

Ecoscopes

How To Make Consolidate and Network Community Action Plans

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1 What is an ecoscope

An 'Ecoscope' was defined in the early 1990s by a group of teachers in Wales as an important tool for demonstrating how to make community action plans. Ecoscope is an acronym of 'demonstrating the *'environmental control of species'* by *'creating operational planning exhibitions'*. The teachers decided that creating a biodiversity action plan for an ecological microcosm is a good way to introduce people in the community served by the school to the logic and practice of planning environmental improvements. This is because the increase and maintenance of local biodiversity is the central principle of sustainable development on all geographical scales and is closely associated with the establishment of a sense of place. A community ecoscope could be aimed at tidying up waste ground, tree planting etc. Once there was confidence in action planning for biodiversity, community plans could be made for other environmental issues of the neighbourhood.

As originally conceived, an ecoscope referred to a small, relatively simple managed ecosystem, such as a grassy patch, a group of trees or a pond, created in school grounds or a public open-air environmental centre. The bigger idea is that the management logic can then be adopted by people to make plans to improve the quality of their own lives, the communities in which they live, and societies of which they are a part. Within this broader context, an ecoscope is an action plan for any kind of community issue packaged as an educational/ training resource to be used by others as a practical template.

Taking local responsibility for making such action plans by communities is now a part of the modern localism agenda of governance, which promotes the idea that bottom up control of environmental improvements should be in the hands of local people. This is exemplified by the following statements from 'government', 'community' and 'education'. Making ecoscopes therefore takes neighbourhood environmental appraisal to the operational level of long term management to meet a community's objectives by scheduling work to be done and monitoring its outcomes in relation to the original objectives.

A national government view

In 2010, the Social Justice Department of the Welsh Government produced an action plan to develop a high quality and responsive community development sector in Wales, with a focus on bringing about change founded on social justice, equality and inclusion. The aim is to strengthen Wales's economic performance and transform the life chances of people in Wales. This requires a community development workforce that can support the creation of an inclusive society that encourages individuals to achieve their potential and contribute to society and their communities. This is the view held by government and by communities themselves.

A local government view

Wrexham Borough Council Leader Aled Roberts has illustrated through a series of examples how his own local authority had benefited from involving residents in setting up and running local services. This experience also demonstrated that there is no single model of neighbourhood regeneration because communities are best placed to decide how it should be done. Quoted from 'Bringing Neighbourhood Centre Stage in Wales; 2008'

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/1910-regeneration-neighbourhood-involving.pdf>

A community view

'Come Outside!' is a new Wales-wide scheme, which enables communities to gain the benefits that the outdoors has to offer. By addressing community needs and aspirations through outdoor activities, participation becomes valued and the benefits are sustained. Dave Horton, Senior Community Development Worker Ely/Caerau, where this scheme was trailed in Cardiff, said:

"This project is aimed at uniting the communities of Ely and Caerau and giving people the confidence to enjoy their local environment.

"It also offers the local community a chance to learn new conservation skills such as planning and managing green spaces."

A school view

"Schools should engage with families and the broader community, including businesses, other statutory agencies and the voluntary sector. Schools also need to work with other agencies to address the well-being and citizen aspirations of individual learners. When schools work with other agencies to deliver joined-up programmes, the full range of resources and expertise can be harnessed to deliver improved learner outcomes and well-being."

<http://www.raise-wales.org.uk/centralsouth-resource-maw>

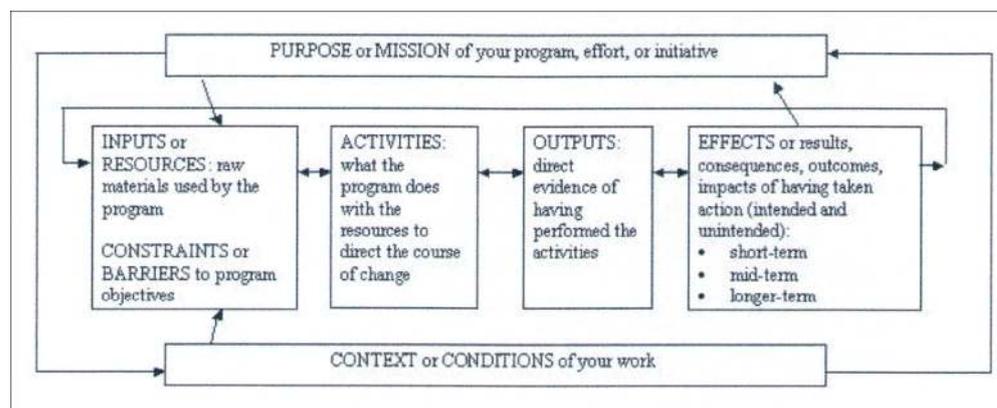
2 General logic model for an Ecoscope

A logic model is a story or picture of how an effort or initiative is supposed to work. The process of developing the model brings together stakeholders to articulate the goals of the program and the values that support it, and to identify strategies and desired outcomes of the initiative.

