



National LLL Policies and Learning Cities: ASEM LLL Hub Research Network 4

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Much of the discussion pertaining to the development of learning cities has focused on the role of city administrations themselves rather than on national policies in lifelong learning (see for example Osborne and Hernandez 2021 and Osborne, Nestervova and Bhandari 2021). At first glance this may not seem surprising given the competence that local and regional governments (LRGs) have in relation to education, as summarised in this extract from a recent OECD/UCLG (2019) report.

On a world average of 67 countries with available data (2015), education is the primary area of spending of LRGs both as a share of GDP (2.6%) and as a share of the current expenditure (23.6%). For federal countries, such as Australia, Austria, Canada and Germany, it is the states, provinces or regions that are allocated education-related responsibilities. In other countries, such as Finland, the United Kingdom and Brazil, strong decentralization processes have resulted in the transfer of power concerning most schooling matters to local authorities. Similarly, in the USA, school districts are responsible for raising and managing funding at the local level, with variable levels of financial support from federal government. Likewise, the Republic of Korea has delegated much of its budget planning and major administrative decisions to local authorities; this trend has also been followed in Denmark, Lithuania, Sweden and the Slovak Republic. Some other countries count on sub-national administrations to act as bridges between their central and regional-level; this is, for instance, the case in Spain (with its autonomous communities), Japan (with its prefectures) and Argentina (with its provinces). In other countries (such as France), although the National Ministry of Education has overall responsibility for organizing the education system, specific responsibilities and funds are also transferred to LRGs. Accordingly, cities are responsible for early childhood and primary education; intermediate levels of government (*départements*) are responsible for compulsory secondary education (*collèges*) and regional governments are responsible for secondary education and vocational education (TVET, *lycées et enseignement professionnel*). OECD/UCLG 2019, p. 44-45

We can see that LRGs are accorded significant responsibilities for the implementation of policies in schooling and the delivery of compulsory education in a number of countries, although in most jurisdictions overall steering is national. In other countries within ASEM, such as Bangladesh, the system is organised at national level, or as in India, delegated to the individual states, but there is little role for city administrations.

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However, when we consider post-compulsory formal and non-formal education, the role of LRGs becomes more significant given the relative lack of resourcing given to these parts of the education system by the state in many countries. This is well illustrated in the UNESCO (2019) GRALE Report.

Funding for adult learning and education is inadequate. More investment is required, as well as more targeting of those hardest to reach.

- Less than a third of countries bracket (28%) reported that ALE spending had increased as proportion of the education budget since 2015, with 17% reporting a decrease and 41% reporting no progress (this despite 57% of countries in GRALE 3 mentioning a planned increase in funding.
- Low-income countries were more likely to report a decrease than an increase. Focusing investment on the least- advantaged adults in society has yet to become widespread as a strategy for widening participation in ALE.
- 19% of countries reported spending less than 0.5% of the education budget on ALE and a further 14% reported spending less than 1%. This confirms that ALE remains underfunded. UNESCO 2019, p.22

The disparity in national support given to education beyond school and schooling itself is well-documented in a number of studies. Examples include analyses from Denmark (Rasmussen, Larson and Cort 2019), and this is despite the plethora of legislation in the country, which was highlighted in a recent European Commission report as having the most comprehensive set of adult learning laws (Andriescu *et al.* 2019, p. 47). This report also documents some 22 instances within the EU where there are countries which have specific adult education laws in place. Often, however, these are not comprehensive and cover only a specific aspect of adult education. Adult learning also is addressed within more general educational laws, Vocational education and training (VET) laws, and in a minority of cases, within higher education and labour law. Importantly, the report (*ibid.* p.46) states that

Of course, the number of different types of legislation covering adult learning in a given country, is not in itself indicative that the policy topic has a strong legislative basis establishing a solid basis and direction for adult learning), nor that policies are effectively coordinated.

There is little or no evidence in the EC report of attention being given in adult education policies or laws to learning cities.

