

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Sustainable Community Development

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## The concept of sustainable community development

First, let's look at *community development*. The starting point for understanding this concept is that people are able, if they mobilise and organise themselves, to solve many of the problems they face themselves and to improve their lives without waiting for someone else to deal with the problems or challenges in their communities.

Sandu (2005) argues that community development is about voluntary change in, through and for community. IN – i.e. the intervention is made at the level of a community such as villages, towns, quarters, neighbourhoods; THROUGH – i.e. development is made with the help or participation of community members; and FOR – i.e. the intervention is always made for the benefit of community members, taking into account their needs and wishes.

The authors of the Integrated Community Development Guide (Alexeanu-Buttu et al., 2008) state that "community development is a planned evolution of aspects of community well-being (economic, social, cultural and environmental). It is a process by which community members come together to initiate collective action and generate solutions to common problems. The purpose of community development can range from small initiatives within a small group to major initiatives involving the whole community", and "the primary outcome of community development is to improve the quality of life" (p. 11). Community development is a process by which a community can achieve the following types of benefits:

- "It's becoming more responsible;
- Organizes and plans together;
- Optionally develops healthy lifestyles;
- Empowers itself;
- Reduces poverty and suffering;
- Creates economic and employment opportunities;
- Achieves social, economic, cultural and environmental goals" (p. 12).

Precupețu (2006) points out that "community development is a way of solving problems at the local level with an important component of sociability (by taking into account principles such as people's participation, empowerment of disadvantaged groups) and leading to social change towards building socially cohesive, inclusive, democratic communities characterized by a high quality of life" (p. 95).

Flint (2013) argues that it is necessary to talk nowadays about "sustainable community development" which means that a community "moves beyond subsistence, to the capability for making choices that promote resilience and *long-term* benefits" (p. 58).

This can only be achieved through an integrated or holistic approach that takes into account all dimensions of community life: natural, social, economic, cultural, etc. For this "we need a new form of public engagement, discourse, and community development. And this development must be holistic in nature, not fragmentary dealing with only people's special interests" (Flint, 2013, p. 17).

Involving as many citizens as possible in the life of the community and increasing their responsibility towards their collective life and the environment in which they live is absolutely necessary. "Key to a new development approach is the mobilization of stakeholders and their participation in the process (...). The citizens of a community are its source of empowerment, and increased citizen participation (attracting a critical mass of public engagement) is necessary in decision-making processes to facilitate democratic governance and responsiveness to community needs and interests" (Flint, 2013, p. 17).

## GreenComp - European framework of competences for sustainability

The European Commission has recently developed (Bianchi et al., 2022 ), through the Joint Research Centre (JRC), a European framework of competences for sustainability - GreenComp - which sets out a set of competences that can be trained and developed in educational programmes. This framework is very useful for teachers and trainers who coordinate learning processes on environmental and sustainability issues, but also for schoolchildren, students or any other categories of citizens involved in formal or non-formal education processes, as it provides tools for training, developing and reinforcing knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the protection of the environment, our planet and public health.

In this framework, sustainability is understood as the balance between the needs of people and the needs of the planet: "**Sustainability** means prioritising the needs of all life forms and of the planet by ensuring that human activity does not exceed planetary boundaries " (p. 12).

The GreenComp model has an interesting graphical representation that helps us to understand, promote and apply the theoretical elements into practice. It is a picture (see Figure 1) using the metaphor of bees pollinating flowers in nature.



Figure 1. Visual representation of GreenComp. Source: Bianchi et al., 2022, p. 16

There are four main elements in the GreenComp model: bees, flowers, pollen and beehives. These four elements represent four *areas of competence* needed for sustainability:

1. **Beehive** represents the competences related to the area "embodying sustainability values";
2. **Pollen** represents the competences related to the area "embracing complexity in sustainability";
3. **Flowers** are an image for competences in the area "envisioning sustainable futures";
4. **Bees** represent the competences related to the area "acting for sustainability".

Each competence area contains three specific competences and their descriptors. Each competence has three elements: a) knowledge, b) skills and c) attitudes, which need to be transmitted and formed in the learning and training processes.

The table below shows the areas of competence and specific descriptors (taken from: *Table 1. GreenComp areas, competences, and descriptors*. Source: Bianchi et al., 2022, pp. 14-15).

Table 1. GreenComp competence areas and their specific descriptors

Competence area	Competence	Competence descriptor
1. Embodying sustainability values	1.1 Valuing sustainability	To reflect on personal values; identify and explain how values vary among people and over time, while critically evaluating how they align with sustainability values.
	1.2 Supporting fairness	To support equity and justice for current and future generations and learn from previous generations for sustainability.
	1.3 Promoting nature	To acknowledge that humans are part of nature; and to respect the needs and rights of other species and of nature itself in order to restore and regenerate healthy and resilient ecosystems.
2. Embracing complexity in sustainability	2.1 Systems thinking	To approach a sustainability problem from all sides; to consider time, space and context in order to understand how elements interact within and between systems.
	2.2 Critical thinking	To assess information and arguments, identify assumptions, challenge the status quo, and reflect on how personal, social and cultural backgrounds influence thinking and conclusions.
	2.3 Problem framing	To formulate current or potential challenges as a sustainability problem in terms of difficulty, people

		involved, time and geographical scope, in order to identify suitable approaches to anticipating and preventing problems, and to mitigating and adapting to already existing problems.
3. Envisioning sustainable futures	3.1 Futures literacy	To envision alternative sustainable futures by imagining and developing alternative scenarios and identifying the steps needed to achieve a preferred sustainable future.
	3.2 Adaptability	To manage transitions and challenges in complex sustainability situations and make decisions related to the future in the face of uncertainty, ambiguity and risk.
	3.3 Exploratory thinking	To adopt a relational way of thinking by exploring and linking different disciplines, using creativity and experimentation with novel ideas or methods.
4. Acting for sustainability	4.1 Political agency	To navigate the political system, identify political responsibility and accountability for unsustainable behaviour, and demand effective policies for sustainability.
	4.2 Collective action	To act for change in collaboration with others.
	4.3 Individual initiative	To identify own potential for sustainability and to actively contribute to improving prospects for the community and the planet.

For a better understanding of how each competence described in the table can be transformed into personal and collective knowledge, skills and attitudes, we select an example from the presented material (Bianchi et al., 2022, p. 19): for competence 1.3 **Promoting nature**, described as: *"To acknowledge that humans are part of nature; and to respect the needs and rights of other species and of nature itself in order to restore and regenerate healthy and resilient ecosystems"*, the following knowledge can be formed and the following skills and attitudes can be developed: a) knowledge: *"knows that our wellbeing, health and security depend on the wellbeing of nature"*; b) skills: *"can assess own impact on nature and consider the protection of nature an essential task for every individual"* and c) attitudes: *"cares about a harmonious relationship existing between nature and humans"*.

For more information on how descriptors can be transformed into knowledge, skills and attitudes, it is recommended to consult the cited document.

Alexeanu-Buttu, M., Arpinte, D., Arpinte, M., Cace, S., Precupețu, I., Preoteasa, A.M. (2008). *Ghid de dezvoltare comunitară integrată (Integrated Community Development Guide)*. București: Vanemonde.

Bianchi, G., Pisiotis, U., Cabrera Giraldez, M. (2022). *GreenComp – The European sustainability competence framework*. Bacigalupo, M., Punie, Y. (Eds.), EUR 30955 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, doi:10.2760/13286, JRC128040.

Precupețu, I. (2006). *Strategii de dezvoltare comunitară (Community development strategies)*. Iași: Editura Expert Projects.

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