



European Commission



Identification, Dissemination and Exchange of good practice in
Local Employment development and promoting better governance

Maximising Employment Potential: local approaches to lifelong learning

The Fifth Thematic report of the IDELE Project

based on an international seminar on 21-22 April 2005 in Thessaloniki, Greece



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Introduction

IDELE is a three year project operated by ECOTEC on behalf of the European Commission. It involves the:

Identification
Dissemination and
Exchange of good practice in
Local
Employment Development.

Each year, IDELE focuses on four themes in local employment development and identifies good practice examples from which key lessons can be learnt. These will be of interest to:

- Policymakers at all levels;
- Practitioners involved in local employment development;
- Other local stakeholders; and
- Academics and researchers.

Previous IDELE reports have focused on examining local employment development in the context of particular geographic spaces – urban-industrial areas, large metropolitan cities, rural areas as well as free standing and ex-urban places.¹ This Fifth Thematic Summary, departs from this geographic focus and takes a thematic approach, looking at local employment development from the perspective of lifelong learning. In particular it analyses how local approaches to lifelong learning can maximise employment potential.

This fifth Thematic Summary is based on a report which draws on the experience of eight good practice case studies from across the European Union (EU). These are used to provide insight into how best to use local partnerships on lifelong learning to develop and maintain employment in a locality, as well as practical advice for both policy-makers and practitioners.

Twelve international IDELE seminars and reports provide a platform for policy-makers and project promoters to share a dialogue about how the local approach can make a difference. This thematic report reflects the outcomes of the fifth IDELE seminar held on 21-22 April 2005 in Thessaloniki, Greece.

¹ These reports are available from the IDELE website www.ecotec.com/idele.

Rationale behind IDELE

IDELE is a key element of the European Commission's activity to encourage the exchange of good practice and networking in local employment development (LED). The local level has been recognised in EU policy since 1984 and has since gained in importance through the Commission's White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment in 1993 and the European Employment Strategy in 1997. While policies at other levels – macro-economic, structural and regional/sectoral – continued to address the broader competitiveness and cohesion agenda at the level of the economic system as a whole, a policy that proposed to use local actors to seek out local solutions had (and continues to have) strong appeal.

At the end of two decades of experimentation and significant funding both for pilot actions and under Structural Funds measures there is a need to review what has been learned and disseminate and exchange the lessons from practice. IDELE comes at an opportune moment in a more general sense, however. Local actors seem, with or without external exhortation, to be becoming more involved in trying to capture employment and development for their regions and it is important to recognise this. While the European Commission programmes have been a significant spur to action, IDELE provides an opportunity to capture learning from a much wider social movement. IDELE also has the capacity to look at how the overall aim of the EES is being achieved by actions in the wider local setting.

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Possibilities for local action

When the local approach came to play an increasing role in the policy frameworks of the EU and a number of Member States (during the 1980s and 1990s), it was chiefly envisioned as an instrument of unemployment policy and this has determined its development pathway. From the perspective of economic analysis LED is seen to work on both the supply and the demand side.

On the supply side, it offers a means to mobilise labour to adapt to new work opportunities and to acquire relevant skills by drawing the unemployed and socially excluded along 'pathways to integration' with strongly local points of entry. On the demand side, it is a means to prospect for new sources of jobs at the local level – particularly by identifying those service gaps and market failures that were unfilled by private enterprise or public provision as service demands changed faster than orthodox responses. With a re-awakening of interest in social enterprise and the social economy, another demand side option has been to stimulate alternative forms of enterprise within local communities that gave both the prospect of addressing gaps in 'proximity services' and the chance that the locally unemployed could create 'tailor-made jobs' by acting as social entrepreneurs.

Another entry point to the possibilities of action at the local level has come from the orthodox perspective of market economics and from the logic of arguments about *market failure*. Indeed, the essence of the highly influential LDEI initiative that emanated from the European Commission's Cellule de Prospective in 1996 was to position local action as an instrument to address existing and emergent market failures in a fast moving economy.



Maximising Employment Potential: local approaches to lifelong learning

The 21st century has in its early years proved to be a crucible of change. Three particular dimensions of change can be observed that began in the latter part of the last century, and in the near to medium future will have an even more profound impact on European economies: technological changes, demographic changes, and changes in life course transitions.

Technological changes are adding an additional layer of complexity to the economic system that people have to respond to. The countries of Europe experience a move away from primary production to a service/knowledge based economy. This trend had started before 2000 in the EU15 and has been very noted in the NMS over the past five years. The ability to use new technologies, as well as to update and adapt knowledge, becomes more important than ever before in the Information Society. Labour market restructuring is inevitable in the face of these changes and lifelong learning is vital for workers to keep pace.

