

The IDELE Project

INTRODUCTION

The Lisbon strategy for economic, social and environmental renewal

The Lisbon Strategy is a commitment to bring about economic, social and environmental renewal in the EU. In March 2000, the European Council in Lisbon set out a ten-year strategy to make the EU the world's most dynamic and competitive economy. Under the strategy, a stronger economy will drive job creation alongside social and environmental policies that ensure sustainable development and social inclusion.

As a part of the European Commission IDELE project, we are inviting practitioners and policy-makers to a seminar in Cork on 8th October 2004 to participate in a debate that will help us to establish what value added role local employment development can play in furthering the objectives of the Lisbon process. We have invited a number of local projects to Cork that have been selected for being good examples to demonstrate how *acting locally* can enhance the process of driving toward the Lisbon objectives. We shall be exploring how universities, employer networks, local coalitions, social partners and state agencies and others can come together to create dynamic local spaces that can both be competitive and can ensure sustainable development and social inclusion.

LOCAL EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, employment and economic development has seen a shift of focus towards the local. 'Local employment development' rests on the idea that action can be taken locally to identify new sources of demand for labour. The argument is that, left to itself, the market can fail to meet certain gaps in local service provision and local approaches are needed to translate these gaps into real job opportunities. It is also acknowledged that the local level can make a significant contribution to assisting people in accessing local employment opportunities, through overcoming the barriers certain groups face in accessing employment. More than this, acting locally can add a



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dimension of creativity to enterprise and can, in some cases, add significantly to business competitiveness.

The central question is how, in practice, people working at the local level can transform local gaps in service provision and local training opportunities into job creation and at the same time add to the competitive edge of business enterprise. The main tool proposed by policymakers is the *partnership approach*; partnerships are felt to combine both creative potential and good access to local knowledge, across a series of thematic areas. They also have the potential to bring key people (from the public, private and voluntary sectors) around the table, which is an important factor in implementing successful projects. There are, however, many different approaches to local employment development across Europe that can be used to tackle a variety of problems and issues at the local level. The identification, exchange and dissemination of such examples is one of the key aims of the IDELE project.

THE IDELE PROJECT

The European Commission (DG Employment and Social Affairs) has appointed ECOTEC Research and Consulting to implement the IDELE project to “identify, disseminate and exchange good practice in local employment development”. IDELE pays particular attention to identifying and disseminating best practice between localities that share common characteristics. The IDELE seminars provide a platform for policy-makers and promoters facing similar problems to share a real dialogue about how the local approach can make a difference and thereby strengthen local employment development across Europe. The lessons, principles and tools identified will be disseminated across Europe.

THE IDELE CORK SEMINAR

This seminar will explore the role of local employment development in the context of the Lisbon Strategy. The EU policy agenda often seems distant to local-level stakeholders and this seminar offers an exciting opportunity to explore how local level action links directly to the Lisbon agenda.

While the other seminars in this programme deal with more clearly defined geographical settings – rural areas, big cities, and urban-industrial areas – this setting embraces a wider variety of settings. We are setting out here to examine this aspect of local employment development from the perspective of ex-urban areas and small to medium-sized towns.

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

The places which the seminar will look at are not, then, major cities, old industrial conurbations or “deep rural” regions. In between these more easily identifiable settings, there is a wide variety of intermediate conditions. They may be commuter towns, close to major cities experiencing the spin-offs and multipliers of decentralisation or on the edges of declining industrial conurbations gaining little and themselves emptying out. They may be genuinely free-standing towns capturing the spin-offs from available green field sites and premises. They may be set in a context of rural depopulation and hidden unemployment. Commuter towns also fit into this category.



KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Local employment development projects in these sorts of areas can make a substantial contribution to the Lisbon Agenda. In particular, the Lisbon agenda recognises the realities of the process of globalisation – such as intensified competition from developing countries in global markets and the increased mobility of capital – and seeks to stimulate the EU into responding to this challenge in a way that maintains the competitiveness of the European economy without compromising social cohesion. The comparative advantage enjoyed by developing countries in low value-added activities will force the EU countries to move increasingly into higher value-added industries, such as financial services, research and development, and high value-added manufactured goods.

As the EU economy undergoes a transformation into an economy even more focussed on high value-added industries than is the case today, there will be winners and losers. Some places will benefit hugely from the emphasis on a high-tech, innovative, knowledge-based economy (KBE), while others areas will need to be protected from the negative effects that often accompany structural change of this kind. It will be necessary to mitigate the worst side-effects of the process of 'creative destruction' inherent to structural change of this kind. The KBE will be characterised by inequalities – inequalities linked to place, class, and race – that will have a particular configuration at the local level. The key role for local employment development will be to ensure that the local economy is able to access the full range of opportunities open to it.

To ensure that the seminar has a clear focus, we will develop the debate around a small number of themes related to the Lisbon process:

- SMEs / entrepreneurship and the development of knowledge based industry clusters and agglomerations
- Human capital for the knowledge-based economy, including lifelong learning;
- The need to take a view on social inclusion and environmental sustainability;



KEY QUESTIONS FOR DEBATE

The seminar should answer the following questions:

1. What contribution can local employment development make to the Lisbon process?
2. How can local employment development projects/actions help to provide an environment in which the knowledge-based economy can flourish?
3. How can local employment development best promote learning and education in a way that genuinely responds to the demands of a knowledge-based society?
4. How can socially excluded people best be integrated into the knowledge-based economy?
5. Where local economies have become 'success stories' – what are the special x-factors that help them sustain this?

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information on the IDELE project please visit our website at:
www.ecotec.com/idele/

Alternatively, you can email or write to us at the address below:

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