



## Briefing Paper 12

# The coming revolution in Public Services: What it means for Cities and Universities

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### Executive Summary

The preconditions for a major revolution in public services are in place. The global financial and economic crisis will lead to major changes in social welfare and the world of work in developed and developing countries alike, in cities both old and new, in places which are still growing and in those which are shrinking. Cities will need new solutions. Universities have a critical role to play to help promote research and innovation for effective and efficient solutions, to train people to make best use of them, and to keep societies open to better ways of living and working. Lifelong learning will be at the core of their role. Cities and universities need to collaborate if effective solutions are to be put in place.

### Key Issues

Crises are a test of social resilience and adaptability. PASCAL's learning city initiative focuses on the social and human services that communities and places need to repair the damage of the crisis and to cope with a changing, ageing society, and with cities that are more vulnerable to catastrophes.

None of this will be easy or simple. Individuals have responsibilities to learn, institutions have responsibilities to teach, and communities and employers have responsibilities to invest in organizational measures which put learning and skills to work and give incentives to everyone to improve them. Cities and regions, whether they seek greater autonomy, or have it imposed on them, will have greater responsibility for public services. How will services be organized and delivered within city-regions? The answer will depend in part on their collaboration with universities.

PASCAL's unique approach, bringing academics and practitioners together can help develop these processes in local contexts.

### Recent analysis

We don't have all the answers but there are many promising developments. Maybe we know what to do; however, we don't know enough about how to do it. The 2012 OECD skills strategy (p.13) calls on governments to:

- Prioritise investment of scarce resources;
- Strengthen the case for lifelong learning;
- Foster a whole-of-government approach;
- Combine short-and long-term considerations;
- Align different levels of government;
- Include all relevant stakeholders;
- Provide a global perspective.

All very admirable, all essential – *but how realistic?* A smooth and sequential series of steps on paper from analysis of a problem to submission of a report is simply far removed from the real-world situation in which urban innovation occurs successfully as the result of partnership in which roles and responsibilities may be blurred, experiments tolerated; implementation may encounter many obstacles, requiring negotiation.

Implementation is where governments fall short. And the crisis has further weakened governments, narrowing their electoral base and shrinking the size and breadth of the public administration. The impact of the crisis has made strategic governance reforms more, not less, difficult.

There are global networks of cities for health, sustainability, even for learning; the C40 movement covers 58 cities, including several of the largest, to share experiences on improving sustainable infrastructure finance; intergovernmental organisations have programmes specifically directed toward city and regional governments. What is striking about so many of these initiatives however is **how relatively few cities out of the thousands in the world are trying to be innovative in areas which they can control.**

Universities are far more “internationalized” than cities. There were 2.5 million foreign and international students in universities in the OECD area in 2007, an increase of 90% since 1998! Of these, 67% come from outside the OECD area. Universities engage in cross-border alliances, and even set up campuses overseas, with the same positive effects, enhancing innovation and competition, that foreign-imported goods and the entry of foreign firms in domestic markets have in other sectors. Performance-based and outcome-oriented methods have transformed many aspects of universities as the global market for students and researchers, and for the application of research, expands.

Institutions of higher education possess characteristics which matter vitally in the effort to lift the level of innovation and to direct innovation to the needs of cities, and to broaden and deepen education for more people through their adult lives:

- A long-term view. It is the nature of universities to outlive political regimes and economic cycles. This is partly due to their autonomy and mode of governance, and partly to their very function as custodians of knowledge, as the priests of *patrimoine* – and as care-givers to young adults - where the pursuit of truth has an ethical purpose.

- Multi-disciplinarity. People should learn how to work on problems, drawing on the skills and creativity of different disciplines.
- The interface between research and practical problems. The expertise to develop practical applications for research exists on many campuses.
- Non-linear learning and discovery. Classroom instruction is often based on a linear model, taking students through a subject starting from first principles. Interaction with business and communities as well as experimentation in the laboratory and investigation in the library make faculty and students experience learning as observer-participants. This model of learning complements classroom instruction, enriching it.
- A platform to introduce and test innovations.

The Learning City concept, which PASCAL has articulated in its own Learning City Network and in its collaboration with the Global Learning Cities programme of UNESCO's UIL, is so important. Learning Cities are places where people are trying to learn to live and work differently to achieve social, environmental and economic goals. This is a trial-and-error process.