Profound **demographic changes** are also taking place as the European population is ageing. Life expectancies are increasing as mortality rates fall and people live longer. At the same time, fertility rates are declining. The outcomes vary from country to country but overall the average age of populations is growing and the proportion of older people (50+) is rising and there is a declining proportion of population in the active age group (16-65). This also means that there is a growing number of people who are older and healthy and want to continue to learn and be active. Lifelong learning is again a vital instrument in addressing demographic change.

The impact of migration – both within countries and between them: the European population is becoming more mobile, and there is increasing movement into the EU of those seeking work from beyond the existing borders. The Schengen agreement and instruments such as EURES are helping mobility within the EU. Despite the restrictions placed on migration from the New Member States in the early years of accession, such movement is increasing. Migration from outside the EU remains a focus for strongly polarised political views but has nevertheless been ever more influential as a counterweight to the ageing process in some of the major cities and growth regions of the EU.

Lastly, there is increasing change **in individual and family lifecycles** implying that learning can no longer be an activity that only happens in school and college in the period before work begins and needs to be pursued throughout the life course, as individuals:

- Delay family formation;
- Spend longer in formal education, often involving periods spent at different institutions, sometimes in different countries, and increasingly involving periods of work experience;
- Transit from education to work and back again more often;
- Mix caring and working with formal and informal learning;
- Anticipate retirement;
- Take longer to transit from work to retirement etc.

The list is far from exhaustive but demonstrates the complexity of the education, work, income, family, caring, and retirement combinations that confront people throughout the EU currently and into the foreseeable future.



These turbulent conditions are not only felt nationally and regionally but also, and in many cases most acutely, at the local level. Some localities will be carried along by these processes and derive benefit from them. Some will have their economies swept away by the changes, some will be on the margins and little influenced by them, some will be “surfing the wave” and seeing growth and prosperity. Sensing change locally is vital if the right strategies are to be put in place to capture the opportunities and evade the threats. Lifelong learning strategies are among the most important that local stakeholders can adopt.

Lessons from experience

This IDELE Seminar interrogated the experiences of case studies where:

1. lifelong learning strategies are being used as a conscious adaptive response to dynamic and threatening change, particularly the consequences of growing global competition;
2. deep rooted problems are being tackled via learning strategies which focus more on social capital building and strengthening community cohesiveness as essential building blocks for local development; and
3. where the importance of various tactical approaches to the delivery of learning strategies, in particular partnerships and political networking; institutional learning; and engagement with business is clearly illustrated.

Managing change

City of Tampere, Finland

The Finnish town of Tampere has built on an already strong general learning ethos that exists locally to engage specific target groups as well as the population in general in learning activities. The objectives were to develop the town into **the** leading centre for education in Finland, and thus create a positive climate for long-term economic growth in the city. Of key importance was the agreement of a clear sighted strategy, agreed to by all key stakeholders amongst public authorities; educational institutions; third sector groups and crucially private sector employers. The strategy benefited from being:

- Consistent with the existing infrastructure and cultural attitudes, and therefore realistic
- Highly appropriate and in fact necessary to maintain globally recognised brands with strong incentives for private sector employers to work with other partners locally to ensure the availability of necessary skills and knowledge
- Able to draw upon the advantages of an increasingly diverse population from around the world, attracted to the area through the reputation of its global brands

Lifelong learning strategies have been successful in managing economic change affecting a locality because:

- lifelong learning was recognised as a key driver for change;
- local stakeholders departed from the opportunities and limits that the social and economic circumstances presented locally;
- key local partners were and still are involved in drawing up, implementing and modifying the strategies
- the role of key private sector employers has been placed at the centre of the strategies
- strategies have been designed with global competitive pressures in mind.



Lifelong learning strategies have also enabled localities to “stay ahead of the game” by combining a number of key elements, including:

- a solid local development strategy which embraces continual renewal and responsiveness to threats and opportunities;
- good horizontal links, meaning a strong partnership at local level involving all key stakeholders;
- good vertical links - solid contacts with actors at higher levels of government, at the regional and/or national level.

The Learnshop in Berlin-Neukölln (Germany)

In Berlin, lifelong learning is part of a wider development strategy for the locality, and is connected to dense networks of partnership. Lifelong learning is a key component of the wider local strategy alongside other elements which can include economic incentives, infrastructure plans, social inclusion elements and so on.

The strength of the initiative comes from a combination of a very locally sensitized and responsive service delivery ethos, in combination with a highly permissive higher level policy environment which can be used to provide resources and political support. This environment is itself available in large part as a result of the dense network of connections and links accessed by the initiative, and its ability to demonstrate the effectiveness over time of its practices

Building human and social capital

The link posited between learning and social capital is that social capital enables human capital investment to be realised; learning sustains social capital and social capital is strongly associated with trust and quality in a knowledge economy. Some initiatives presented in this seminar consciously used learning to build individual's social skills, contacts within and outside their 'group' and confidence. Learning which enhances social capital can help improve individual's position in the labour market and their overall perspective on life.

