



Photo from a community centre in Wales UK

# TOWARDS COMMON CRITERIA FOR LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND CITIES

SECOND EXTENDED VERSION

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## INTRO

This contribution is developed in preparation of the advisory board of the national learning cities initiative in Israel.

We need common guidelines to set-up, discuss and evaluate what is now across the world called learning communities and learning cities.

Learning communities and cities, their needs and ambitions, are very complicated and very different.

This is why we need a common language, a set of common criteria, allowing us to define, discuss and reflect on what learning communities and cities are really about, and what they are not about.

The fact that learning communities are and should be very different, does not mean that there are no shared values and principles.

In this context *learning community* simply means a small or mid-sized city, a part of a city or a region: a geographical part of a city, a special community of citizens, a sector, a partnership, etc.

Bigger *learning cities* and also regions consist in a number of learning communities linked together at city level. A special interest should be paid to *how* bigger learning cities are linking together learning communities.

This goes, however beyond the ambition of this contribution. This contribution only concerns generic criteria for both learning cities and communities.

In general our approach to what learning cities and communities are in theory is very un-dogmatic, flexible and un-dramatic. Our mission is the common language based on common criteria.

The criteria should never link to specific content or topics, such as for example health or energy, but exclusively to how the community functions, operates and collaborate, or in short: to the "learning" capacity building of the city and its citizens.

A learning community can be rich or poor and have many or few resources. It could be a metropol or a village.

The point is HOW the resources are used, HOW the organizations collaborate, HOW citizens' needs are met at a given resource level - in short, HOW infrastructures are set up and operate to ensure that the community is a *learning community*.

A learning city must therefore be evaluated in relative and not in absolute terms: evaluating the community performance against available and potential resources.

*The criteria below are simply placed in alphabetic order and consist in short statements.*

## FRAMEWORK

### BALANCES



The learning community or city does not produce excessive rhetoric around itself. Learning and innovation ambitions are always balanced against the realities of the community, including economic and social realities.

When resources do not allow community missions to be completed, the key stakeholders make dilemmas and balance needs transparent and encourage the citizens and organizations to find alternative solutions.

### CHANGE



Change is regarded the rule and not the exception in the community, and the community works to develop a strong capacity to link changes to opportunities of innovation.

Change and change management, individually and collectively, is being included in all sorts of learning and training activities.

The community and the key stakeholders demonstrate an awareness to ensure meaningfulness in the way challenges and problems are turned into opportunities of change.

### DIVERSITY



The learning community do not encourage one size fits all. The community and the partnerships are aware that different people and organizations need different solutions.

Diversity is therefore regarded a potential resource that should be exploited and unfolded, not an obstacle.

The term diversity covers in the community culture, race, policy as well as different ways of living, working and learning.

### DYNAMICS



The learning community promotes an atmosphere of dynamics: things are possible, things can be debated, and initiatives can be taken at all levels of the community.

The key stakeholders openly acknowledge that resources are always limited and that not everything is possible, but demonstrate the dynamics of the community by constantly encouraging and supporting initiatives and innovation.

The community supports a dynamic climate by encouraging strong cross-sector initiatives and partnerships, allowing the encounter of learning and policy, business and art, culture and administration.

## INCLUSION



The learning community demonstrates in practice awareness towards groups of citizens with strong inclusion needs.

Inclusion is designed according to the real needs of the different groups of citizens, taking into account gender, cultural background and learning resources.

Inclusion is not seen as charity, but as a serious and important challenge to the community.

All key sectors and stakeholders in the community demonstrate responsibility and accountability with regard to inclusion strategies and actions.

Inclusion actions are taken in open collaboration with the citizens to be included.

## INFRASTRUCTURES



Core infrastructures of collaboration are in place in the community to identify the learning and employment needs of all groups of citizens.

The infrastructures are constantly being maintained and further developed.

The infrastructures of lifelong learning links directly to groups of citizens.

The infrastructures seek to be cross-sectoral, especially bridging between the public, social and private sectors.

The infrastructures are able to identify needs, form partnerships, capture existing resources and raise new resources, and to take concrete action.

The infrastructures highly influence the atmosphere of communication, information and dialogue in the community.

The infrastructures make themselves and their initiatives visible in the community.

## INNOVATION



The learning community regards innovation as an ongoing and integrated activity within all major fields of community activity, from technological innovation to innovative learning spaces and social innovation.

Innovation is regarded one of the most important incubators of cross-sector partnerships.

The community has a strong focus on children's and young people's innovative capacity, and nurtures such capacities from a very early stage of life.

Innovation is not practices as a higher education or private enterprise activity only. The community invites all groups of citizens to participate in innovative activities.

The community works to encourage an innovate mentality among all community stakeholders.

## LEARNING



The learning community encourages communities of learning!

The community infrastructures ensure a permanent and systematic approach to the citizens' learning and employment needs.

The infrastructures work towards a high capacity to identify new learning challenges and to take concrete steps to meet them.

All sorts of learning in the community - from excellence to first-step-inclusion, from formal to non-formal and informal learning - are seen as valuable and enriching to the community.

