisation of Sustainable Development

<b>O U T C O M E S</b>	<b>Living Within Environmental Limits</b>	<b>Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society</b>	
<b>D R I V E R S</b>	<b>Achieving a Sustainable Economy</b> Prosperity but environmental and social costs fall on perpetrators (polluter pays)	<b>Using Sound Science Responsibly</b> Policy based on strong scientific evidence	<b>Promoting Good Governance</b> Promoting participative systems of governance in all levels of society

## *Role of Good Governance*

- to promote and support democratic decision-making about SD issues (using sound science)
- Decisions arise at all levels of society
- Core skills required are generic rather than specific

# 'Skills for Sustainable Communities'

- *Range of skills needed to deliver sustainable communities*
- *generic skills and knowledge make the difference*
  - ability to create a vision
  - leadership to achieve buy-in
  - understanding
    - sustainable development
    - economics of development
    - democratic processes
- *'core' occupations –spend professional time in planning, delivering and maintaining sustainable communities*
  - built environment professionals – planners, architects, urban designers
  - decision makers and influencers – local, regional and central government, developers and investors, voluntary and community workers

# Learning environment

- *“generic skills must be practised...by working in a variety of projects... within multi-disciplinary teams...with people who already demonstrate some or all of the skills.”*
- *Embodied learning “in acquiring dispositions, skills and attitudes for learning how to learn, and how to negotiate the values issues and dilemmas of the real world.”*

# Skills classification

- *strategic and leadership skills: initiating and promoting change*
- *process skills: enabling change*
- *practical skills: delivering change*

○ Turok & Taylor

# Key role of Professionals

- *Fundamental role in the process*
- *but “there is a challenge to the ethos of professionals working in separate disciplines and institutions, and especially to any suggestion that specialists know what is best for local communities... there are demands for public bodies and experts to be more responsive ... to other views and interests.”*

# Professional Practice for Sustainable Development Initiative PP4SD

- *working with 14 professional institutions to help members improve capacity to support SD*
  - Building Services
  - Research and Information services
  - Water and Environmental Management
  - Purchasing and Supply
  - Energy and Waste
  - Chemical, Civil and Mechanical Engineers
  - Environmental Scientists
  - Architects and Surveyors
  - Planning

# The PP4SD Framework

- *Materials should not exceed the environment's capacity to disperse, absorb, recycle or otherwise neutralise harmful effects to humans and the environment*
- *Biological diversity and ecosystems should not be endangered*
- *A healthy economy which accurately represents the value of natural, human, social and manufactured capital*
- *Skills, knowledge should be developed and deployed to optimum effect*
- *Social progress and justice should recognise needs of all*
- *Must be equity for future generations*
- *Structures and institutions should promote stewardship of natural resources and the development of people*

# PP4SD Training materials

- *Based on systems thinking*
- *“Systems provides ... ideas, tools and methods for engaging with and improving complex situations*
- *holistic approach emphasising connections between issues and components*
- *simplifies complexity by thinking at a greater level of abstraction or generality*
- *fosters multiple perspectives*
- *assumes that insights generated will shift established ways of thinking*
- *Systems most useful where single perspectives fail”*

# Recommendations for key professional bodies

## ■ *Governance*

- become leaders for sustainability
- culture change within profession

## ■ *Policy*

- make SD a priority
- set minimum professional competency standards

## ■ *Practice*

- Take lead on CPD and create SD framework to guide actions
- guidance on integrating SD principles
  - Are new skills required?
- codes developed for sustainable practice

## ■ *Next steps*

- encourage and support skills for systems thinking
- encourage cultural changes that favour sustainability
- promote communication skills

# Conclusions

- *Long way to go in developing generic skills & values*
- *Considerable conflicts of values and interests*
- *Science and participative democracy can be conflict*
- *Interdisciplinary training and education still rare*
- *Participative decision-making is time & resource intensive*
- *Time is short!*
- *Impacts of climate change are potentially great*
- *Could quickly move from Living Within Environmental Limits to Living with the Consequences of Environmental Change*
- *A much more challenging and unpredictable agenda!*

