

## **Michael Osborne**

Professor, University of Glasgow; Director of CRADALL; Co-director of PASCAL  
[michael.osborne@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:michael.osborne@glasgow.ac.uk)

## **Learning Cities 2020**

### **Abstract**

This article provides a brief overview of historic work in the field of Learning City development. It then proceeds to highlight two contemporary strands of work. The first is the initiative of UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in establishing the International Platform of Learning Cities. The second is the work of the PASCAL Observatory, currently manifested in the Learning Cities 2020 programme.

Key words: UNESCO International Platform, Learning Cities, Lifelong Learning Programme, Pascal International Exchanges, EcCoWell

### **Introduction**

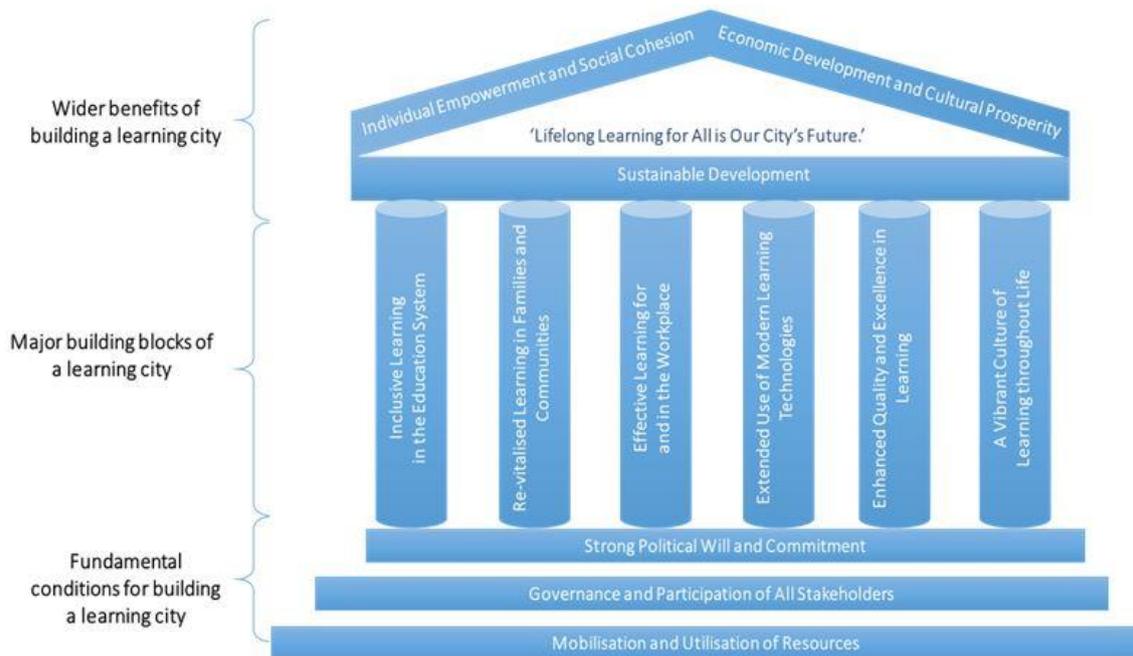
In two recent articles Kearns, Osborne and Yang (2013) and Jordan, Longworth and Osborne (2014) have summarised how over the last 40 years, the idea of learning city has been intimately linked with that of developing a 'learning society', and how initiatives have waxed and waned. It was in 1972, that the report of the International Commission on the Development of Education to UNESCO - *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* (Faure et al., 1972) – offered the "learning society" concept as a basis of its member states to re-organise their educational structures. There were two basic premises at that, firstly that all agencies become providers of education and secondly that all citizens be engaged in learning, taking full advantages of the opportunities provided by the learning society. A further UNESCO report of 1996, from the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century - *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Delors et al., 1996) develops this theme further with the concept of 'learning throughout life'. This report speaks of a learning society, which offers many and varied opportunities of learning, both at school and in economic, social and cultural life, and therefore, more collaboration and partnerships with families, industry and business, voluntary associations, people active in cultural life are needed. On this basis Kearns, Osborne and Yang (2013, p. 409) suggest that 'in order to building a learning society and make lifelong learning a reality, it is important to embrace and connect all learning stages, types and places'. These authors also in some detail summarise a number of transnational initiatives within the European domain in particular various initiatives of the OECD (1973, 1992 and 2001) and the European Commission (EC) (CEC, 2003). They also cite a number of specific projects funded by the EC in the field of learning cities and regions, mainly under the aegis of its Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). These include the following projects: TELS (Longworth, 2000), Pallace (Allwinkle & Longworth, 2005), Lilliput (Longworth, 2006), Lilara (Doyle et al., 2007), PENR3L (Pascal, 2008), EUROlocal (Hamilton & Jordan, 2010), R3L+ (Eckert et al., 2012) and MASON (2012). From these and a range of other publication it is evident that as Duke, Osborne and Wilson (2005) have reported there are various ways in which the concept of a learning city has been interpreted. At one end of what might be described as a continuum it is about creating an underlying infrastructure of educational opportunity