As a means to communicate a program visually, within a coalition or work group, and to present it to external audiences, a logic model provides a common language and reference point for everyone involved in the initiative.

A logic model is essential for collaborative community planning, implementing a plan and evaluating the initiative. It helps stakeholders in the neighbourhood to agree on short-term as well as long-term objectives during the planning process, decide on activities and actors, and establish clear criteria for evaluation during the effort. When the initiative ends, it provides a framework for assessing overall effectiveness of the initiative, as well as the activities, resources, and external factors that played a role in the outcome.

Fig 1 General community planning logic <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/default.aspx>



To develop a specific model, it will probably be necessary to use both forward and reverse logic. Working backwards, a start can be made with the desired outcomes and then identify the strategies and resources leading to projects that will accomplish them. Combining this with forward logic produces a pathway to produce the desired effects (Fig 1).

The model will probably be revised. This is precisely one advantage of using a logic model. because it relates program activities to their effect,. It helps keep stakeholders focused on achieving outcomes, while it remains flexible and open to finding the best means to enact a unique story of change. For these reasons it is important for beginners to refer to the work of others as a template.

An understanding of planning logic is necessary for all human activities, from baking a cake to running a multi-national corporation. The basic procedure for making a community action plan is to set a measurable objective for a feature of the neighbourhood that raises a local issue detracting from a sense of place, schedule the work to be done to meet the goal, and report what was actually done. Monitoring is then carried out to check how close the outcome is to the objective. Plans are essentially diaries of what to do, what was done, what the outcome was and what remains to be done.

Sense of place encompasses many meanings that a given place holds for people and the attachments that people develop for that place. It is expressed when people say they feel good about where they live. To reach and maintain a good sense of place there is a broad environmental element to be tackled. This is pinpointed by what has come to be known as 'front door issues of environmental poverty'. Environmental justice seeks solutions to these issues that are usually defined in the 'square mile' where people live, walk and socialise.

The overall aim of action plans is therefore to increase the proportion of people who feel good about their square mile/neighbourhood'. Success in achieving this aim is measured with simple before and after surveys that can be done within the community. These yield outcome performance indicators of the community action plan.

Factors influencing community well being that it is necessary to control by action plans are many and varied:

i Sociability, which includes:

- Number of women, children and elderly
- Social networks
- Volunteerism
- Evening use of the neighbourhood
- Street life

ii Uses and activities, which includes:

- Ownership of local business
- Land use patterns
- Property values
- Rent levels
- Shops

iii Comfort and image, which includes

- Crime
- Sanitation rating
- Littering/refuse collection
- Condition of buildings

- Trees, gardens and grass
- Graffiti
- Local history/heritage highlights
- Signage
- Recreation/play areas
- Creative arts groups
- iv Access and linkages, which includes
 - Traffic
 - Public transport
 - Pedestrian and cycling activity
 - Condition of roads and pavements
 - Parking patterns

Success in creating a good sense of place depends on bringing many different providers of expertise and finance together to enable community volunteers to address one or more of above factors in an action plan.

3 The Ecoscope planning logic

Planning

Planning can be thought of as a process that prioritises ideas, assesses their relevance and potential, and answers the following sequence of practical questions that are going to determine future actions which will take place in the form of projects.

- What is the goal and how will we reach it?
- What are the required resources and how much will everything cost?
- What does the project timeline look like?
- How will we check if the project is working and successful?

The necessary actions are then scheduled to answer five essential questions which define the action plan.

1. Why are we here?
2. What have we got?
3. What is important?
4. What do we want?
5. What must we do?

The most important question is ‘What do we want?’ because it sets the management objective. It is answered in the form of a vision statement written in plain language so that everyone is aware of the desired outcome of management.

For example, the grass cutting action plan for a housing estate with roadside verges would have a vision statement something like:

“The grass has been uniformly and evenly cut including perimeter edges and obstacles. Grass length is longer than 40 mm and shorter than 70mm. Edges are trimmed and not encroaching hard surfaces, hedge lines or bedding areas. Adjacent paths and bedding areas are kept clear of clippings There are no bare patches. All litter was removed prior to mowing. There is no leaf fall, litter, debris or dog fouling”

With regards to the type of ecosystem to miniaturise for an Ecoscope, grassland and coppiced woodland are probably the easiest to manage. Grassland has the advantage in that mechanical

cutting can be aimed at producing different grass heights and regular cutting provides a dynamic seasonal element to the work schedule <http://grass-scan.wikispaces.com/home>

Logic

The planning logic of Ecoscopes is a development of the Scottish community planning framework entitled LEAP. LEAP stands for 'learning, evaluation and planning' designed by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) to support a partnership approach to achieving change and improvement in the quality of community life (Fig 2).

