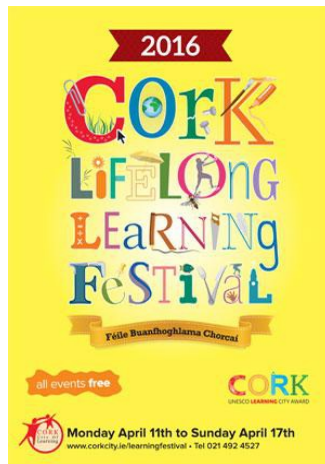




Cork's Learning City journey so far – a story of Investigation, Participation, Celebration and Motivation

Cork's presentation is a reflection on milestones, challenges, hurdles and crossroads faced on the city's Learning City journey since 2002. It focuses on lessons learned from:

- Our annual Lifelong Learning Festival, successfully grown exponentially since 2004 to now include almost 500 events across all sectors, statutory, private and community;
- Applying the EcCoWeLL concept for holistic learning city development since 2012;
- Learning Neighbourhoods – our 2 current pilots in disadvantaged communities;
- Dealing with the challenges of governance and sustainability;
- Exploring the possibilities and impact of the Learning City award given by UNESCO in 2015 as one of the 12 case study cities featured in their publication 'Unlocking the Potential of Urban Communities'.



A mixed media presentation, it will be delivered by a panel of experienced leaders and practitioners drawn from the city's Civic, Educational and Community Sectors.

Cork City Overview

Cork is a port city, located on the south coast of the island of Ireland on the second largest natural harbour in the world. Its name comes from the Gaelic word for 'marsh' and many of the city streets were once channels of the River Lee that flows into the harbour.

Founded as a monastic settlement by Saint Finbarr, later inhabited by the Vikings, it developed as a regional trading port, receiving its city charter in 1185, and grew most markedly in the 18th century when it was at the centre of sea trading routes between Europe, the British Empire and the 'New World.'

In the 19th century it developed as an industrial, manufacturing and naval base, all of which declined markedly in the 20th century causing areas of high unemployment among traditionally working class communities. Since the 1970s the city and harbour have become a hub for multinational pharmaceutical companies and from 1980 on for the I.C.T. industry, with the European HQ of Apple among the companies located here.

The economic driver of the region, it is the second largest city in the Republic of Ireland, with a population in its Metropolitan area of c. 300,000.

As a port it has always attracted immigrants, which have integrated into areas of the city. Among them French Protestant Huguenots in the city centre, a Jewish quarter and, since the 1990s, a large immigrant population from Eastern Europe – from Poland in particular – has come to live in different areas of the city, along with smaller communities of African, Middle Eastern and Asian immigrants.

The city has always had its own strong identity, motivated by its status as the second city of the Republic of Ireland, with locals proud of their independent spirit. The city is the principal city of the large County of Cork, traditionally known as the ‘Rebel County.’

Cork was European Capital of Culture in 2005, and is known as a city of festivals, with a rich cultural tradition, with the oldest Opera House in the country and International Jazz, Film, and Choral festivals among the highlights of the annual cultural calendar. The city and its surrounding county also has a rich sporting tradition, with a proud record of success in our national Gaelic Games, and in Rugby, Football and International Athletics.

All of these elements are included in our learning city approaches, and particularly in our lifelong learning festival as will be reflected in our panel presentation, chaired by Denis Barrett, Cork ETB.



Cork's development as a learning city

Cork's progress as a Learning City can be traced back to the 2002 publication of 'Imagine our Future', Cork City Development Board's 10 Year Strategy for the economic, social and cultural development of the city. The vision of developing Cork as a Learning City as one of just seven overarching goals in that plan, which aimed to improve the quality of life of all citizens and to tackle the causes of social exclusion, including poverty and unemployment.

Cork City Council approved this plan and set up a Learning Forum for the city and has provided leadership in the development of the concept since then, formally adopting the UNESCO *Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities* in 2014.

The city has a strong learning infrastructure that includes: two major higher education institutions, University College Cork (UCC) & Cork Institute of Technology (CIT); three of the state's five largest Colleges of Further Education which are, along with the South West Regional Training Centre, under the auspices of Cork Education and Training Board (CETB), which also provides a wide range of complementary and second chance educational opportunities, and initiatives tackling educational disadvantage in both formal and informal settings.

In 2015 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by these four key organisations: Cork City Council, Cork Education & Training Board, UCC & CIT, to act as a steering group to advance the aspirations of the Beijing Declaration. The working group GLLiC (Growing Lifelong Learning in Cork) operates under this umbrella and, having taken an EcCoWeLL approach to the development of a Learning City, includes representatives of a wide range of agencies and organisations drawn from across the Economic, Health, Environment, Cultural and Social Inclusion sectors, adding these perspectives to those of education and learning stakeholders.

