

Dear members of the Pascal global community,

The year 2024 was exceptional. PASCAL has grown with the adhesion of two new centres. In New Brunswick, New Jersey USA, Prof. Radha Jagannathan leads a centre at Rutgers University, a key institution in the greater New York metropolitan region. This centre promises to improve our understanding of youth education (STEM) and employment issues, and with a focus on the design and planning of infrastructure, to strengthen connections between universities and the public sector. Catherine Lido, Glasgow Centre Director, travelled to New Jersey to attend the launch of the Rutgers Centre. On the opposite side of the world, in greater Manila, Prof. Mario Delos Reyes leads a centre at the University of the Philippines and looks forward to collaborating with other centres on neighbourhood studies and peacebuilding. Lifelong learning remains a thread tying centres and the themes of the learning city networks so capably led by Rob Mark. The internationalisation agendas of these universities work in our favour, facilitating and strengthening links between Rutgers and Glasgow, and RMIT, Johannesburg and Glasgow. I am confident that these centres, added to our centres in Johannesburg, with a focus on entrepreneurship and local economic development ecosystems, Glasgow and its leadership in learning city development, and Melbourne through its focus on the sustainable development goals, will have a dynamic effect on all our activities.

A highlight at the end of the year was the presentation of Learning City Awards by UNESCO to the cities of Cork and Glasgow, both long-time members of PASCAL's Learning City Network. I offer congratulations to both cities for this very well-deserved honour.

Tragically, the year was marked by the death of PASCAL Americas Deputy Director Michael J. Camasso of Rutgers University, whose passing was so ably memorialised in a piece on the PASCAL site by Radha Jagannathan. Prof. Ron Quincy succeeds as Deputy Director to take forward Mike's legacy work.

### *Conferences*

The XVIIth Pascal conference in Taipei, Taiwan focused on the challenges of global SDGs on education and cities. Over a dozen PASCAL colleagues had a unique opportunity to meet with hundreds of local and international participants over three days. The conference, co-organised and hosted by the University of Taipei, Taiwan University of Education, and Datong Community College, had an agenda which covered climate change, pandemics and disasters, diversity and social protest in cities, city-region relations, and artificial intelligence. Several keynotes by distinguished policy and civic leaders, including former ministers such as Prof. Hong-Yuan Lee, former Minister of the Interior and now on the faculty of the Taiwan National University's Department of Civil Engineering, raised the bar for future conferences. The most distinguished PASCAL participant, Peter Kearns AM, also gave a keynote on universities and their role in learning in later life. One of the key lessons was the attention to resilience at the local and community level, making people aware of disasters that could happen. All of us are very grateful to Dr. Eugenia Chang of Datong Community College and her colleagues for planning a conference that included policy as well as research, something that should set PASCAL apart from other associations.

The year ended with the 18<sup>th</sup> conference, "Sustainable Development Futures: From Knowledge to Practice". Hosted by the University of the Philippines through its School of Urban and Regional Planning and directed by Mario Delos Reyes and Dina C. Magnaye, this conference

combined three PASCAL priorities, *place management, social cohesion, and learning cities and regions* and was held in tandem with the 5th International Conference in Urban and Regional Planning (ICURP). It concluded with a call to establish national networks of learning cities in the Philippines and elsewhere in Asia, and to offer both cities and universities practical tools for evaluation of place-based initiatives and training programmes.

We hope shortly to announce the place and key theme of the 19<sup>th</sup> conference, most probably to be held late in 2025.

### *Centre highlights*

Each PASCAL Centre has been busy during the year, as shown by this selection of highlights demonstrating the power of international co-operation and networks:

#### Americas

- Research visit by Radha Jagannathan, Director of PASCAL Americas to Tampere University, to investigate the successes in education of the Finnish system, sponsored by the U.S. State Department and the Finland Fulbright Foundation, and hosted by Jari Stenvall, PASCAL Associate.