The emphasis of the Ecoscope planning logic is the LEAP logic augmented with the feedback from performance indicators which is central to the Conservation Management System (CMS) used by UK Environment Agencies, Wildlife Trusts and Local Authorities to make and record plans for nature sites.

The Ecoscope logic is extended from biodiversity plans to other community issues by answering the following seven questions .

- 1 What are the issues that bug the community?
(Identifying the need)
- 2 What does the community want to see happen?
(Setting the vision and the specific objectives)
- 3 What are the barriers preventing the community getting where it wants to be?
(Determining the limiting factors of the objectives)
- 4 How will the team know when they have overcome the barriers?
(Setting measurable outcomes as performance indicators)
- 5 What work has to be done?
(Scheduling resources and actions)
- 6 What progress is being made?
(Monitoring by measurement of outcome performance indicators)
- 7 Who needs to know the outcomes?
(Feedback reports to the team, partners and funders)

In this wider view of community action the SCDC says a community planning framework should be useful to community organisations; local authorities; voluntary sector organisations; and policy makers, particularly those involved in community well being programmes, community planning partnerships, community regeneration programmes, and social inclusion and social justice initiatives.

- It encourages critical questioning to ensure that all those with a stake in taking action for environmental improvements are working to a shared agenda.
- It emphasises self-evaluation, encouraging participants to take joint responsibility for planning and evaluation throughout a project or programme.
- It is a learning-based planning and evaluation framework to support good practice in community working to improve the quality of community life.
- It helps identify the difference a community hopes to make, to plan more effectively, work in partnership with each other and other members of the community, and learn the lessons from the experience.
- The framework can be used in different contexts, to support the work of different sectors, and at project, programme and policy level. It is particularly useful as a tool to support partnership working and the production of community action plans.

Fig 2 The original LEAP logic diagram (2005)

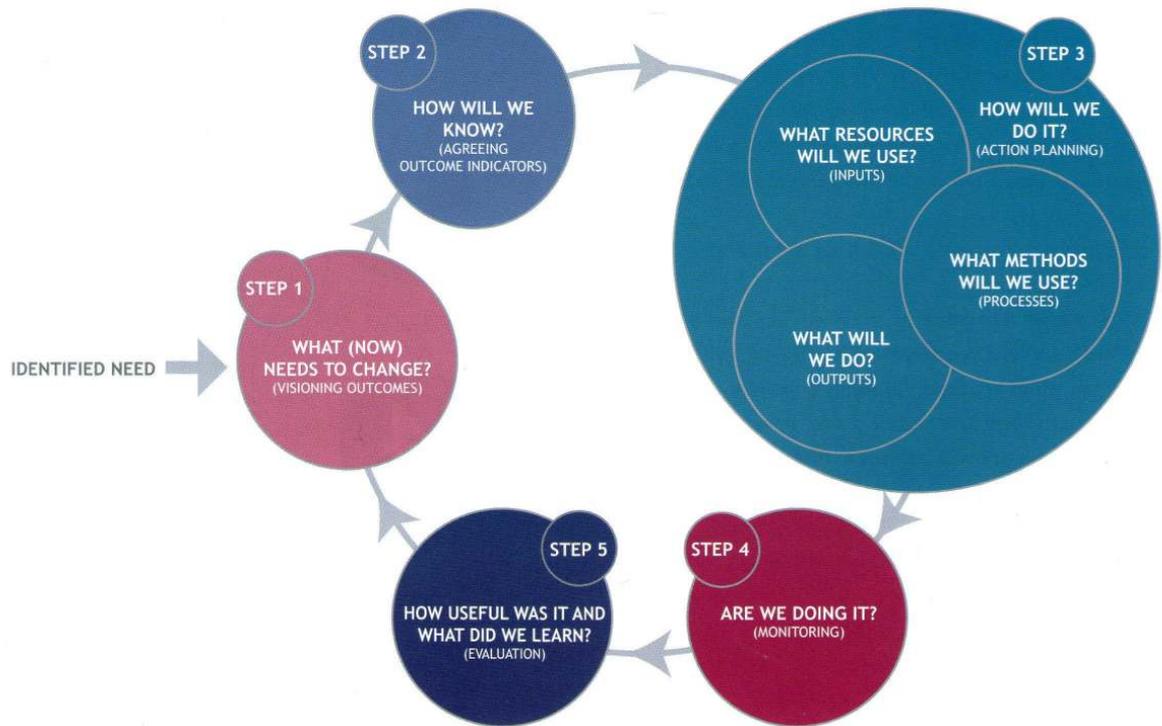
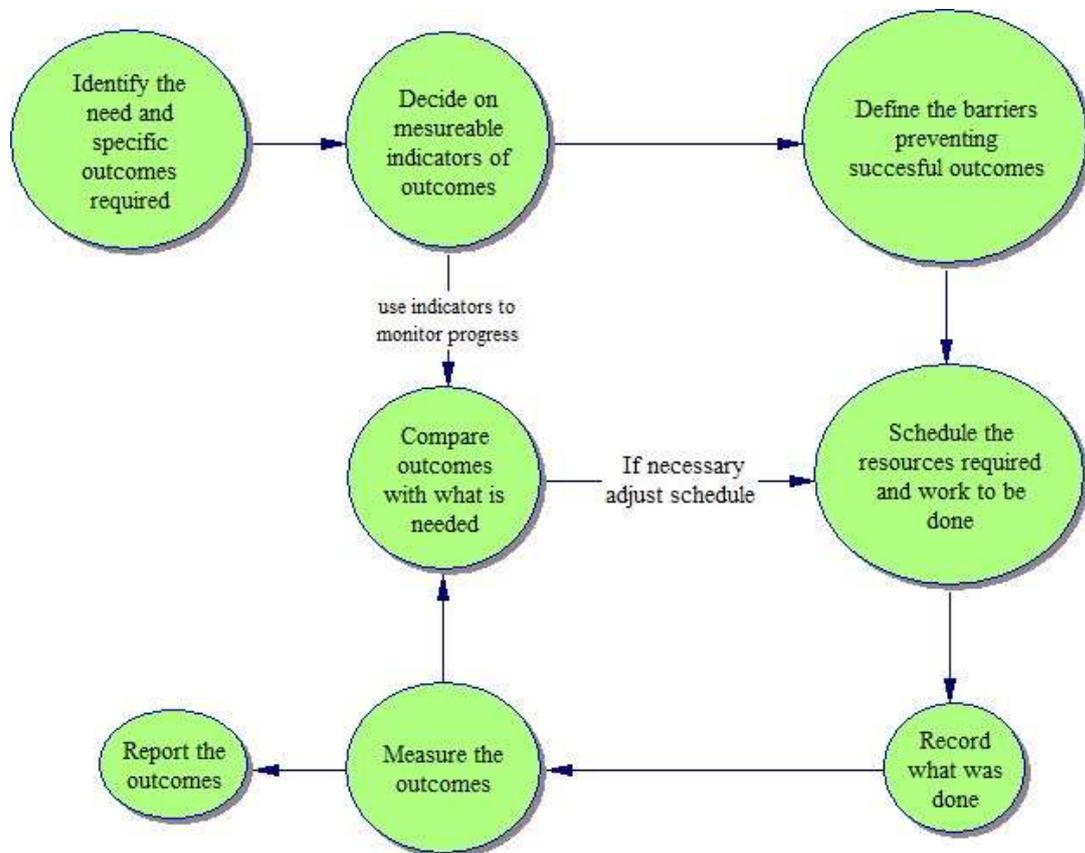


