

## » How Conceptual Shifts Make Tangible Impacts

This case study focuses on the impacts of the Freiburg study tours, conducted by the SOLUTIONS research consortia and the WHO Collaborating Centre for Healthy Cities and Urban Policy. Senior leaders in public health and planning participated in two study tours to the town of Freiburg to learn first-hand about the city's world renowned sustainable living system. The tours created a network of senior leadership officials who were inspired to work together on a shared, sustainable vision for the future in the South West of England.

# The ISSUES Project

## SUE SUCCESS STORY

The German town of Freiburg, internationally recognised for its pioneering outlook on sustainable development, was selected as the location for two study tours which brought together health, transport and urban planners from the South West of England to witness first-hand how sustainable development could be fully incorporated into urban design.

The original idea for the tours came from Regional Director of Public Health for the area, Gabriel Scally, who had links to one of the institutions participating in the SOLUTIONS project. Connections with the city had already been forged by a PhD student working on the project.

SOLUTIONS designed the study tours to allow planners and policy makers to experience and learn directly from the successes of sustainable urban planning in Freiburg. As well as experiencing the city for themselves participants were able to discuss what contextual, technical and political factors had enabled its progression with key figures involved in Freiburg's development. The tours embodied the spirit of the city and incorporated the use of sustainable transport, such as bikes and trams. Upon their return participants gave presentations throughout the South West to disseminate lessons from the tour.

### Conceptual Impacts

As well as forging a lasting influence on the participants' views on sustainable development, by asking **planners** and public **health directors** to attend together, and by encouraging stimulating reflective discourse throughout, the organisers created a space in which **a network of likeminded decision-makers from different sectors** could develop. Promoting this understanding of other disciplines allowed participants to work together more closely on their return from the tours, allowing decisions concerning sustainable development to be made more easily. It is hoped this will go on to influence the direction of a wide range of projects throughout the South West and the SOLUTIONS team is currently in the process of assessing the impact on three areas: policy, projects and collaborations.

### Tangible Impacts

Tangible impacts have also already begun to emerge, the greatest of these being the creation of an eco-town in Cornwall. Many of the ideas from Freiburg about creating communities and environments that are conducive to sustainable development will be incorporated into the eco-town project and once completed it will serve as a "new Freiburg", inspiring people from across the South West.

#### >SOLUTIONS

Sustainability of Land Use and Transport in Outer Neighbourhoods (**SOLUTIONS**) ran from 2004 to 2008 and was part of the first phase of the **Sustainable Urban Environment Programme (SUE)**.

**SOLUTIONS** investigated how towns and cities can be planned so that they are socially inclusive, environmentally sustainably and economically efficient.

The project utilised cities around the UK as case studies, testing the effectiveness of alternative development policies and planning strategies for the year 2031.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

### The Importance of Conceptual Impacts

Although often difficult to measure and understand, conceptual impacts are an important part of the uptake of research concepts into the areas of policy and practice and in delivering a desirable social outcome. In the case of the study tours personal connections and shared experiences in Freiburg created an opportunity for high level decision makers to come to a shared vision of how to incorporate sustainable development throughout the planning process.

### Selecting High-Level Participants

A deliberate focus of the Freiburg study tours was to involve leadership at strategic and senior management levels, and therefore individuals who were in a position to influence policy direction. This is particularly important in situations like the Freiburg study tours where the learning outcomes are conceptual.

### Flexibility of Research Direction

Although SOLUTIONS did not originally consider health to be part of its remit it became clear to the researchers that health drivers and impacts were an important part of sustainable development. By adapting their project to fit more closely with the views and concerns of the public, SOLUTIONS has widened the interest in sustainable urban environment with public health officials and their local authority counterparts across the South West are now co-ordinating their efforts to plan for a sustainable future.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

- > **Know the value of conceptual impacts.** These are often an important part of the uptake of research policy and practice and in delivering a desirable social outcome.
- > **Approach high level participants for maximum impact.** Strategic and management level individuals are more able to influence policy direction so target these groups.
- > **Be flexible with research direction.** Be prepared to adapt your project to fit more closely with the views and concerns of the public/stakeholders in order to widen the scope and impact.
- > **Use research effectively.** In the UK, practitioners and policy makers feel paralysed into inaction by mixed messages from research. Freiburg overcame this barrier by utilising current understanding as much as possible to take action, without focusing on measuring impacts in the early stages.