Nonetheless, when digging deeper, it is evident in some countries in both Europe and Asia that place-based initiatives at local level are a reflection of co-ordinated national planning. Some of these are specific to learning city development. The GRALE Report, for example, makes specific reference to China, where in 2014, the Ministry of Education with six other governmental institutions, produced clear guidance on developing learning cities, which included the following:

- To vigorously cultivate and put into practice the core values of socialism and build consensus among the whole of society with respect to values.
- To build a lifelong education system so as to promote integration and openness of various types of education.
- To strengthen in-service training of employees of enterprises and institutions with a view to enhancing their competencies.
- To offer extensive urban and rural community education in order to promote social governance innovation.
- To advance the development of different types of learning organizations so as to increase the dynamism of social organizations.
- To develop, in a coordinated manner, the learning resources of society so as to promote open access and sharing of learning resources.
- To effectively leverage ICT so as to expand learning horizons. (UNESCO 2019, p. 47)

This central steering, that also involves the Communist Party of China which regulates municipalities, is manifest in a number of comprehensive city-wide initiatives that integrate all sectors and providers of education, some of the most prominent being in the mega-cities of Beijing and Shanghai, both recipients of the UNESCO Learning City Award in 2013 and 2021 respectively. The stages of development in China are summarised by Zhonghai, Yong and Lihua (2015), and the facilitation of national policies occurs through strong municipal structures such as the Shanghai Municipal Institute for Lifelong Education (SMILE)². Moreover, there is a national network of learning cities in the country (see Atchoarena and Howells 2021).

The situation in the Republic of Korea is perhaps the most comprehensive example of a national policy initiative and was summarised for UNESCO's 4th International Conference on Learning Cities by Osborne and Hernandez (2021)³.

² See <http://www.smile.ecnu.edu.cn/smileenglish/>> Accessed 11 March 2022

³ See also the NILE site at <http://eng.nile.or.kr/eng/>> Accessed 11 March 2022 for a summary of the Republic of Korea's 4th Lifelong Learning Promotion Plan (2018-2022), the the members of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities at <http://uil.unesco.org/sites/default/files/doc/lifelong-learning/cities/list-of-members-unesco-gnlc-uil.pdf>> Accessed 11 March 2022 . There are now 46 member cities in the Republic of Korea.

... the main organisation responsible for the design and planning of lifelong learning policies in Korea is the National Institute for Lifelong Education that was established in 2008 through the National Lifelong Learning Act, a national effort to: develop and implement national lifelong education policies, realise individualised lifelong education services and improve organisational responsibilities and efficiency. In order to achieve its mission, the Institute develops lifelong education programmes, trains professionals, builds networks among lifelong education organisations, supports local institutes, operates the lifelong education system and specifically establishes a master plan for expanding national lifelong education. The Institute promotes the benefits of lifelong learning not only nationally but also aims to encourage other countries and experts to embrace the lifelong learning approach. In doing so, it has already published four National Lifelong Learning Promotion Plans to share the Institute's particular vision of lifelong learning and to help local and international authorities to improve their strategic insight. The learning city initiative in Korea has been so successful that 44 cities already are part of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities and collaborated in 2015 directly with UNESCO-UIL to publish meaningful descriptions and analyses of 12 case studies of learning cities in the country. Osborne and Hernandez 2021

The cascading of policies down to city level is also evident in Japan where Masuda *et al.* (2021) have recently reported on efforts to implement the SDGs at local level, and possible approaches to support local governments in mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda. They suggest that up to this point studies of mainstreaming, understood as the 'inclusion of relevant concerns about sustainable development into policy-related decision making' at local level are limited. They also argue that guidance for such processes have been limited though note the work of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (2016), as set out in its roadmap and its subsequent reports, as well as the UN's Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN 2016). Whilst the focus in the Masuda *et al.* paper is 'Future Cities' rather Learning Cities, there is considerable overlap in objectives. Most relevant is that the authors offer an analytical framework based on studies of two of Japan's Future cities selected in the first round of this national development in 2011⁴: Shimokawa and Kitakyushu. The paper reminds us of interconnectedness of each of the 17 SDGs, how local government can facilitate local ownership of these, the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships, the importance of horizontal collaboration and co-ordination between departments, vertical communication with national and international initiatives, policy mechanisms for mainstreaming, and monitoring and review. Japan of course does also have a longstanding history of a focus on urban learning, with the city of Kakegawa in 1979, being one of seven cities internationally that was part of OECD's Educating Cities initiative. However, this initiative was somewhat different from subsequent learning cities developments, and can be differentiated with its emphasis on role formal institutions by contrast with a broader conception of learning.

