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Project

SUE Success Stories: The Value of Influence

A Case Study of Knowledge Transfer and
Interaction from the Sustainable Urban
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GLOSSARY

EPSRC	Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
ISSUES	Implementation Strategies for Sustainable Urban Environment Systems
KT	Knowledge Transfer
LAs	Local Authorities
NHS	National Health Service
PI	Principle Investigator
SD	Sustainable Development
SOLUTIONS	Sustainability of Land Use and Transport In Outer Neighbourhoods
SUE	Sustainable Urban Environment
SW	South West
UWE	University of the West of England
WHO	World Health Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This investigation focuses on the impacts of the Freiburg study tours, which were conducted by the WHO Collaborating Centre for Healthy Cities and Urban Policy and Gabriel Scally, Regional Director of Public Health for South West England. Strategic and management level health officials, planners and Local Authority staff participated on two study tours to the town of Freiburg, Germany to learn first-hand about the city's world renowned sustainable living system. The main impact of the tours was to create a shared vision and network of senior leadership who were connected with sustainable living in the South West of England. The tours have begun to have a more tangible impact on society through the input of sustainable living ideas into projects such as the Eco-town being created in Cornwall. Impacts from the Freiburg study tours resulted from the fact that high-level health directors and public planners were involved. This meant the participants directly inspired by the tour were at a decision making level within their organisation, enabling them to act on their ideas and also created a network of people who could later work together on a shared, sustainable vision for the future.

1 Introduction

Sustainability of Land Use and Transport in Outer Neighbourhoods (SOLUTIONS) was a research consortium which ran from 2004 to 2008 and which formed part of the first phase of the Sustainable Urban Environment (SUE) Programme. The SOLUTIONS consortium investigated how towns and cities can be planned so that they are socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable 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. The research examined the interaction between strategic (whole city) and local (neighbourhood) levels with close attention to transport and urban design issues.

The research consortium consisted of an interdisciplinary team from six universities: Newcastle, Leeds, Bristol, Cambridge, University College London and the University of West of England. The project was conducted in partnership with local authorities and other stakeholders, many of which were connected to the project through its steering group, reference group or through the international advisory group.

This investigation has focused on the impacts of an activity within the SOLUTIONS project, the Freiburg study tours which were organised and led by SOLUTION researchers from the WHO Collaborating Centre for Healthy Cities and Urban Policy at the University of the West of England. In partnership with the South West Regional Public Health Group, two tours to the town of Freiburg in Germany - internationally recognised for its pioneering sustainable outlook to development - were conducted in 2008 and 2009. The purpose of the tours was to allow health, transport and urban planners to witness first-hand how sustainable development could be fully incorporated into urban design and the effects this could have on society. A secondary aim was to forge and strengthen links between high level policy makers in the South West.

This investigation has studied the impacts the tours have had on sustainable urban development. The findings in this report are based on background research and interviews with the key players involved in the Freiburg Study Tour.

2 The Success of the Freiburg Study Tours

2.1 The origin and planning of the tours

The original idea for a study tour which would bring together people from planning, health and local authority backgrounds in an inspiring environment came from the Regional Director of Public Health for South West England, Gabriel Scally. He contacted the SOLUTIONS group working in the WHO Collaborating Centre –based at the University of the West of England where he holds a visiting Chair - asking for suggestions for a tour location.

The SOLUTIONS group had previous connections with the town of Freiburg through a PhD student who was studying its car free transport system. Much of the original contact between the research group and Freiburg came through this student. Freiburg is well known internationally as a city which has successfully reduced its carbon emissions, mainly through decreasing dependence on private car transport and a co-ordinated approach to urban planning. Based on this, the SOLUTIONS group suggested Freiburg as a suitable location for the study tour.

The SOLUTIONS group designed the Freiburg study tours to allow planners and policy makers from South West England 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 the development of the city, including which contextual, technical and political factors had enabled its progression, with key figures in the city such as Wulf Daseking, Freiburg's Director of Planning.