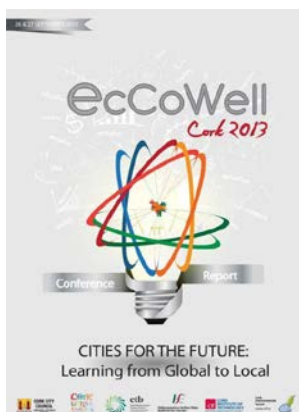
The presentation of a Learning City Award to Cork by UNESCO at their second International Conference on Building Learning Cities in 2015 as one of the 12 case study cities featured in their publication 'Unlocking the Potential of Urban Communities' was widely celebrated and has created new opportunities and a renewed momentum that we are beginning to explore.

Cork Lifelong Learning Festival – a 'bottom up' model of Inclusion, Culture and Citizen Engagement

At the heart of the showcase will be a presentation on the annual Cork Lifelong Learning Festival - the key factor in Cork's Learning City development since it was first run in 2004. It will focus on our reflections on the main reasons for the festival's success, on the part it has played in involving citizens, communities and a wide range of agencies across all sectors in Cork, and on our recommendations to other cities interested in taking this step.

To bring the festival to life, we will show a short film featuring footage taken over the 13 years of the festival and featuring a variety of events, people and images. This section will be presented by two people who have been involved in the festival since the outset, the co-ordinator Tina Neylon, and Chairperson Willie McAuliffe.

Holistic Development – applying the EcCoWeLL approach in the Cork City context



Creating international links and taking inspiration from learning city approaches elsewhere created a paradigm shift in Cork's learning city vision. Membership of PASCAL International Exchanges (PIE) initiated a series of international seminars since 2012 and led to the city's involvement in the first UNESCO International Conference and Declaration in Beijing in 2013.

It also leads directly to the decision to take PASCAL's EcCoWeLL approach to our Learning City development, linking the city's thinking about Economy and Ecology (Ec) with Community and Culture (Co), Health and Wellbeing (Well) to Lifelong Learning (LL).

The success and growth of the Festival created the conditions for successfully connecting the Learning Festival Organising Committee with the City Council Economic Directorate and leaders from the Health, Environmental and Cultural Sectors.

This section of the showcase will outline how applying the EcCoWeLL approach in Cork changed our thinking, added cross-sectoral value and a holistic development perspective to the Learning City Agenda. This development has brought us towards the achievement of an aspiration voiced at the 2013 Hong Kong PASCAL conference of having 'Learning in all polices.' This section, illustrated with images from EcCoWeLL Cork events, will be delivered by a panel drawn from members of its steering group.

Learning Neighbourhoods – our learning so far

Initial lessons emerging from our current pilots on making the Learning City concept a lived experience for citizens in two disadvantaged communities

Our showcase will feature a section on a recent development in Cork - the co-creation of two Learning Neighbourhood Pilots in disadvantaged communities. Informed and inspired by the thinking and writings of PASCAL's Peter Kearns, and supported by the University's Adult Continuing Education Centre (UCC ACE), there has been an ongoing approach in two communities on different sides of the city. Cork's delegation will include leaders in this Learning Neighbourhood initiative and the voice of local citizens.

Governance, Motivation and Sustainability

As is likely to be the case elsewhere, Cork's Learning City journey brought us to a series of crossroads and challenges along the way. The biggest of these was faced in 2014. Unlike some other countries, local government in Ireland is not directly responsible for the provision of education or training. When a change of Government Policy caused the dissolution of the City Development Board in 2013, its sub structures, including the Learning Forum, were also dissolved creating a vacuum that could have caused the abandonment of the Learning City Agenda at that time. This was in the context of public spending cuts imposed as part of the austerity policies being followed by the Government under the 'troika' of the EU, European Central Bank and IMF.

The Lifelong Learning Festival itself was thus operating for a time without either an overarching policy framework or a supporting learning city structure and was likewise facing possible dissolution. That it was not dissolved is a story of perseverance, and explores the motivations that proved vital for sustaining Learning City efforts. This section of the presentation focuses on the factors that turned this situation around and created conditions for the subsequent rebuilding of both the local government policy framework and our ongoing work on the supporting structures. It will be delivered by people who fought to keep the Learning City vision alive in Cork at that time.

Learning from a Learning City

It is hoped that our story so far may offer some lessons, comparisons and encouragement for Learning City strategies in cities of a similar size. It is also our intention to create new connections with cities that have similar interests as a way to advance our own thinking and as a means of delivering on our PASCAL EcCoWeLL Learning City network intentions.