Fig 3 The Ecoscope logic diagram



4 Ecoscopes as open air exhibits for community learning

Ecoscopes to demonstrate how biodiversity action plans are made centre on five major factors of environmental control for the conservation of species:

- Control of other species e.g. invasive species, other native species and parasites and disease.
- Control of direct human impacts; e.g. grazing, human access, on and off-road vehicles, low impact recreation and illegal collecting and poaching.
- Pollution control; e.g. chemical run-off, siltation, water quality and use of pesticides and herbicides.
- Active habitat control; e.g. fire management, soil erosion and wetland and water bodies, habitat restoration and mechanical vegetation control.
- Artificial population recruitment; e.g. may include captive propagation (forced immigration) or captive breeding.

Exhibition sites are needed for people to learn about how to make biodiversity action plans for their community based on details like the ecological targets being conserved, threats to these targets, strategies being implemented, and what indicator measurements are showing about progress towards achieving the project objectives. Ecoscopes have to be presented to the public and the obvious place to introduce them, in the context of ideas about the community managing its local environmental issues, is in a network of local open air demonstration/ learning/training centers. This offers an opportunity for open air museums, wildlife/habitat trusts and country/urban parks to go beyond the formal aspect of their heritage conservation role and demonstrate action planning as a practical tool for living sustainably. This was the aim of the French museologist Hugues de Varine who, in 1971, used the word ecomuseum to define a very special kind of museum based on an agreement by which a local community takes care for its own environment (M.Maggi, 2002, *Ecomusei. Guida europea*, Torino-Londra-Venezia, Umberto Allemandi & C.), where:

- *agreement*, means a long term commitment, not necessarily an obligation by the law;
- *local community*, means a local authority and a local population jointly;
- *take care*, means that some ethical commitment and a vision for a future kind of local development are needed;
- *environment*, means not just a surface but complex layers of cultural, social, environmental values, which define a unique local heritage.