2.2 Going to Freiburg

A central aspect of the tours was that both planning officers and health directors would be involved. The public planning sector in the South West had recently been through a restructuring process, and the tours offered an opportunity to strengthen bonds between planning officers and health directors in the same constituencies. By inviting both planning officers and health directors, the Freiburg tours aimed to improve relationships and make both sides aware of the aims, responsibilities and difficulties that their counterparts faced.(Scally 2010).

The tours embodied the spirit of the city – planned events incorporated the use of sustainable transport, such as bikes and trams. Participants were taken to see neighbourhoods such as Vauben, a car free district where sustainable water and energy strategies are incorporated into the housing and community ties are promoted through inclusive design (Grant 2008). This new development has put principles of sustainable development into practice to a degree rarely seen elsewhere in the world.

On returning from both tours, participants gave presentations throughout the South West in order to disseminate lessons from the tour throughout the region.

2.3 Impacts on the South West of England

2.3.1 Conceptual impacts

A persistent message throughout this investigation was that the Freiburg Study Tours had been inspiring for all participants. Although some participants were not able to point to any tangible impacts of the tour, they enthusiastically noted that the tours had had a lasting influence on their views on sustainable development.

Since the tours involved influential individuals from both the planning and public health sectors the findings from the tour were more likely to affect people with the ability to make important decisions. This may influence the direction of a wide range of projects throughout the South West in the future.

Another regularly cited success of the Freiburg study tours was the focus on creating and strengthening partnerships across the South West. By asking planners and health directors to attend together and allowing time for open discussion on the tour the organisers created a space in which a network of likeminded decision-makers could develop. Central to this was building an understanding of how the decisions made by health planners could affect the aims of the planning officers and vice versa, and promoting an understanding of the inter-relatedness of their disciplines. This has allowed participants to work together more closely on their return from the tours and may have allowed decisions concerning sustainable development to be made more easily (Sally 2010).

2.3.2 Tangible impacts

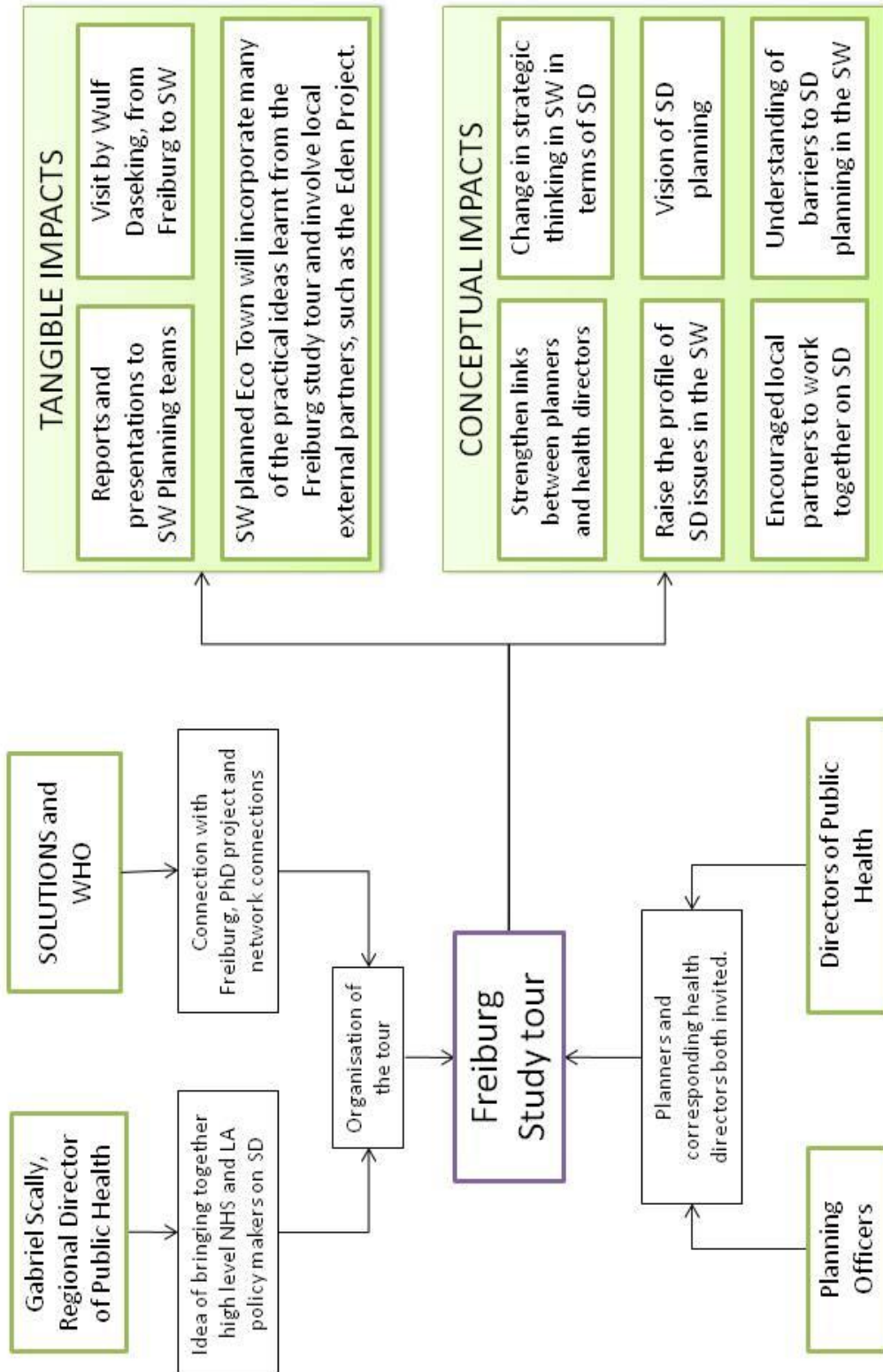
Although the Freiburg Study Tours were mainly designed to have a conceptual impact on participants, their influence has started to become evident in some more practical applications throughout the South West region. Perhaps the greatest tangible impact so far has been the design of an eco-town currently being built in Cornwall. The Imerys China Clay Community, near St Austell, was chosen as one of four opportunities to develop an eco-town by the Department of Communities and Local Government (BBC News Report 2009). Many of the ideas from Freiburg about creating communities and an environment which are conducive to sustainable development will be incorporated into the eco-town project (German 2010). Once completed, the eco-town will serve as a “new Freiburg”, inspiring people from across the South West concerning sustainable development.