The community demonstrates a capacity and will to turn a variety of community activities into learning events.

The key stakeholders work to provide new and interesting spaces for learning.

The community works to provide different learning opportunities linked to different groups of citizens' needs.

Learning is regarded a field of constant change and innovation in the community.

The citizens' learning interests and capacity is regarded the most valuable resource in the community.

## NEEDS



The lifelong learning infrastructures and partnerships are able to identify unmet and emerging learning needs among the citizens and in the organizations.

The needs and the steps taken are seen in a lifelong learning perspective.

The needs are regularly discussed with the citizens who have the needs.

The infrastructures work to take concrete initiatives to meet learning needs, in collaboration with the citizens who have the needs and the organization who can offer new opportunities.

The community acknowledges that needs can be very different and should be addressed in very different ways.

## OPPORTUNITIES



The community works, based on the resources available, to provide useful and meaningful learning and employment opportunities to as many citizens as possible.

The opportunities offered are to a large extent designed in dialogues with the relevant citizens and organization.

The key stakeholders in the community demonstrate an awareness of the fact that their citizens, including talented youth and adults, must have spaces, platforms and frameworks to be able to learn and unfold.

The community works to offer a diversity of spaces for

learning, both physical and digital.

## OUTREACH



The community and partnerships reach out to citizens and organizations not engaged in lifelong learning.

The community is aware that special measures and initiatives are needed to reach disengaged and disadvantaged citizens and organizations.

The outreach is practiced in an open and inviting way, not in a moralistic way.

## PARTICIPATION



The community seeks to engage as many groups of citizens in lifelong learning, cultural and social activities as possible.

The participation is direct and meaningful.

Participation strategies put a special emphasis on participation of citizens at risk or citizens with special (learning) needs.

Participation is not experienced by the citizens as simulation, but as meaningful activities that can make a difference to themselves and others.

Participation is practiced both in formal and non-formal contexts.

## PARTNERSHIPS



The community establishes partnerships between organizations from relevant sectors, public authorities and active citizens.

Partnerships are seen as one of the major tools to meet the many lifelong learning and employment challenges.

Partnerships between public and private stakeholders are in particular encouraged and supported in the community.

Partnerships linking directly to the citizens are in particular encouraged and supported in the community.

Untraditional partnerships offering added value and innovative approaches to the learning community is highly welcomed and celebrated.

Partnerships are governed by the ethics of mutual interests, mutual understanding and mutual benefits.

## PENETRATION



The learning community and its infrastructures pay much attention to the fact that the values and principles of the learning community penetrate the entire community.

The community is aware that not all citizens and organizations need to be active on the learning and employment scene, but that the learning community principles should be visible and practiced in all corners of the community - from the Mayor's office to the home for elderly.

The community practices the 3-dimensional penetration approach:  
Horizontal - the learning activities reaches a large part of the citizens and organizations.  
Vertical - the learning activities links together many levels of the community.  
Depths - the learning spaces allows citizens to be deeply engaged in different forms of learning.

## POLICY-MAKING



Policy-making takes into account the long-term needs of the citizens.

Policy-making links to active citizens.

Policy-making provides independent and flexible frameworks for citizens' and organizations' initiatives and active participation.

Policy-making encourages initiatives and innovation.

Policy-making encourages a mentality of sharing, openness and transparency.

Policy-making actively supports the maintenance and further development of collaborative infrastructures, including cross-sectoral.

## REFLECTION



The community and the partnerships know that no learning community will ever be perfect, and they allow and encourage critical reflection on the performance and achievements of the learning community.

The key stakeholders are aware of their special responsibilities as public authorities or large organizations and they therefore pay special attention to open and critical dialogues on their performance.

The community invites on certain occasions experts or experienced learning cities' resources to engage in critical dialogues.

The community encourages citizens' and professionals' mobility to other cities and countries to deepen the critical reflection.

## SHARING



Although functioning within the open market mechanisms framework, the community and the partnerships practice a mentality of sharing.

The basic approach in the community is that sharing and competing is the best balance towards a dynamic economy.

The community practices open collaborating with other cities in the country and puts a strong focus on international collaborating.

Local and global sharing is strong values in the community and is promoted both at policy, organizational and citizen level.

The sharing mentality includes organizations' and citizens' physical mobility to other cities, regions and countries.

## TALENT



The community provides interesting and challenging opportunities for talented youth and adults.

Talented youth and adults are encouraged to pursue their talents and unfold them within the community.

The infrastructures and partnerships work to provide incubators for talents and innovative clusters to enable new ideas to reach the market and produce new jobs and enterprises.

Incubating talent is seen in the community as key to the community's future economic and social success.

The community celebrates a variety of different talents, from technology to painting, and not only talent that can be short-term linked to the market.

## TRANSPARENCY



Policy-making, partnerships and collaboration is transparent to the citizens.

The different agendas of the participating organizations are visible to the participating partners and to the citizens.

The general transparency in the community supports coherence, trust and liability.

## VALUE CODES



Certain value codes embraces the learning community, but are also openly debated among stakeholders and citizens, such as gender equality, human rights, respect for nature and fighting prejudice.

