2.03: Research Findings Executive Summary

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Lifelong
Learning
Programme

Introduction

This report presents the Research Findings Executive Summary that was prepared within the framework of the Community Learning Social Networks (NetBox) project. The Executive Summary presents an overview of the project, as well as the main findings of the individual research reports completed by each respective partner within the framework of research phase two. The English version of the Executive Summary was prepared by CARDET and proof-read by Meath Partnership (MCRSDP), and was then sent out to the remaining partners for translation. CARDET translated the Executive Summary to Greek, AESD to Romanian, JKC to Lithuanian, IRZL to Polish, UPB to German, and SCMS to Portuguese. The English version of the Executive Summary and the relevant translations are presented below.

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of research phase two. This research phase was based on the findings of the collective audit summary report and the individual community audit reports completed within the framework of the NetBox project. The community audit research for each individual report was conducted by each respective consortium member: Meath Community Rural and Social Development Partnership Limited (MCRSDP-Meath Partnership) from Ireland conducted its research with the community in Oldcastle, County Meath; Superact from the UK conducted its community audit research in the town of Wiveliscombe; the Association for Education and Sustainable Development (AESD) from Romania focused its audit research within the community of Stefan cel Mare; Juanimo Karjeros Centras (JKC) from Lithuania conducted its community audit research with the Kulautuva community; Instytut Rozwoju Zasobów Ludzkich (IRZL) from Poland focused its research on the Rososz and Lasocin communities in the Ryki district; and Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Santarém (SCMS) from Portugal conducted its audit research with the communities of Vale de Figueira and São Vicente do Paúl.

The aim of the NetBox project is to pilot, but also validate, a model for educationally self-sufficient rural communities, where conventional consumers of

educational services can become producers of educational services and content. To do this, partners have merged best practices from the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) and Needs Based Community Development (NBCD) approaches and have utilised the established networking standards and arrangements, as well as the providing bespoke induction training and online learning resources. There are three primary target groups of the NetBox project. These are:

a. residents of all ages, genders, and ethnicities, at all educational levels in selected small rural communities

b. key educational providers and practitioners, as well as statutory organisations providing services in small rural communities

c. business owners, managers, and entrepreneurs based in small rural communities.

The scope of this research phase is to exhibit the most appropriate learning content so as to address the educational needs and harness the educational assets that were identified during the community audit, which took place across the six communities last summer. Through this research report, common educational resource needs as well as specific resources essential to address the specific needs in the different communities are identified.

The main aim of this research report is to present the findings based on the data collected by the different partners. The data collected through the community audit are deconstructed in this report as they relate to the main thematic areas of research phase two, which are:

• Community needs and assets assessment

• Learning content to address community needs and assets

• Common educational resource needs

• Specific community resource needs

The data used in this report are extracted from questionnaires, community conversations, face-to-face or telephone interviews, focus groups, and piggy-backing on public events, as collected during the community audit process.

At this point, it is important to make a clarification regarding research phase two. With the completion of the community audit process, which was carried out in order to

identify the educational assets and needs of the above mentioned communities, it was commonly felt by all project partners that the elements that research phase two aimed to address, were already addressed by the community audit and thus there was no need to undertake an independent research phase. It was therefore decided by the lead partner that information pertaining to educational assets and needs of the six communities found in the collective audit summary report, as well as in the individual community audit reports, which were prepared after the completion of the community audit process, should be used for the completion of this report. Additionally, the learning areas identified by all partners and the individual matrices prepared by each partner and compiled by JKC in the collective resource matrix, should also be used as a source of data for preparing this research report.

To begin with, the audit that was carried out in Oldcastle, Ireland, in order to gather data from the three different target groups of the project, was based on various methods of data collection. During the community audit, there were a number of challenges; these included the low competence levels for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) within a portion of the community's population. This fact becomes even more complex by poor internet service provision. Oldcastle is a community with highly skilled inhabitants, many of whom are willing to share their knowledge and skills with other community members. Furthermore, there is a library service, which offers an information and learning hub to the community and there are also other services that could potentially contribute to the community's development. Moreover, there are two local schools that offer programmes of standard education as well as evening classes for people in the community.

Some of the recommendations that emerged through the data analysis include: the targeting of persons from different age groups so as to promote intergenerational mentoring; recommendations about the NetBox site regarding accessibility and user friendliness; the provision of a blended learning approach; the promotion of local employment by offering training that is informed by local employer needs; the provision of free or reasonably-priced courses; and better internet service provision.

With respect to the UK, the community audit in Wiveliscombe aimed to investigate the learning needs and assets of the local community. The collection of both qualitative

and quantitative data was achieved through a blend of formal and informal tools and frameworks. Wiveliscombe is a small, friendly town with a strong community spirit, which can clearly help and facilitate learning opportunities in the town. This community has an established tradition of sharing skills and knowledge with other community members.