that might attract inward investment from business. A contrasting conception is that of establishing learning networks that promote and enhance social cohesion and inclusion. In reality this is somewhat of a false dichotomy: as Longworth and Osborne (2010) argue, whilst the rationale for wanting to become a learning city may principally be economic, social or environmental, it usually contains elements of each stimulus.

### The UNESCO International Platform of Learning Cities

Moving to the present, UNESCO has defined the learning city as one which invests in quality lifelong learning for all in order to: promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education; invest in the sustainable growth of its workplaces; re-vitalise the vibrant energy of its communities; nurture a culture of learning throughout life; exploit the value of local, regional and international partnerships; and guarantee the fulfillment of its environmental obligations. In so doing a city would release the strength and capacity of all its resources for creating individual empowerment and cultural prosperity, social cohesion and economic prosperity, and sustainable development. In order to determine the progress of a city, a set of *Key Features of Learning Cities* have been developed by UNESCO, the details of which were announced at a major conference in Beijing in October 2013, which launched the *International Platform of Learning Cities*. These indicators are based on a combination of existing administrative data, survey data and expert analysis, and are linked to a conceptual framework shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:** The Framework of the Key Features of Learning Cities (UNESCO 2013a)



As UNESCO’s Introductory Note for their Beijing conference notes, this framework corresponds to the pediments, columns and foundation steps of the UNESCO logo.

The *Pediment* of ‘wider benefits of building a modern learning city’, is concerned with three areas: Individual empowerment and social cohesion; Economic development and cultural prosperity; and Sustainable development.

The *Columns* are six areas that are described as the major building blocks of a learning city: Inclusive learning in the education system; Re-vitalised learning in families and

communities; Effective learning for and in the workplace; Extended use of modern learning technologies; Enhanced quality in learning, and A vibrant culture of learning throughout life.

The *Foundation* represents three areas of focus reflect the fundamental conditions for building a learning city: Strong political will and commitment; Governance and participation of all stakeholders; and Mobilisation and utilisation of resources.

These 12 areas have been expanded upon in the Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities (UNESCO, 2013b). In total there are 42 identified features, many of which are quantitative and which can be gathered by secondary analysis of existing datasets or through surveys. Some are qualitative and would be gathered by expert teams. Overall the features are seen as the first internationally agreed set of measures by which cities can reference their progress towards the goal of becoming a learning city.

Whilst this Declaration does not commit at this point to establishing a UNESCO City of Learning Award, it does *inter alia*, 'call upon UNESCO to establish a global network of learning cities to support and accelerate the practice of lifelong learning in the world's communities. This network should promote policy dialogue and peer learning among member cities, forge links, foster partnerships, provide capacity development, and develop instruments to encourage and recognise progress' (UNESCO, 2013b, p. 8).

Many cities have already tested the features in their own context or have committed to do so in the future. It is therefore quite possible that a new global momentum within the field of learning cities has been fomented. Meantime there other initiatives being developed on a global level by other agencies, most notably the PASCAL Observatory.