#### Asia

- Panel presentations by Roberta Piazza, Associate Director of PASCAL Europe, University of Catania and Annie Tubadji, Learning City Co-ordinator, Swansea University, at 6<sup>th</sup> UNESCO International Conference on Learning Cities, Jubail, Saudi Arabia.
- Representation on behalf of PASCAL at the ASEAN+3 Regional Learning Cities Conference in Bangkok by Mario de los Reyes, PASCAL Asia Director and Leone Wheeler, PASCAL Board Member.
- Keynote by Mike Osborne, Director of PASCAL Europe, on university regional and community engagement to Iranian senior policymakers at the National Institute for Higher Education Planning and Research, under the Ministry of Sciences, Research and Technology.

#### Australia

- Final conference of the Jean Monnet Network on Social and Scientific Innovation to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in Melbourne at RMIT organised by Bruce Wilson, Foundation Director of PASCAL, and with presentations by Mike Osborne, Roberta Piazza, and Robbie Guevara, Director of PASCAL Australia.

#### Europe

- Co-operation in organising the 5th International Learning City-Region Talks in Pécs, Hungary through Balázs Németh.

- Webinars organised by Catherine Lido on sustainable communities for learning city transformation & inclusion, and on AI & technology for learning city transformation & inclusion, held in conjunction with the XVIIth conference in Taipei.
- Development of a framework for co-operation between the cities of Helsinki and Glasgow in the fields of transportation, innovation ecosystems, urban economies, continuing professional development and higher education, by Ilpo Laitinen, Associate Director of PASCAL Europe and Catherine Lido.

#### Africa

- First graduation from the PhD programme in Local Economic Development for HE Lecturers, funded by the British Council at the University of Johannesburg and co-ordinated by Marius Ventor, Director of PASCAL Africa.
- Expansion of the PASCAL Network in Africa with discussions currently underway with the city of Harare in Zimbabwe.

#### *Briefing papers*

PASCAL has also been busy in publication during 2024 with nine Briefing Papers as follows having been published:

- BP21 Impact – “Playing the Long Game” by Michael Osborne
- BP 22 “Harnessing Museums, Heritage and Education: by Maggie McColl, Catherine Lido and Henrik Zipsane
- BP23 “Local challenges, global imperatives: Cities at the forefront to achieve Education 2030” - Mario de los Reyes, Shilpi Roy, Michael Osborne and Yulia Nesterova
- BP24 “Cognitive and Non-cognitive Skills Acquisition in Disadvantaged Populations: Evidence from the Nurture thru Nature (NtN) Experiment” - Radha Jagannathan and Michael Camasso
- BP25 “Faith and Spirituality-based Learning City Development” - Annie Tubadji
- BP26 “Connecting Urban and Rural Learning Initiatives” - Leone Wheeler
- BP27 “Pedalling Through Pregnancy: Is riding a bike when pregnant a political statement on spatial justice?” - Jac Torres-Gomez
- BP28 “Reimagining Inclusive Economic Futures” – Shilpi Roy and Michael Osborne

- BP 29 – “University Responses to Population Ageing” - Peter Kearns

Several Briefing Papers emanated from the work of the Learning City Networks, most notably those on *Reimagining Economic Futures* led by Shilpi Roy, University of Khulna, *Connecting Urban and Rural Learning Initiatives* led by Leone Wheeler, Australian Learning Community Network, *Harnessing Museums, Heritage and Education* led by Henrik Zipsane, European Museum Academy and Maggie McColl, University of Glasgow, and *Faith and Spirituality-based Learning City Development* led by Annie Tubadji, Swansea University. This work of the LCNs was complemented by a number of webinars during the year around the core themes of each network.

#### *Institutional framework*

PASCAL’s growth suggests a change in how PASCAL operates. Formerly, the Board combined centre directors with independent experts, academics and practitioners or policy experts. It met infrequently, its attention divided between short and long-term issues, technical issues relating to the website or a conference, and strategic issues on matters of substance. Henceforth, a Strategic Executive Steering Group of centre directors and the Learning Cities Coordinator will meet on a regular schedule. Complementing it will be the International Advisory Group whose expanded membership of independent academics and experts grounded in policy and practice will provide strategic options, and facilitate coordination with other international associations and organisations.

With best regards and every good wish for 2025,

Josef Konvitz  
Chair, Pascal International Observatory (2012-24)

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