As far as needs are concerned, there was an almost universal need for an appropriate space that would serve as a venue for a variety of activities. Based on people's perceptions, this venue could assist in gaining and sharing knowledge or skills. People in Wiveliscombe believe that their community could be enhanced by the development of facilities for children and teenagers. Also, the restoration of the adult education service was among the most popular needs that were expressed. Suggestions for a skills exchange system were expressed, along with better broadband service provision, and continuous maintenance of the 'Wivey Website'. As for the local community NetBox site, it was recommended that it should be user-friendly, with clear tools in order for the community members to be able to use it effectively.

The community audit that took place in the Romanian community of Stefan cel Mare, exhibited that there is a growing demand for training, which was identified as a necessity that could improve learning in the business community. This training can take place in the form of new local courses, online courses, peer courses, and so on. In terms of course types and structures, there is a preference for accredited courses, vocational courses, and learning with the engagement of ICT.

In Stefan cel Mare, the interest for advanced ICT skills including accredited courses is undisputable. Also, there is a significant interest in advanced levels of English language skills that could be facilitated through NetBox.

The community audit conducted in Kulautuva, Lithuania indicated that a great number of assets exist in the community. Apart from physical assets, such as playgrounds, there is also IT infrastructure, as well as buildings of other organisations that could potentially be used for the enhancement of community activities. Furthermore, skills, such as arts, crafts, health care, project management, ICT, working with media, pedagogy, gardening, and cooking were identified during the community audit. The fact that many members of the community are willing to share their skills with

other people is something that should be mentioned.

The audit in Kulautuva identified a number of learning needs. For example, one of the principal needs within the community is the necessity to promote the notion of idea sharing. By meeting these needs the creation of a culture of 'learning through sharing' can become more concrete and stable. Also, the need for specific modes of learning was highlighted. For example, accredited vocational and re-skilling courses and non-formal educational programmes could contribute to the improvement of the condition of local businesses. Moreover, the prospect of the local community NetBox site was very encouraging.

The community audit conducted in the communities in Poland demonstrated that service providers possess a significant place in the community and locals believe that their presence is very important for the communities' development. Moreover, the results of the audit exhibited a major need for local transportation, which would allow people to participate in courses or events taking place in the city of Ryki.

Furthermore, during the community audit it became apparent that there is an immense generation gap in terms of ICT skills, in particular among people aged 50 or over, who lag behind the younger age groups in terms of ICT competence. For the communities in Poland, and by taking into consideration the fact that the majority of the residents surveyed for the purposes of the audit considered that they have little or no basic computer skills, this automatically makes the use of the local community NetBox site tricky. Despite this fact, there are various factors that could assist in the usability of the site. It was also highlighted that the local community NetBox site should be very easy and simple to use. Also, the possibility of using the site with low speed Internet was highlighted, as was the use of downloadable content where possible. These were the most popular points raised in the Polish community audit report.

The community audit in Portugal exhibited that there are some important assets that the community as well as the community members are willing to share. For instance, there is the possibility to let community members use or share different resources or equipment. Various organisations have already expressed their interest and willingness in offering rooms within their premises as well as access to computers, printers, and Internet.

Participants in the two Portuguese communities indicated that it would be beneficial for them if information regarding their communities was improved and enhanced. Furthermore, they highlighted the need for the development of activities that promote health, and enhance literacy and employment. There is also a need to coordinate activities that can promote a shift in mindsets. The fact that the ICT skills of the community are limited was also highlighted and thus the recommendation, which followed, was to coordinate training courses in the field of ICT in order to satisfy peoples' need in this particular field.

The research findings extracted from the community audit conducted by all the acting partners involved in the NetBox project revealed that there are quite a few community assets as well as needs in the communities examined. In many of the communities involved, partners reported that they are facing some limitations in the area of ICT, which were, for the most part, related to the lack of advanced ICT skills by the community members or to insufficient access to the necessary equipment and lack of good internet connection. It is important to mention here that even in those communities, where internet connectivity was adequate and ICT skills level was average to high, some community members were still not willing to engage in online learning, something that needs to be considered during the content acquisition phase of the project.

The report offers information on both the common educational resource needs identified during the community audit, as well as the specific community resource needs. The common educational resource needs identified and agreed upon by the project acting partners focus on the four broad categories of: community skills, advice and information, hobbies and pastimes, and professional skills. Within each of these categories, a wide range of learning topics was identified. The specific needs of each community are explored in this report, as they pertain to the common learning areas identified by partners. These specific learning needs will form the basis for the learning content acquisition process that will be implemented in each of the six communities respectively.