### **PASCAL International Exchanges and Learning Cities 2020**

The PASCAL Observatory<sup>1</sup> is a worldwide research and policy development alliance, which focuses on issues in relation to place management, social capital and learning regions. It develops, communicates and explains new and emerging ideas in order to assist client institutions, bodies and regions achieve their social and strategic aims. The Observatory aims to enable governments at all levels, and associated policy-makers, to benefit fully from emerging research and to foster balanced and sustainable economic and social development in their regions. It offers an innovative approach to accessing state-of-the-art international knowledge and expertise in its domains of interest through a rapid response to meeting information needs of the public sector (city and regional governments in a form and in a manner tailored to their needs. It does this thought using the expertise of a large number of accredited experts spread across the world and drawn from senior post-holders in both the research community and in policy and practice organizations. It thereby produces access to bespoke knowledge, expertise and consultancy through a call-off arrangement - thus avoiding the need for complex procurement arrangements - which builds a sustained relationship between policy and research experts and a provides a sound basis for policy development. Its contacts with networks of others interested in similar issues allow members to showcase their own innovative initiatives and to share knowledge and mutual learning opportunities. It offers a range of instruments including benchmarking tools, formal research and evaluation and comparative studies in order to assist delivery of strategic targets.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://pascalobservatory.org>

### *PASCAL International Exchanges*

Amongst PASCAL's key areas of concern is the establishment of Learning Cities and Regions; to that end PASCAL International Exchanges (PIE)<sup>2</sup> was launched in 2009 with the following objectives: to facilitate and support international exchanges of ideas and experience between participating communities and institutions directed at the role of cultural institutions, libraries and heritage learning in encouraging and supporting learning throughout life for all; to use the exchanges to reconceptualise the role of cultural institutions, libraries and heritage learning in community and regional development through a lifelong learning lens; to encourage ongoing international exchanges of new ideas and experience between participants; to utilise the resources and expertise of the PASCAL International Observatory to support and facilitate the international exchange of ideas, experience and people between learning communities and regions.

PIE has been informed and directed in its development by the member communities themselves. To date this has resulted in range of outcomes. These include: online exchanges of information and experiences between cities around the world relevant to building sustainable learning cities, and contributing towards the achievement of a universal learning society; more than twenty stimulus papers on the PIE website from cities located across five continents in what is emerging as a distinctive, perhaps unique, approach to cities sharing insights and learning together. These include papers from the following cities: Addis Ababa, Bari, Beijing, Bielefeld, Cork, Dakar, Dar es Salaam, Gaborone, Galway, Glasgow, Gwang Myeong, Iida, Hong Kong, Hume, Limerick, Kampala, Kaunas, New York, Seoul, Shanghai, Sydney and Vancouver; community to community linkages between municipal authorities and associated agencies. For example, drawing on those designated as learning 'towns' or 'communities' in Australia, linkages have been made with those involved with community-based research in Canada and Learning Cities work in Europe. This includes both virtual and face-to-face interactions; more formal, larger institution initiatives have been developed to link city-wide art galleries, libraries and museums on different continents in shared initiatives which explore innovative ideas about how they contribute to lifelong learning. In this type of collaboration, PIE develops specific opportunities in conjunction with key regional conferences, which have relevance to the fields under discussion.

The value of these exchanges has been enhanced by the growing diversity in these profiles of key aspects of learning and community building in cities, a theme taken up in many of the papers that have synthesised the work. These papers comment on insights of value from the initial phase of PIE development. Some examples of these are: Beijing and Shanghai papers show how learning city strategies can be successful in mega cities this size. The importance of initiatives in local communities is illustrated in both these cities, and in Sydney and New York. Cork and Limerick demonstrate how lifelong learning festivals can provide a platform for broader action towards building sustainable learning cities. The Hume Global Learning Village illustrates the key role of strategic action by local government authorities linked to a clear vision of the future.

### *EcCoWell*

PIE exchanges led to conceptual work by PASCAL directed at identifying and advocating more holistic and integrated approaches to building sustainable learning cities that

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://pie.pascalobservatory.org>

combined the aspirations and objectives of a range of city labels that are used internationally. This approach has been termed EcCoWell<sup>3</sup>, the central thesis of which is that Learning City, Healthy City, and Green City initiatives share certain common interests so that these aspirations will be progressed best in cities if holistic integrated strategies are adopted that recognise, and build on, the areas of common interest.

For example, many cities have adopted policies to preserve and enhance the environment, and a number of leading Green Cities have emerged. The success of Green City strategies depends on community understanding and support for the policies adopted so that there are important educational and learning dimensions. Innovative eco-community projects provide examples of community-led initiatives. Community understanding of complex issues such as global warming presents challenges where education and learning strategies can make a contribution. Hence learning and de facto Learning Cities and Green Cities have much in common. Heritage and cultural policies are also important in building community, a sense of identity and belonging, and adding to social cohesion in cities – as well as enhancing the quality of life and well-being of residents. These dimensions of good cities are especially important in cities that have experienced rapid growth, large-scale migration, and considerable poverty and inequality. Learning City initiatives commonly aim to provide learning opportunities for all sections of the community, and so further equity, social justice, and community objectives. An empowered and enlightened citizenry will have an enhanced understanding of environment issues, while the equity strategies of Learning Cities will facilitate progress in addressing the social determinants of health.