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, Britain

Lifelong learning in Blackburn is seen not only as a route towards employment for its population but more importantly as a way to bring people together and encourage their social and intellectual development. The Council's approach to lifelong learning had to start with changing the attitudes and disaffected culture across both communities and employers. A wide and imaginative set of techniques was used, beginning with encouraging participation in a variety of taster activities. Basic Skills were promoted as central to an appreciation and understanding of the world. A number of other methods to reach non-traditional learners and to create a culture of learning were also used such as enlisting the help of established figures in each ethnic community; organising learning events that were geographically and culturally close to the different population groups (e.g. traditional poetry, henna art etc); and discussing with the different communities what areas of learning would interest each ethnic group.

Key lessons for implementation

- The need for learning to continue throughout life needs to be emphasised as essential to sustainable development in the local context in the face of today's technological, demographic and life course challenges.
- A local approach is vital for lifelong learning strategies to be successful, since the deliverers, recipients, and those able to identify in strategic terms what the locality actually *needs* are themselves at local level.



- For a local employment and development strategy to be successful, lifelong learning is a vital component in the mix of policy actions, since it builds the necessary confidence, flexibility and skills (human capital) of local people to equip them to read change and respond effectively to it.
- Local lifelong learning does not take place in isolation. Success needs good institutional links and broader perspectives, being in a position to exploit opportunities originating at higher levels, and mobilising political, financial and practical support.

Cergy Pontoise (France)

Cergy Pontoise is a successful local initiative that has shown an ability to adapt to institutional changes or changes in politics, demonstrating institutional learning, such as by adapting their structure and aims in order to respond to changing institutional arrangements. When a change in national policy created conditions of disruption in the lifelong and skills training market, the leader of a local network of partners, trainers and SMEs proved able to act entrepreneurially and adapt its offerings. This meant that the structure had to adapt by expanding its activities and by offering to cover the much larger area of the whole 'Département'. The local agency responded to the changes in political will and the sources of political support and managed to develop a successful survival strategy for itself and to maintain and expand the local partnerships adjacent to it.

- Local learning strategies are not easy. The best examples are partnerships:
 - experienced in collaborative working attuned to local needs;
 - with a clear sense of strategic direction;
 - where participants pool their resources and influence for the common purpose.
- Many things may stand in the way of success. These include:
 - institutional rivalry
 - lack of the requisite freedom of initiative
 - lack of consensus on what is needed
 - the prior absence of critical institutional capacities (both locally and at higher levels).
- When people recognise and respond to the idea of a distinct local identity for their area, this makes it possible to achieve impressive learning outcomes.
- Last but not least, a particular challenge for lifelong learning is the need for it to deal effectively with population *dynamics*. Change has an impact on identity – the inflow and outflow of people with differing attributes, demographic trends that alter the age-gender profile over time. A sound lifelong learning strategy needs to have a clear focus on the needs of existing, arriving, departing and transitory populations as well as the changing patterns of needs at different life stages.



The IDELE Thematic Report Series

- Old Industrial and Mining Areas: the added value of local employment development (seminar 1 Lille-France seminar)
- The Metropolitan City: seeking competitive advantage through local actions to integrate immigrants and minority groups (seminar 2 Berlin-Germany)
- Local Employment Development in Remote Rural Areas (seminar 3 Rovaniemi-Finland seminar)
- Successful Local Milieux and the Lisbon Process (seminar 4 Cork, Ireland)
- Maximising employment potential: local approaches to lifelong learning (seminar 5 Thessaloniki, Greece)
- Connecting the local: linking local employment and economic development into national and regional governance systems (seminar 6 Faro, Portugal)
- Funding the long term- mainstreaming and sustainable finance for local employment development (seminar 7 Nice, France)
- Cross-border and Transnational Co-operation for Local Employment Development (seminar 8 Copenhagen, Denmark)

IDELE Thematic Report series available in the future

- New Round of Structural and Cohesion Funds: Bringing the Local into Play in the Context of Convergence (seminar 9 Budapest, Hungary)
- Fresh Approaches to Employment Activation and Sustainable Communities: Lessons for the Competitiveness and Employment Regions (seminar 10 Bologna, Italy)
- Sustainable rural communities: local approaches to job generation and learning & skills development (seminar 11 Santiago, Spain)
- Local and the European Employment Strategy: Lessons from IDELE (seminar 12 Brussels, Belgium)



Contact Details

The full thematic reports and thematic summaries and further information on IDELE can be found on the project website: www.ecotec.co.uk/idele

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http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/local_employment/index_en.htm