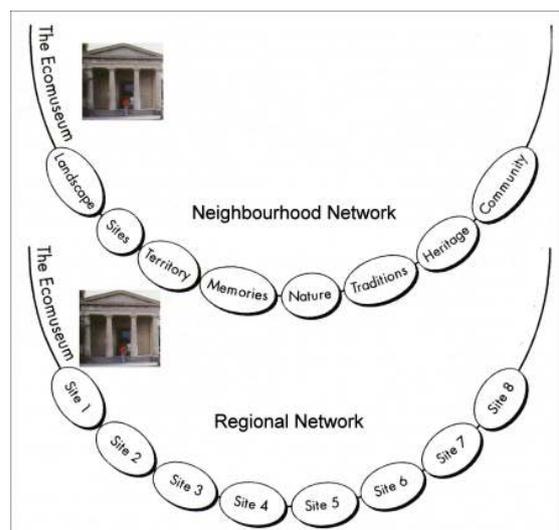
According to “*Declaration of Intent of the Long Net Workshop, Trento (Italy), May 2004*” an Ecomuseum demonstrates how communities preserve, interpret, and manage their heritage for a sustainable development.

A community with an ecomuseum means a group with:

- general involvement;
- shared responsibilities;
- interchangeable roles: where public officers, representatives, volunteers and other local actors are all playing a vital role in an ecomuseum.

Such groups are really neighbourhood social networks, more properly defined by what they do rather than by what they are called. In particular their territory is a discrete area, which can be a parish or electoral ward. They can be grouped into a larger area or a region consisting of a group of these community sites networked to a regional node, which could be a conventional museum, a heritage centre or a religious centre (Fig 4). In terms of building a communications network, the neighbourhood network may be seen as a virtual on-line site using social networking software to present and explain its exhibits, in the form of pictures, videos, audio files and text documents.

Fig 4 Necklace models of ecomuseums



Plans can be made on paper when a community sets out to answer the seven questions of the CMS logic, but using software as a set of spreadsheets or a dedicated database-diary is better for continuity and reporting. In a wider community context, conservation management is equated with planning for sustainability in all aspects of community life. Every nook and cranny of a neighbourhood becomes a distinctive place worthy of environmental surveillance and a community action plan. A plan can be modelled on the preservation or enhancement of the community's core green heritage assets, no matter how small. The plan can then be extended to include the management of other community assets/issues, such as health, transport, security, energy use, tidiness, and opportunities for employment and recreation. In this context the basic planning logic unifies action and recording across sectorial boundaries.

When the UK strategy for sustainable development was first launched, the idea of a national citizen's environmental network was proposed. The aim was to unite people to share their ideas and achievements in making and running community action plans for living sustainably. It was envisaged that a 'copycat network' should be initiated and controlled at the community level to ensure good ideas and practices should be multiplied. However, the idea as it was originally proposed, did not materialise; the Internet was in its infancy and freely available social networking software did not exist.

An environmental network needs to have the following two features:

- (i) A system for social networking
- (ii) A freely accessible database for presenting the community's planning process and its current state of progress towards meeting outcomes of citizen-led environmental improvements.

The Internet is now available to accommodate these two features on line. The first requirement is exemplified by text-based screen presentations such as 'wikis', blogs and 'conversational threads'; the second is illustrated by the 'web viewer' for presenting versions of the databases that are used to record planning and its outcomes as a process, which can both be interrogated on line.

5 An integrated planning model of localism

Community resource mapping is a strategy for promoting inter-agency collaboration by better alignment of programs and services for neighbourhoods. A community action plan sets out the resource limitations that have to be addressed by top level strategies, programmes and services. The major goal is to ensure that all have access to a broad, comprehensive, and integrated system of services essential in achieving desired outcomes defined by the stakeholders. Community resource mapping can be used to improve education, workforce development, and economic development in a community by aligning available services and resources, streamlining those services and resources, and identifying areas of need. The idea of resource mapping builds on the community's strengths by increasing the frequency, duration, intensity, and quality of services and supports in the community. It is a route map to organize information and give direction to meet a common community goal. As a result of resource mapping, people have more flexibility and choice in navigating the system, whether they be providers or stakeholders.