There is also some evidence of national steering, albeit with various degrees of strength, in European countries and in Australia. The UK, for example, has had a longstanding focus on learning city development, which can be traced back to the response of one of its government departments, the then Department for Education and Enterprise (DfEE) using the European Year of Lifelong Learning as

⁴ See https://www.japanfs.org/en/projects/future_city/ Accessed 11 March 2022

the stimulus to set up a Learning Cities Network (1998). As Hamilton and Jordan (2010) have reported, the network placed emphasis on lifelong learning at the centre of learning city activity.

Using lifelong learning as an organising principle and social goal, Learning Cities promote collaboration of the civic, private, voluntary and education sectors in the process of achieving agreed upon objectives related to the twin goals sustainable economic development and social inclusiveness (Learning Cities Network, 1998).

There have been other nationally-driven initiatives in European countries, amongst which work in Germany has been notable. Developments here, driven by the federal government, have very much been driven in response to the policies of the European Commission, and have been well articulated by Reghenzani-Kearns and Kearns (2012). These authors map out the way in which Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF 2004)) developed a programme in response to a call within the EC's well-known White Paper on Lifelong learning for its member countries to develop 'coherent and comprehensive strategies for Lifelong learning' (European Commission 2001: 4), itself a response to the earlier Memorandum on Lifelong Learning⁵, which amongst other things included six key messages:

- *guarantee universal and continuing access to learning for gaining and renewing the skills needed for sustained participation in the knowledge society;*
- *visibly raise levels of investment in human resources in order to place priority on Europe's most important asset—its people;*
- *develop effective teaching and learning methods and contexts for the continuum of lifelong and lifewide learning;*
- *significantly improve the ways in which learning participation and outcomes are understood and appreciated, particularly in non-formal and informal learning;*
- *ensure that everyone can easily access good quality information and advice about learning opportunities throughout Europe and throughout their lives; and*
- *provide lifelong learning opportunities as close to learners as possible, in their own communities and supported through ICT- based facilities where appropriate.*

European Commission 2000

The European Commission subsequently became very active in the first decade of the 21st century within programmes funded through its Directorate for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC). In 2002, it announced a call within a programme entitled, *European networks to promote the local and regional dimension of lifelong learning* (the 'R3L' initiative)⁶, and subsequently funded 17 projects over

⁵ For those interested in tracing history further back, we can also observe national initiatives that led to the 1996 European Year of Lifelong Learning, were also related to the European Presidential Conferences on adult education from the 1994 to 2000, nurtured by Magda Trantallidi, Paolo Federighi, Ekkehard von Nuisssl, Alan Tuckett, Paul Belanger, and Arne Carlsen. They are currently drafting a history of these developments.

⁶ See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2002:174:0006:0012:EN:PDF> Accessed 11 March 2022. An evaluation of the first 100 projects in the field of adult education funded by the EC in 2000 by

the next two years, each with multiple partners across the European Union. Through other funding programmes it had already supported and continued to support other one-off projects of a similar kind through the decade were supported, including for example, TELS (*Towards a European Learning Society*), PALLACE (*Promoting active lifelong learning in Australia, China, Canada and Europe*), LILARA (*Learning in Local and Regional Authorities*), PENR3L (*PASCAL European Network of Learning Regions*) and R3L+, the details of which are found in Longworth and Osborne (2010).