### **Implications for practice**

Educational systems and particularly universities can make change happen. **Institutions of higher education, working internationally through teaching, research and community service, can take this agenda forward.**

Three key developments are needed – research, instruction and community engagement:

- for innovation in public services,
- on how competition and accessibility affect the quality of services,
- on how to help people working in public services to make best use of available knowledge,
- on regulatory reforms that will improve the delivery of services at community level;
- on risk, vulnerability and resilience that help determine the kind of public services communities need;
- on new dimensions of security in the international order, and on ways to promote international co-operation and an adequate stock of public goods;
- on how to finance innovations and provide a long-term stream of financing for public services; and
- on how to improve evaluation and the capacity to share and learn from good practices.

**This is a practical agenda for all universities**, from the most prestigious and research-oriented to regional institutions where the emphasis is on teaching.

Universities should see this agenda – the coming revolution in public services - as in their own interest. Universities like Glasgow and Tec de Monterrey, where PASCAL centres are based, are changing their campuses and tearing down walls separating them from the surrounding neighbourhood. Physical changes speak of a change of outlook and values, a willingness to take on the agenda of social inclusion.

All disciplines at the university level, implicitly and explicitly, are about the discovery, codification and transmission of rules: the laws of physics, rules of historical evidence, linguistic rules, economic paradigms – all embody the notion that biological, social and physical systems can be studied to reveal underlying structures and patterns, and that how knowledge can be brought forth and tested themselves follow certain rules of demonstration and proof.

As special places in our universe of institutions, universities traditionally have had their own rules, and have functioned as a place of refuge during civil and international conflicts: if knowledge of the truth is sacred, then universities are, indeed, sanctuaries. At a time when populist pressures and false news are undermining evidence-based decision-making, universities stand apart. But that does not mean that they cannot engage with the communities around them, to help address the issues which drive intolerance and protectionism.

Universities have specialists who understand how cities function and how they have evolved, who develop the methodologies suitable to the interpretation of urban cultures, and how can train the next generation of architects and engineers, urban administrators, educators, health specialists, lawyers, etc. **Better methods are needed to bring people from different disciplines together**, specialists in forestry, chemistry, geology, linguistics, law, finance, the whole range of scientific, social science and humanities disciplines. Consider the movement to reduce urban lighting at night so that people can enjoy the night sky as a right: this involves not only astronomers and lighting engineers, but also safety specialists, designers, even artists. The principle of the university is the cross-fertilization of ideas, even when this leads to debate and disagreement. If multi-disciplinary teaching and research can be improved in universities, how much easier cross-sectoral work will be in public administrations.

### **Actions**

Sometimes the initiative must come from outside the university, which is still closed in on itself; sometimes it is the university that takes the initiative to engage with local and regional governments, with civil society, and with business. Sometimes, regional and city authorities can seek out the learning within the areas they serve.

Universities must manage their own space more sustainably, and address social needs in their own population of students and staff, thus demonstrating the practical value of measures that can be applied more widely in the communities around them.

Universities can be found in virtually all cities and regions, whatever degree to which they are urbanized. And they play a critical role in economic regulation as the place where people who will take responsibility in communities, firms and governments are trained and educated, where much of the adult population is acculturated to participate in a diverse, globalized society; and where knowledge and ideas are validated, tested and disseminated according to normative procedures which have rule-making functions, classifying knowledge on a continuum between truth and error with a range for doubt in between, and always open to questioning and dissent .

### **How can PASCAL assist?**

- PASCAL can help decision-makers especially at local and regional levels to “put good ideas to use” by strengthening the demand for innovation and improving the fiscal, managerial and political capacity to see it through, even at the risk of failure. (Szanton, 1981: 155). Workshops and reports are basic tools.
- PASCAL, through its centres, can marshal evidence of developments underway on university campuses that promise benefits for their communities.
- Comparative studies and reports, and case studies at the PASCAL annual conference, build a solid body of evidence, with demonstration effects.
- The PASCAL network of associates can provide informed advice on short notice.

- PASCAL, as a global network, can show how global governance can triumph over parochialism. In the final analysis, the main value of efforts to lift human and social capital is not (just) higher productivity, but a commitment to co-operation as an instrument of progress.

## Sources

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***The PASCAL International Observatory can help promote and validate innovative solutions. Experts in our Learning Cities Network can:***

- *Address university leaders at the Vice-Chancellor level, city leaders including mayors, the administrators who do things, and policy-makers at regional and national level.*
- *Reach the development and philanthropic sectors by producing a stand-alone report and an active web site.*
- *Inform and engage local business leaders who can help define educational and skill needs and promote entrepreneurship especially among young people.*
- *Identify research priorities for foundations and national research councils.*

Contact us through our website <http://pascalobservatory.org>