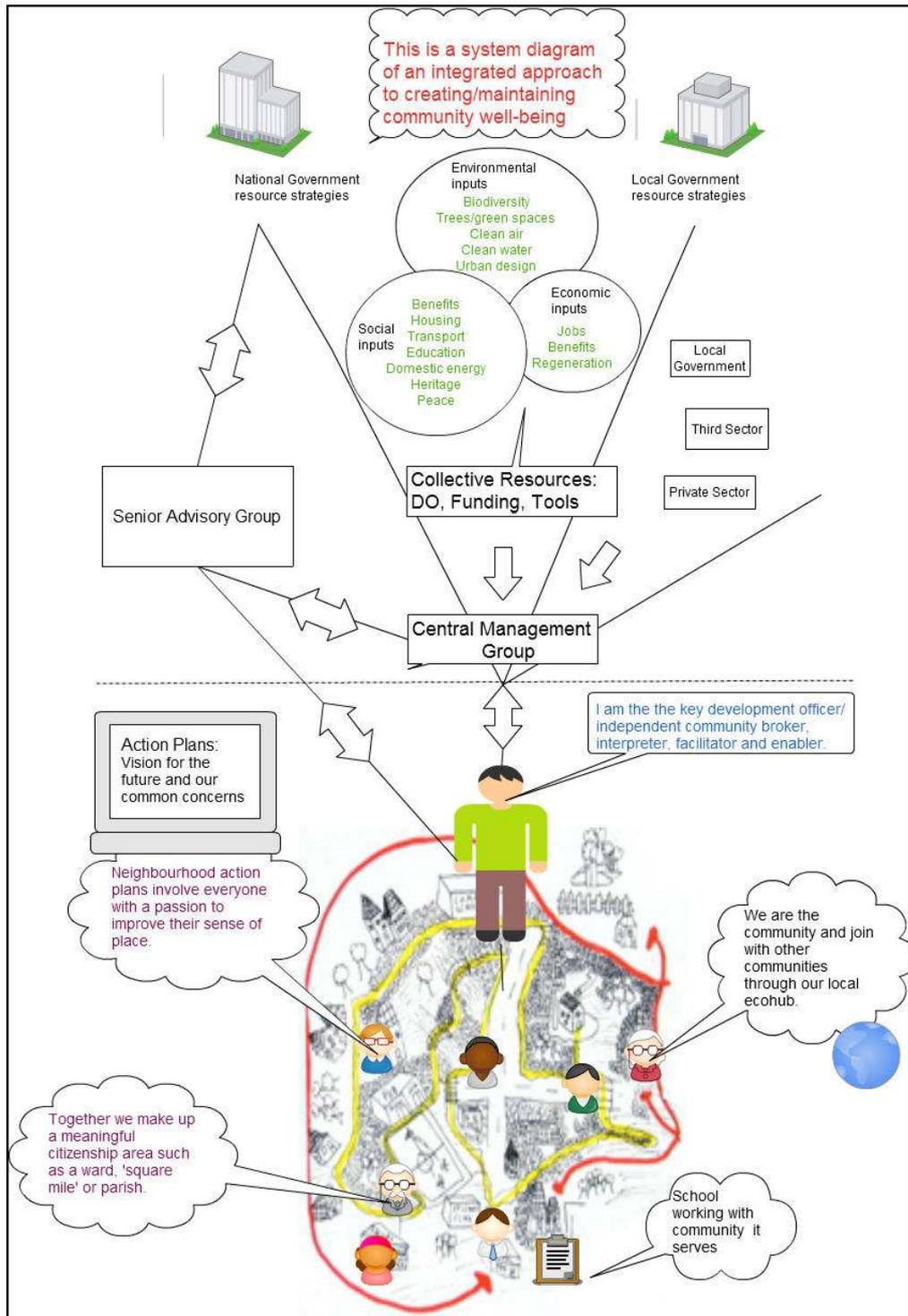
Resource mapping is particularly important as a strategy for improving outcomes for communities with complex and varied needs. When collectively pooled, resources for such communities can create a synergy that produces services well beyond the scope of what any single provider can hope to mobilize. The alignment of resources, streamlining of resources, and identification of service gaps within the community enables educators and service providers to (a) understand the full range of services available to different members within a community, (b) more efficiently provide the specific supports needed by each, and (c) develop new services and supports targeted to fill existing gaps.

An example of a community resource map is presented in Fig 4. It is a system designed to funnel services from departments within the Welsh government, local government and partner agencies, so that national community development strategies can be more effectively integrated into communities who are making action plans to increase their well being.



“The greatest limiting factor in setting up a regional citizen’s environmental network is to establish local training centres”.

Fig 5 Community resource map for integrating top-down support for bottom-up needs



6 Some examples of school/community networking

<http://www.blything.wikispaces.com>

www.biodiversity.ecoworld.co.uk/lincolnems

www.biodiversity.ecoworld.co.uk/ewicnet

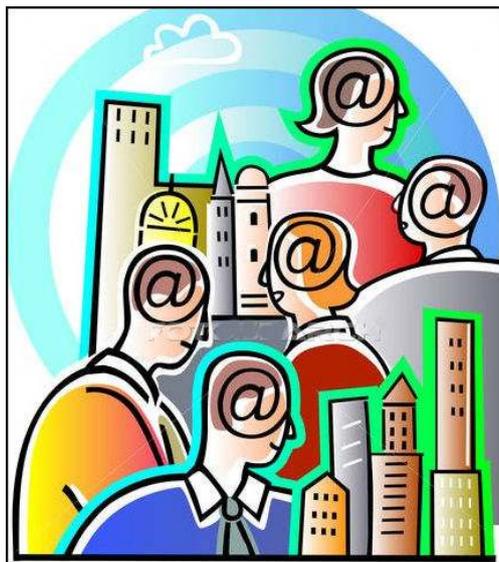
www.biodiversity.ecoworld.co.uk/rigsby

<http://www.ecomemaq.ntua.gr/Files/Draft%20Model%20Ecomuseum.pdf>

<https://sites.google.com/site/scanresources>

http://www.supportingadvancement.com/web_sightings/community_building/community_building.pdf