However, the projects were relatively small in scale. There was little co-ordination across the R3L programme, and many other projects were part of larger EC programmes, not linked to national policies, and lost momentum when funding stopped. What is distinct in the German Government's approach was that it was supported in a different way by the European Union's, European Social Fund (ESF), which overall is a very large pot of funding that has been used to improve education and employment opportunities across the union, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable⁷. Obtaining funding from the ESF relates closely to place, and therefore appropriate to actions related to cities and regions. It has had two main objectives: convergence and regional competitiveness. The convergence objective is based on the aim of stimulating growth and employment in the least-developed parts of Europe with a GDP per capita of less than 75% of the EU country average. It also has a regional competitiveness objective, which is less constrained and applies to all regions. One of the principle differences between the two objectives is the degree of co-financing provided by the ESF; for convergence this can be up to 85% of costs, whilst for regional competitiveness it is typically 50%. For the least wealthy member states of the EU, there is greater dependency on ESF to support education and employment, whilst in the richer countries it is a complement to national funding. Thus, in Germany, the *Learning Regions Promotion of Networks Program* from 2001 to 2008 was funded with €144m with an equal split between ESF sources and the federal government, and the balance from national sources (Thinesse-Demel 2010). Some 71 'Learning Regions' were supported initially with 100% funding, declining to a 60% contribution to costs by year 4 of the scheme.

Subsequently, between 2009 and 2014, the BMBF together with some 180 private German foundations initiated *Lernen vor Ort*⁸ (local learning, sometimes translated as 'Learning on Place'). This was a programme for developing and consolidating coherent municipal education management, and has been one of the largest public-private partnerships in Germany. These foundations now work together under the aegis of the *Netzwerk Stiftungen und Bildung*, supporting co-operation between civil society and municipal actors across the country⁹. We therefore can see a transition from the policy of a supra-national body to a federal initiative translating into local and regions practices that has been later supported by the private sector. There is something of a contrast in this development and other

Arne Carslen, Paolo Federighi, Ekkehard von Nuissl, Naomi Sargant and André Schläfli was influential in initiating R3L.

⁷ See Regulation(EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and the Council for more detail of the ESF - <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013R1304>> Accessed 11 March 2022. To give an idea of scale in the period 2014-2020, the ESF budget was €120bn, roughly 8% of the whole EU budget. Currently European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) has a budget of almost € 99.3bn for the period 2021-2027.

⁸ See https://www.transferinitiative.de/lernen_vor_ort.php> Accessed 11 March 2022

⁹ See <https://www.netzwerk-stiftungen-bildung.de>> Accessed 11 March 2022

national schemes such as those in the UK in the 1990s, which petered out once funding subsidy was removed (Jordan, Osborne and Longworth 2014).

There is a history in Australia similar that of the UK and Germany with a national funding initiative set up to pilot learning cities. Kearns (2021) reports that the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) supported a national learning cities project in 2000 with ten pilot programmes stimulated by a report that it has commissioned, *Lifelong Learning: VET in the Learning Age* (Kearns *et al.* 1999a and b), that had an international dimension and which included case studies of cities In Australia: Albury-Wodonga, Ballarat, Devonport, Newcastle and Canberra. This included four projects in regional South Australia, in Port Augusta, Port Pirie, Copper Coast, and Mount Gambier as well as projects in Queensland (Toowoomba), New South Wales (Deniliquin) , and Tasmania (Launceston). However, as has been the case in the UK and Germany, national support was not sustained once ANTA was abolished in 2005, and those learning cities that exist now (and there are many in Australia) are funded locally with no federal or state policy underpinning developments.

We can see other countries within ASEM where national policies in lifelong learning take a place-based approach, but without an explicit reference to learning cities. Nonetheless, these are relevant to this analysis. A number of these initiatives have been catalogued in a forthcoming paper by Osborne and Kheng (2023). Perhaps the most relevant of those policies cited are those of Thailand with reference to which Charungkaittikul (2019) has reported that to provide lifelong learning opportunities to all and to balance national development in urban and rural areas, the Thai government has launched several national development policies, including the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan 2017–2021; the National Education Act 1999 and its amendment, the National Education Act Amendment (Issue 2) 2002; the Non-formal Education and Informal Education Act 2008; and Thailand's 20-Year National Strategy and Thailand 4.0 Policy (a digital economy and social development strategy).