Kearns (2013, pp. 10–11) thus asserts that the impact of policies in learning, health, community building, and culture can in a synergetic way each contribute more to the well-being of citizens and their families when co-ordinated. The logic of his argument is that: Learning encourages social interaction and increases self-esteem and feelings of competency. Benefits from learning in one domain such as health and environment impact on functioning in domains such as family and community. As better measures of well-being are becoming available, the policy significance of well-being has increased. There has been a growing concern in some countries at mental health problems and increased alienation of sections of the population, including many young people.

These connections are being taken seriously by cities, a very good example being within the city of Cork in Ireland has shown leadership in examining how an EcCoWell approach could be implemented in their city<sup>4</sup>.

### *Learning Cities 2020*

PASCAL is now seeking to identify future directions for learning cities up to 2020. A dialogue is being facilitated with cities, and will consist of four strands of work for and with cities.

Firstly the role of networks is extremely important in maintaining and very importantly to enhance the current PIE structure by creating policy-focused interactive networks dealing with specific elements that have emerged from previous work. Networks will seek to link with city, regional and national governments, and business and labour organisations, and very importantly establish links with foundations. Two possible

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<sup>3</sup> Ec = Ecology & Economy, Co = Community & Culture, Well = Well-being & Lifelong Learning

<sup>4</sup> see <http://eccowellcork.com>

examples are as follows: Developing a network connecting rural and city learning initiatives; Building up the EcCoWell network.

PASCAL will be approaching cities to lead these networks and provide a wider advisory group drawn from the observatory's associates.

Secondly PASCAL intends to offer support services for cities in areas where there are some existing developments (Europe, East Asia) and new territories (e.g. India, Latin America, South Asia, Oceania) wishing to develop as learning cities, utilizing the services of key associates with experience in these areas from Europe (Germany and UK) and East Asia (China and Korea).

Thirdly the observatory will offer a research and development arm through specific project offers. The suite of programmes have been announced as Learning Cities 2020 are one manifestation of the work, and in this area PASCAL seeks to work with a number of city networks in all continents. The rationale of the programmes under offer is to enable cities and regions to maximise their competitive advantage. Since the ground-breaking study by OECD (2001) on cities and regions in the new learning economy, much has changed in the context in which cities and regions strive to secure their economic prosperity and social and cultural well-being. The year 2013 has created the opportunity to revisit that work not least because some many significant pieces of related work have emerged. This is included the outcome from important EU studies of regional performance on lifelong learning (MASON 2012). Further in October 2013 the first reports from the *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competences* (PIAAC) were announced (OECD, 2013a) and in December the latest sweep of the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) was published (UNESCO, 2013b). This is in addition to the aforementioned UNESCO launch of its international platform for learning cities.

PIAAC and PISA have attracted very significant attention in the media and amongst policy-makers in all parts of the education system. In the suite of studies offered by PASCAL a range of opportunities for cities and regions to understand the implications of this emerging data for their own policy development are being offered. Some ostensibly simple questions are being put to city leaders to ask themselves: *How is my city performing? And what are the trends? Are we doing a good job in connecting learning with its application for innovation, and economic and social development? How do we compare with others? What could we do better to improve things? What will be the likely consequences if we continue as we are? How can we get government, business, educators and civic society to work together?*

These are simple questions, but with complex answers. PASCAL sets out the options that may provide at least some answer, ranging from local analysis of the latest data on lifelong learning, skills and economic performance, the benchmarking of current practice, to master-classes by international experts to help local policy appraisal and development<sup>5</sup>.

Finally a number of workshops are being planned. Two events have already been run under the banner of EcCoWell/Learning Cities 2020 in Cork and Glasgow. Other events are planned and all are intended to be within a common, but developing theme. Events being planned for 2014 focus on different aspects of the theme – these are intended to

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://learningcities2020.org/introduction> for more detail

cumulatively add to knowledge in the area. The events already confirmed will be in Tampere (Finland), Pretoria (South Africa) and St Johns (Canada).

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