The impacts of the tours continue to be monitored by WHO; by capturing and demonstrating positive outcomes of the tours they intend to secure funding for similar projects in the future.

The diagram below illustrates the main organisational influences and impacts of the Freiburg Study Tours.



Diagram 1. The Organisation and Impacts of the Freiburg Study Tour



3 Disseminating the Freiburg Study Tours

3.1 Drivers

3.1.1 Key Players

Together the SOLUTIONS team from the WHO Collaborating Centre and Gabriel Scally were the main drivers behind the concept, design and organisation of the Freiburg Study Tours. The innovative nature of the project, along with the focus on high level participants meant that the tours had far reaching conceptual and tangible impacts across the South West region.

Participants on the tours who have been inspired by what they saw in Freiburg have continued to widen the impacts the tours have had on sustainable development in the region. For example, Wulf Daseking, Freiburg's Director of Planning was recently invited to Cornwall in order to speak to the Council about Freiburg and to see what has been achieved in Cornwall based on Freiburg's success (German 2010).

3.1.2 Designed for disseminating conceptual impacts

The Freiburg Study Tours were designed to have an impact on the attitudes and mental approaches of the participants. Key to the design of the project was the bringing together of planning officers and health directors from the same constituencies. This was done to encourage individuals in these potential partnerships to spend time together, learn about each other's work, and experience the lessons from Freiburg together. Throughout both tours, the SOLUTIONS team built in time for participants to reflect on the tour findings in groups and on a one to one basis. It is widely acknowledged by experts in knowledge transfer that conceptual impacts are most often based on personal connections (Molas-Gallart, Salter et al. 2002; Meagher, Lyall et al. 2008) and this was emphasised throughout the Freiburg study tour, both between participants and the residents and designers of Freiburg and amongst the participants themselves. This created a network of high level planners, health directors and policy makers across South West England who had a shared inspiration derived from the tours.