Other examples are also illustrative of national policies with a focus on place, and which give a responsibility to municipalities. In Japan, the *Social Education Law*, enacted in 1949, established autonomous Kominkans ('a community center, literally translated as citizens' hall') as 'exclusive educational facilities differentiated from other community facilities such as libraries and museums', staffed by qualified social educators and distinct from welfare or general administration (Choi and Han, 2019, p.128). Osborne and Kheng (2023) report that since 1990, with the adoption of a separate *Lifelong Learning Promotion Law*, there has been a stipulation that municipal governments should drive lifelong learning through public-private partnerships.

In other parts of Asia, whilst the learning city is not used explicitly as a term, a place-based approach to lifelong learning embedded in a national framework is found through Community Learning Centres (CLCs). Lee and Kim (2016, p. 18) have argued that 'CLCs play a major role as a space for lifelong learning regardless of the existence of robust policy frameworks of lifelong learning. CLCs in each country have country-specific characteristics, but they share a common characteristic in that they are community-based institutions which are generally managed by local communities.' And also, in some of the seven countries (Bangladesh, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam), which they report on in Asia, CLCs have been developed by the NGO sector there are examples

of links to national policy for example in Thailand where the Ministry of Education has established some 8,000 District Non-Formal Education Centres across the country. Also, in relation to CLCs, UIL/NILE (2017) have reported on six countries with some overlap in coverage to the Lee and Kim study (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, Thailand and Viet Nam), making links to national legislation that informs their work. The following extracts from their report are illustrative

The backbone of LLCs in Mongolia is the Education Law of 2002, which included non-formal education and supported the former 'NFE Enlightenment Centres'.

Thailand introduced lifelong learning through the National Education Act of 1999. In 2008, the Promotion of Non-formal and Informal Education Act defined the CLC as a „place for providing non-formal education activities in order to improve the quality of Thai people lives [sic]“. The Office of Non-formal and Informal Education in the Ministry of Education set out principles, objectives and guidelines for those who want to establish and run a CLC, with the key principle being that it:

Belongs to the people, is operated by the people and is for the benefit of the people. It is established as a local institution for villagers in rural or urban areas and is managed by local people in providing various learning opportunities for community development and people quality of life improvement.

In Viet Nam, the CLC model is characterized by its nature as 'of the community, by the community and for the community [and has] applied the main principle of education which is that all educational issues must derive from the community, and the solutions of which would serve the community'. It is therefore:

defined as a Continuing/Non-formal Education Institution of the national education system. It is a learning centre outside the formal setting (primary and lower secondary schools) in the community to provide lifelong learning opportunities for all local citizens to improve the quality of their life and to ensure sustainable development of the community.

This is in accordance with the Education Law of 2005, which 'affirms that CLCs are continuing education institutions at commune, ward, and town levels'. (pp. UIL/NILE 2017, pp. 14-15)

Concluding Remarks

We can conclude that there is relatively little evidence of national policies for adult education or lifelong learning explicitly being linked to learning city development in the ASEM 51, though there are clear exceptions in the case of China and the Republic of Korea.

There is, in other countries, a history of national or supra-national initiatives (in the case of Europe from the European Commission) with developments in the UK and Germany standing out. The example of the German learning regions model initially supported by the European Social Fund (one

of five funds working to support economic development) and transitioning into an initiative funded by private foundations is of particular interest. It is quite likely that further investigation within Europe would uncover many educational interventions in the regions that have been funded by the ESF, which bear close resemblance to facets of learning city activities elsewhere. It is simply that they have not been labelled as such, and given that these funds are the most significant financial contributor to developments in the field of education in many European countries, dwarfing the contributions of other initiatives of the EC (such as the Erasmus+ programme¹⁰) and national initiatives, we can expect to find relevant activity that can be attributed ultimately to pan-national policy. In addition, one of the other five funds to finance economic development, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), also has supported learning city development through its Interreg programme which supports co-operation between Europe's regions. An example can be found in its *2 Mers Seas Zeeën* Programme, which covers coastal areas on England, France, Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands during the Interreg 2014-20 period¹¹.

