



PASCAL International Observatory Briefing Paper 28

Reimagining Inclusive Economic Futures

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Cities are facing a number of major challenges which they seek to address in their attempts to ensure a sustainable economic future. The list is a long one. They have to recover from the effects of the COVID pandemic in a context of global concerns about the impact of climate change, reaching net-zero carbon emissions, the impact of digitalisation and artificial intelligence, migration, the emergence of new industries and the decline of some traditional patterns of employment.

All of these have implications for the future economic development of cities and issues which Learning Cities need to address.

There has been a longstanding emphasis on learning as the means to assure the economic well-being of regions has emerged in the regional innovation literature (see for example Florida 1995; Asheim 1996; Morgan 1997 and Rutten and Boekema, 2007). Asheim (2012) has summarised three concepts of the learning region as follows:

- The role played by cooperation and collective learning in regional clusters and networks in order to promote the innovativeness and competitiveness of firms and regions
- A socially and territorially embedded, interactive learning process, making knowledge the most fundamental resource and learning the most important process
- Regionally based development coalitions. (Asheim 2012, p. 994)

The subsequent emergence of the learning city conception extended place-based learning approaches, not simply by a narrowing of geography, but by the consideration of a wider range of stakeholders, activities and purposes beyond the economically instrumental (Longworth & Osborne 2010, p. 373). Particularly in the last decade, learning cities have been popularised globally as a vehicle for promoting provision ‘to revitalize the virtue of learning in families and communities, to facilitate learning for and in the workplace, fostering the culture of learning throughout life for sustainable outcomes’ (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), 2019). UNESCO now promotes the learning city concept as a major driver for lifelong learning within its Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC), and in the Key Features of the

Learning City, one of its six ‘pillars’ that represent the major building blocks of its model is ‘effective learning for and in the workplace’ (UIL 2013).

However this conceptual widening has to an extent meant that the focus on economic benefits has been relegated to a secondary concern in debates. The economic is also something juxtaposed with non-economic benefits in dialogue, but as Bruce Wilson has recently reported, Bruce Wilson, founding director of PASCAL has reported in a recent forum for Wyndham Learning City¹ ‘in today's volatile environment, knowledge is paramount, and achieving a balance between learning and earning is crucial for individuals and organizations’. He emphasized the importance of how knowledge is acquired and applied in both personal and organizational contexts.

The remit of this Learning City Network, *Reimagining Inclusive Economic Futures*, has sought to fill this gap, and when it was first established, was defined with a focus on:

1. Creating an Entrepreneurship Ecosystem for enterprise start-ups and growth: embedding entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship training within a city-region ecosystem of finance, support, space, collaborative procurement, and underpinning technology.
2. Visioning a new future of Work for Wellbeing: the potential for developing different spaces and ways of measuring employee contribution that is not place and time based and provide an equitable reward. Altering the reward system to focus on well-being rather than income is a step toward narrowing income disparities. This calls attention to the importance of skills retraining and up-skilling, within employment and for a career change, and forms of successful adaptation to new ways of working.
3. Visioning a new future of Not-Working for Wellbeing as a result of a changing economy and restrictions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Lifelong learning enhances active citizenship, volunteering, and personal fulfilment in a different world of Not-Working.
4. Adjusting to an uncontrolled external environment- due to influences that may be: political, environmental, conflict, health, technology, and the development of Artificial Intelligence. Adapting to change, developing flexibility, enhancing resilience.

This potentially was a very broad and ambitious agenda focussed on entrepreneurship, the future of work and wellbeing in a fast changing economic, environmental and social context.

The network has members drawn from many parts of the world, representing diverse economies and backgrounds, which provides an opportunity to look at these issues in a variety of different situations, to learn from comparing experiences, and hence to explore implications for learning city development.

The LCN now has an active membership of some 15 people drawn from universities and local city authorities several of whom are also cities within the UNESCO Global Learning Cities Network as well as being active within the PASCAL Learning Cities Network.

Activities

¹ See <http://pobs.cc/23iro>, Summary of Friday Forum - Lifelong Learning for Life and Work 22 September 2023

Over the last two years, the network members have met regularly on a monthly basis. They shared progress in local learning city initiatives. Members represented the group and individually participated in several international conferences and events, including the Global Learning Festivals, PASCAL Conferences and the 10th Anniversary of UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities. They shared their fascinating experiences from engagements in projects on the preparation of city-level Learning Community Strategy, entrepreneurship and the impact of artificial intelligence on humans, youth entrepreneurship development in a developing economy, institutional learning on inclusive urban transportation and so on.

The network has had a series of presentations from members on topics relevant to aspects of its remit. These include:

Building Learning Cities-Contributions of Creative Engagement Methods;

Economic and social aspects of forced migration: the case of Ukraine;

The role of earning in resolving some policy disconnects over current issues in planning city futures

Outputs and Implications

Presentations have been recorded and published on the PASCAL Learning Cities Network website, along with other news contributed by the members. Through the website, the group have reached over 2000 subscribed members.

Over the last year, the team interviewed several actors in Europe and Africa to trace the impact of the energy crisis on learning and measures. The video documentaries of this work will offer a worldwide perspective on local possibilities.

It will be seen that the topics discussed range widely over programmes in diverse settings that are relevant to both developing economies and more established contexts, and illustrate the importance of taking into account local culture and heritage. It is intended to undertake further comparative and collaborative work on these topics to clarify and inform different learning city opportunities. To this end, the network plans to collaborate with other LCNs, for example in relation to rural-urban links.

Future programme

A structured plan for activities in 2024 has been agreed. Several principles have been identified to guide future work, which are outlined below:

It is already agreed that the network will seek to expand its membership, particularly to include more representatives of policy-makers in local Learning City administrations, mentors, business support and safe finance.

The network expects to be an active contributor to a proposed webinar on Local Challenges, Global Imperatives: Cities at the Forefront to Achieve Education 2030 in Bangladesh, and will contribute to the Global Learning Festival should it take place again in 2024.

The network recognises the need to capitalise on its members' experience through comparative studies to draw out lessons which emerge from the benefits of the development of learning cities.

The network will consider other ways in which it can directly communicate its outputs to and connect with policy-makers in city administrations about the role of learning in taking forward actions, for example, in videos, webinars and through relevant media and at the upcoming PASCAL conferences.

References

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