<http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/LEAP/>



To communicate is to be human

Appendix 1 INTERNET Communities

An Internet community consists of:

- People, who act socially as they strive to satisfy their own needs or perform special roles, such as leading or moderating;
- A shared purpose, such as an interest, need, information exchange, or service that provides a facility for the community;
- Policies, in the form of tacit assumptions, rituals, protocols, rules, and laws that guide people's interactions;
- Software systems, to support and mediate social interactions and facilitate a sense of "togetherness"

These common activities help to create a sense of community by providing a common feeling of identity, with which the members of the community can associate themselves. This growth of trust between members of a community is an important factor in the success of an online community. The common factors that help shape the behaviour of community members become practiced habits that help to construct the norms and identity of the community as a whole. The strength of such a network is frequently perceived to impart a heightened vitality to the community, and contributes to a strong sense of community identity.

Social networking

Social networking is the process of initiating, developing and maintaining friendships and collegial or project sharing relationships for mutual benefit. Current discussions surrounding social networking deal with web-based or technology-mediated tools, interactions, and related phenomena, but social networking really takes place in many forms, including face to face. A community that is active in strong in planning and acting grows through social networking, a process in which the Internet is now a primary driver.

Much technology-facilitated social networking is done in the form of person-to-person exchanges that can be classified as question and answer, point and counterpoint, announcement and support, action and feedback.

Technologies that facilitate social networking tend to emphasize ease of use, spontaneity, personalization, exchange of contacts, and low-end voyeurism. Some technologies that are often considered social networking technologies may not be socially oriented in and of themselves, but the communities that form around such technologies often demonstrate key elements of social networking (for example, the discussion communities that form around collaboratively authored wiki content).

Online community networks are often developed and deployed to supplement residential face-to-face communities in an effort to revitalise and grow neighbourhoods and to revive civic engagement and local community identity in society. In this context, the ubiquity of the Internet enables and encourages users to pursue 'personalized networking' which leads to the emergence of private 'portfolios of sociability'. 'Proximity' is the factor in on line residential communities, which produces networked individualism. This gives online residential communities a competitive advantage over dispersed online communities. Residential networks allow residents to interact online and to continue developing online interaction

offline, in real life and face to face. This offline and place-based dimension introduces challenges to the design, development and rollout of online community networks.

Reaching a critical mass of users is considered to be the key criterion of success and has been reported as one of the most common stumbling blocks: “If you build it, they will not necessarily come”. However, other studies have shown that a critical mass of interconnected users alone is not sufficient for a community network to live up to higher expectations, such as increasing social capital in the community, fostering sociability and establishing community identity. Those geographic communities already rich in social capital may become richer thanks to community networks, and those communities poor in social capital may remain poor, or simply put, connectivity does not ensure community. Something else has to be done. The Internet neither destroys nor creates social capital, people do, and the Internet will not *automatically* offset the decline in more conventional forms of social capital, but it has that potential.

Some examples of popular social networking technologies include:

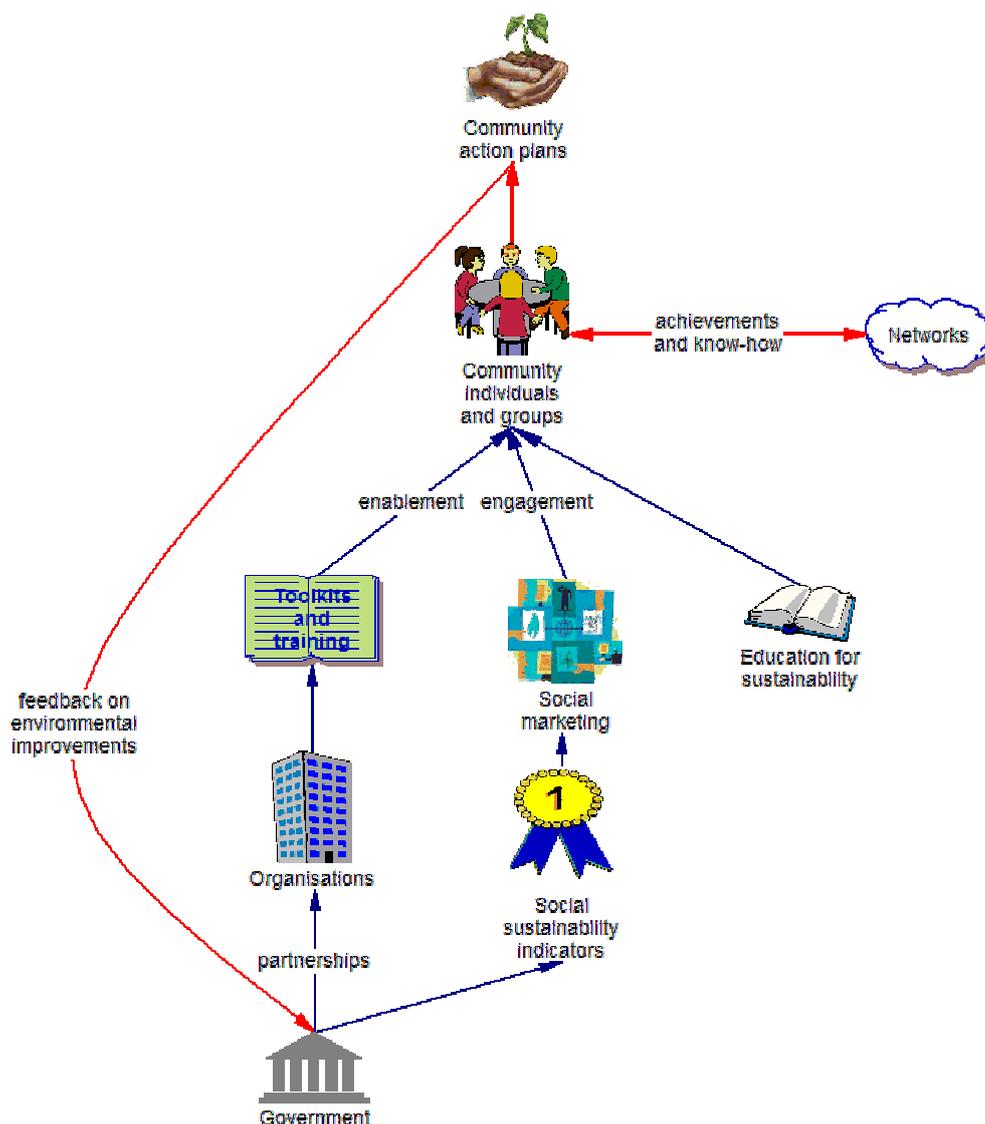
- asynchronous discussions via discussion boards or newsgroups
- instant messaging, e.g. MSN, AIM, and ICQ
- text-messaging or SMS
- message logging and sharing, such as Twitter
- document sharing and controlled collaborative authoring, such as Zoho or Google Docs & Spreadsheets
- loosely structured collaborative authoring and information sharing, such as wikis.
- photo sharing, such as Flickr and Picasa
- video sharing, such as YouTube
- blogs (life-sharing, news analysis, and editorialising)
- online communities, such as Nings, Facebook, etc.
- Second Life - sort of a combination of many of the above communication and collaborative tools.

Electronic networks may help support human networks and combat social exclusion provided there is sufficient access and support. Experience shows that most communities start as small emergent clusters organized around common interests or goals. Usually these clusters are isolated from each other. They are very small groups of 1-5 people or organizations that have connected out of necessity. Many of these small clusters are found in under-developed communities. If these clusters do not organize further, the community structure remains weak and under-producing. Without an active leader who takes responsibility for building a network spontaneous connections between groups emerge very slowly, or not at all. This network leadership role is known as a *network weaver*. Instead of allowing these small clusters to drift in the hope of making a lucky connection, the weaver actively creates new interactions between the clusters. Through this activity useful community structures emerge. This process is not easy to start, to maintain and to spread.

Spreading know how, good ideas and achievements is vital so that a community knows where it stands. This requires groups coming together in geographical nodes, which then make connections with other nodes. Nodes can appear and coalesce in community facilities, such as churches and heritage centres. Establishing nodes is also vital for bringing new communities on board and to provide local training in the planning logic and how to use software. It was to serve these purposes that the ecomuseum emerged as an idea to promote the establishment of self-sustaining citizen’s environmental networks.

Appendix 2 The community action cycle

Fritz Schumacher (Small is Beautiful) said you have to start at the human level if you want to change society and build a system to engage and enable community action plans. It is at this community level that ideas and needs are generated by individuals and groups to improve their sense of place. In this context, Schumacher argued that the first task of government and partner organisations is to recognise people who are already doing something about it (by following the red route in the following diagram), to support them and ask: what do we need to do to ensure that more of this good work happens elsewhere ?



The system diagram is really a community action cycle. Individuals and groups respond to social networks and education for living sustainability to make examine their environment and produce action plans for environmental improvements. Government helps by producing social sustainability indicators as specific action drivers, and through social marketing and partnerships with organisations providing toolkits and training, stimulates community engagement and enablement. Feedback on outcomes from action plans back to government provide performance indicators to complete the cycle. If this action system is not recognised, strategic plans simply represent government talking to itself.