Hence within all countries within Europe that are part of the European Union, we have not only to be aware of national policies, but also the policies of the union as a whole. Together with city administrations themselves, the European Commission may be more important actors at city and regional level than national government, although there will always be some connectivity between the local and national. By contrast, we have to be aware of the existing extent of devolution of responsibility to the regions and to local government.

We must also be cognisant that the concept of the learning city is a broad-brush term and is used in a liberal way to describe a range of interventions in urban spaces. Some of those cities that carry the Learning City label in reality offer provision that is narrow in scope. At the same time, we must be aware that there are many activities in the ASEM 51 that do not use the label, yet are offering provision

¹⁰ We also need to be aware of the history of this programme to understand the fit of adult education within the overall framework. The Erasmus+ programme was the successor to the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) (2007-2013), an integrated action crossing fields of lifelong learning that had previously been undertaken under the umbrella of the Socrates programme. The component actions of the LLP covered schools (Comenius), Erasmus (Higher Education), Leonardo da Vinci (VET), Grundtwig (Adult Education), Jean Monnet (European Integration) and a Transversal programme. Only 4% of a budget of €6.97bn was spent on Adult Education. The new umbrella programme from 2014-2020 was known as Erasmus+ and incorporated components of the LLP together with programmes for youth and international co-operation in education organised around three Key Actions: mobility of individuals, cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practice, and support for policy reforms. The names of the component actions of the previous LLP were retained (for example as Erasmus+ Grundtwig), but there is a less obvious focus on adult education except for the mobility of adult education staff. In other words, the previous sub-sectoral approach within education was largely removed. A new programme of Erasmus+ from 2021 to 2027 is now in place. We can also note that the EC-funded EPAL (European Platform for Adult Learning in Europe) does have a thematic focus of learning communities that makes mention of learning cities (see <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/epale-2022-thematic-focuses>)

¹¹ See http://archive.interreg4a-2mers.eu/approved_project_16153f4f2.pdf?id=16153> Accessed 11 March 2022

that accords well with the principles of a learning city as set out by UIL (2013¹²). The examples of CLCs provide some indication that place is vital to learning albeit at smaller scales of geography, in both rural and urban settings, and often is driven by national policies. We see similar sentiments in research that is focusing on neighbourhoods, including for example in the Centre for Sustainable, Healthy, Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods (SHLC)¹³, which has undertaken studies in Bangladesh, China, India and the Philippines, and which recently made contributions to highlight its work as part of the recent ASEF 2021 Summer University, *Liveable Cities for a Sustainable Future* (see Roy 2021, Kundu and Pandey 2021).

Furthermore SHLC's recent policy brief on neighbourhoods and their effect on educational opportunity (Nesterova and Schweisfurth 2021), including in Bangladesh and India, provide some useful pointers for future reflections by RN4. This research points out that opportunity within cities is not homogeneous with those in low-income neighbourhoods having poor and badly equipped schools by comparison with those in upper-middle and high-income neighbourhoods. Furthermore schools in poorer neighbourhoods often have no or limited accessibility because of the quality of transport infrastructure, and parental support is limited. And even inside neighbourhoods, clusters of poorer families have inadequate access to educational opportunities by comparison to those in more wealthier areas. We may expect to find similar differentiation in relation to access to lifelong learning, and these issues pertain to cities in both Asia and Europe.

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¹² Since CONFINTEA VII will shortly be taking place in Morocco, it is also of note that the Belem Framework for Action from CONFINTEA VI speaks of 'comprehensive movements such as Learning Cities and Learning Regions, are contributing substantially to adult learning and education' (UNESCO-UIL 2010, para 8).

¹³ See <http://www.centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk>

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