The value codes are not moralistic mantras for the community but a set of values debated among people in the community.

The learning community is openly value based, not on certain eternal values, but in the way that the community encourages value discussions and acknowledge values as important elements in the community.

## VISIBILITY



The community makes lifelong learning opportunities and activities visible to the citizens - from kindergarten to the hospital and the shopping centre.

The communication is inviting and encouraging, not moralistic.

The visibility focuses to a high degree on the citizens' own storytelling.

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EARLY STAGE DIALOGUE  
QUESTIONS

What community challenges are or will be **the drivers** of the different new learning communities?

What **values and principles** are or will the establishment processes and debates be based on - directly or indirectly?

How are or will the new learning cities be **communicated** to the citizens of the communities?

How is or will the challenge of **different communities** and different cultures be discussed in the planning of the initiatives?

How are or will the initiatives be **visible** to people and organisations in the new learning communities?

What are or will be the **infrastructures** of the new initiatives - who are or will be communicating and collaborating?

Are or will **partnerships** in the communities be formed in support of the establishment process - and from which sectors?

How are or will people and organisations from the community be **included** in discussions about what the learning community should look like in practice?

How is or will it be included in the establishment process to reflect on and discuss how **needs and opportunities** in the community are identified and approached?

Have or will specific initiatives been or be launched to involve **less active groups** of citizens in the establishment process?



*To be developed...*

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MID STAGE DIALOGUE  
QUESTIONS



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MATURE STAGE DIALOGUE  
QUESTIONS



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CRISIS DIALOGUE QUESTIONS



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ROLE MODEL DIALOGUE  
QUESTIONS



## A LEARNING FRAMEWORK



The idea of the criteria and the statements is to describe the core structures of a learning community from different angles. The criteria are not mutually exclusive and do not have to be.

More criteria might be added, some deleted and some integrated in other criteria along the discussions and implementation of the criteria.

Qualitative and quantitative evaluation approaches should be developed for each of the criteria - some approaches might be suitable for a group of criteria, some for others...

New sets of approaches should be likely to result from the practical application of the framework and its monitoring devices.

A further perspective would be to invite learning communities to offer examples and interesting practices on the different criteria, also examples documenting non-successful initiatives or actions.

In this way, the Common Criteria framework is itself a learning process - a learning framework.

Frameworks are not static structures, but dynamic reflections of the realities they relate to.

The framework must reflect and welcome *change*...

Different and elaborated versions of the framework can therefore be foreseen - incorporating lessons learned from different contexts of application of the framework.

The framework is aware and openly acknowledges that it represents and promotes certain political and social values as to learning communities.

*Comments, critical reflections and dialogues are extremely welcome!*

## THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

We have been talking about learning cities for over 20 years. Some people link a learning city to things like lifelong learning, health, climate, environment or social innovation - or to democracy and active citizenship...

Much rhetoric can be unfolded in the attempt to define what a learning city is.

We prefer a very pragmatic approach, trying to set up some basic criteria and expectations for a learning city.

At the same time we prefer the word *community*, as it is more flexible and point towards *structures* rather than *content*: learning community structures can be developed and practiced at many different levels, such as a (poor or rich) city, a region, a transnational region, etc. - but also at the level of a part of a city, a partnership or innovative collaboration covering certain themes or challenges.

What's important to us is that a learning community is *a community that learns*.

The learning community is not defined by the amount of lifelong learning activities, but by how the community as a community is learning.

A community with a lot of lifelong learning might be called *a community of learning*, but is not necessarily *a learning community*.

In other words, it is about how a community (a city, a part of a city, a partnership) develops infrastructures of communication and collaboration capacity to *manage needs, change and challenges* important to the community and its organisations and citizens.

This *infrastructural communication and collaboration capacity building* is crucial to the essence of a learning community:

- How are initiatives taken?
- Who is communicating about emerging needs or opportunities?
- To what extent are different sectors collaborating, a college, a bank and a sport club?
- How are groups of citizens involved in finding new ways to solve their problems?
- How are talent and innovation and creativity welcomed and supported?
- What kinds of partnerships are created outside the public authorities?
- To what extent can partnerships and groups of citizens act independently?
- How is policy created?
- How is trust built between the collaborators and between authorities and citizens?
- What organisations and groups of citizens are involved in entrepreneurship?
- How are the community's inclusion principles and infrastructures working in practice?
- How is a community mentality encouraged, developed and sustained?

A learning community is a community that dynamically practices, tests, challenges and critically discusses such infrastructures of communication and collaboration permanently and at a systematic level. This is how the learning community is learning.

A city with a lot of education institutions is not by definition a learning community...

A city with a strong focus on health is not by definition a learning community...

A city actively promoting green innovation is not by definition a learning community...

A city engaging in the rhetoric of learning cities is not by definition a learning community...

A learning community can be expected to address such matters in a serious way, but this is not what *makes it* a learning community.

The Common Criteria tries to unfold expectations linked to this understanding of a learning community - and is prepared to learn from practice and experience.