3.2 Significance

3.2.1 High level approach to participants

A deliberate focus of the Freiburg study tours was to involve participants who were likely to have considerable influence within their local region (Scally 2010). This was based on the idea that strategic and management level individuals were more able to influence policy direction. This may be particularly important in situations where the learning outcomes are essentially conceptual rather than immediately practicable. The Freiburg study tours are an example of this – the message was about how to incorporate sustainable development throughout the planning process. As discussed in Meagher et al. (2008), although such impacts are difficult to measure and understand, they are often an important part of the uptake of research concepts into the areas of policy and practice and in delivering a desirable social outcome. If high level decision makers have a shared vision of what they want to achieve this may allow policy plans across a region to be co-ordinated in an effective manner.

3.2.2 Flexibility of research direction

Although SOLUTIONS did not originally consider health to be part of its remit within sustainable planning, it became clear to the researchers that health drivers and impacts were an important part of sustainable development (Barton 2010). This was reinforced by the findings from Freiburg. Many participants in the tour noted how sustainable planning had had a positive effect on the health of the citizens of Freiburg. Environmental and health concerns about acid rain were the original driver for the city to pursue sustainable development (Grant 2009). By adapting their project to fit more closely with the views and concerns of the public, this project has widened the number of people interested in the concept of the sustainable urban environment. Health officials and their local authority counterparts across the South West are now co-ordinating their efforts to plan for a sustainable future.

3.2.3 Using research effectively

Although Freiburg's development has been based on scientific technologies, the town has not empirically tested the impact their work has had on people's lives. This created a point of conflict between the participants on the tours, with most people believing that the impacts of Freiburg's development should have been researched and documented in order to clearly demonstrate the value of their work. However, Adrian Roper, South West Director of Sustrans, had a different viewpoint:

“In the UK we know what needs to be done but in Freiburg they had just done it.”

(Roper 2010)

Although some parts of the Freiburg development may have had more of an impact on people's lives than others, it is the holistic approach to sustainable planning and development that has driven the changes in the city. Freiburg planners have worked with researchers to incorporate the latest technologies into the design of the city. In the UK, practitioners and policy makers may feel paralysed into inaction by mixed messages from research: inconsistencies; the need for further research; and gaps in current understanding are all often highlighted by researchers, who wish to be clear about the uncertainties connected with their work. It is understandably difficult to convey the limitations of research findings without discouraging non-experts from utilising this knowledge and this can be a major barrier to the uptake of research findings.

Freiburg has overcome this barrier by utilising current understanding as much as possible without focusing on the impact at this stage. Although it is not possible to give quantitative evidence about the effect this has had on the city, the participants interviewed for this report were unanimous in their praise for the Freiburg project.

4 Conclusion

The wide and lasting impacts that the Freiburg Study Tours have had on the South West are due to three key factors:

- The tours were designed to maximise conceptual impacts through first hand experiences and creating networks of a shared vision
- The organisers concentrated on pulling in high level local planners and policy makers to participate on the tours
- The flexibility of the SOLUTIONS project to widen its research field to include health factors in sustainable development. This allowed the team to engage with health directors and to influence a demographic that was found to be critical to policy-making.

Although it is difficult to quantify conceptual impacts, all participants who were interviewed for this report expressed the view that the tours had had a widespread and lasting impact on sustainable development in the South West region of England (German 2010; Roper 2010; Scally 2010). The immediate impacts have been mainly conceptual, creating a shared vision of how planning and policy decisions can effect a real change in direction for developments. More recently, practical impacts from the tours have started to materialise throughout projects in the South West. The most notable of these, is input into the design of one of the governments four eco-villages, being created in Cornwall with the help of partners who participated in and were inspired by the Freiburg Study Tours.

This investigation has shown how the promotion of conceptual impacts can be successfully designed into a project. The tours have acted as an inspiring example of best practice for planners and policy makers, showing them what is achievable. They also created a space for people who would work together to mingle and share ideas, allowing them to cooperate more effectively together on their return. These elements were designed into the tours from the start by Gabriel Scally and the SOLUTIONS organisers, showing that it is possible to focus on and affect conceptual impacts of research as well as more tangible results.



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Adrian Roper, South West Regional Director of Sustrans

Professor Gabriel Scally, Regional Director of Public Health for the South West region of England

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