



Learning Cities: Strategies for promoting inclusion

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Learning cities for inclusion

Inclusion has been a core objective of learning cities from the inception of this concept. Much of this interest has focussed on ways in which lifelong learning policies can combat exclusion and provide opportunities for all to participate actively in society and enhance their well-being. This paper provides an overview of some of the insights and lessons derived from exchanges between cities in many parts of the world which participated in the PASCAL International Exchanges programme (PIE) over the past 4 years, as cities faced the challenge of finding new ways in which their learning city strategies can contribute to inclusion objectives.

The PASCAL International Exchanges programme provides insights into policies to progress inclusion objectives through city stimulus papers. The papers demonstrate vividly the extent and nature of problems to be addressed in a world of exponential change where some groups are winners and many are often losers. The program operated between 2011 and 2013 with twenty two cities involved. All stimulus papers may be read on the [PIE web site](#).

This policy briefing illustrates steps taken in a number of very different cities around the world to promote social inclusion and cohesion, and encourages other cities to explore these approaches in their own particular contexts.

The inclusion challenge

The PIE papers noted a number of major issues confronting cities around the world. Many of these relate to the impact of urbanisation with large scale migration from rural areas causing social dislocation and exclusion for many. Papers on African cities (Dar es Salaam, Kampala, Gaborone, and Addis Ababa) in particular emphasised these issues, but echoes of can also be found in the papers from Hong Kong and Beijing. Related issues were found with migration across national boundaries with the Hume Global Learning Village in Australia, a typical case of a community struggling to handle issues raised by large numbers of migrants and refugees.

While these challenges were important in many of the papers, other issues such as exclusion resulting from poverty and insufficient education were also prominent.

Some strategies in response

A broad spectrum of strategies directed at addressing inclusion is available. This paper highlights the following six approaches as offering a sound basis for progress.

1. Involving all in the strategic development of the city.
2. Widening participation in lifelong learning as a basis for inclusion.
3. Integrating development at the local, district, and city levels.
4. Enhancing a sense of place and belonging.
5. Strengthening the work of cultural institutions.
6. Adopting a strategic approach.

Comment follows on some examples of each of these approaches:

1. Involving all in the strategic development of the city

Involving the whole city in planning for the strategic development of the city can contribute much to inclusion objectives. The approach adopted by the city of Sydney provides a good example of this approach. Sydney City Council divided the city into ten Urban Villages for planning and development purposes. Local Action Plans (LAPs) were developed for each Urban Village in consultation with the community. Forums were conducted with a wide turn out of residents. Local Action Plans then contributed to the overall strategic plan *Sustainable Sydney 2030*. The Urban Village model adopted by Sydney has much in common with the Hume Global Learning Village in Melbourne where lifelong learning policies were added to the urban village concept to drive empowerment and inclusion objectives.

Read more in the PIE papers from Sydney and Hume Global Learning Village.

2. Widening participation in lifelong learning as a basis for inclusion

Cork and Limerick provide examples where an annual Lifelong Learning Festival has been used as a strategy to widen participation in lifelong learning. In the case of Cork participation in the Festival grew over ten years from 65 events in 2004 to about 500 activities in 2013 over a week. This growth of participation in the annual Lifelong Learning Festival has contributed much to building a learning culture in Cork with a capacity for enterprise. This was seen in the initiatives Cork took to promote the EcCoWell approach to holistic and integrated learning city development. The co-ordinators of the Cork and Limerick Festivals in an article in the Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education posed the question whether these Lifelong Learning Festivals can be seen as pathways to sustainable learning cities (Kearns, et al 2013).

Vancouver provides another example of a city seeking to promote inclusive engagement in lifelong learning through a number of projects. These include harnessing curiosity and popular culture in innovative projects.

The Hume Global Learning Village provides a further example of a community providing lifelong learning in a range of ways with the library role important in several learning hubs built to provide for learning in various forms and contexts. Inclusion has been central to development of the Hume GLV over ten years with considerable attention given to raising aspirations as a basis for inclusion.

Read more in the PIE papers from Cork, Limerick, Vancouver and Hume Global Learning Village.

3. Integrating development at the local, district, and city levels

The Chinese cities in PIE, Shanghai and Beijing, provide good examples of ways in which development has been co-ordinated at three levels: the city, district, and local area. This approach enables large cities of the size of Shanghai and Beijing to implement sustainable learning city projects. While city authorities in Beijing and Shanghai have a key role in establishing a policy framework for lifelong learning, these cities are divided into a number of administrative districts which have an important role in progressing education, learning, and building community. Shanghai, for example, is divided into eighteen districts and counties. District administrations are important in the task of translating city-level policy objectives into actions to advance education, learning, and community. Inclusion objectives are then progressed at the local level including individual streets, through a number of providers and special events such as the Shanghai Week of Lifelong Learning, Cultural Festivals, and Book Fair and Reading events.

There have been similar developments in Beijing where administrative districts are also important in translating general objectives to action at a local level. Good practice is rewarded with the most successful districts honoured with the title of Model District in Community Education by the Ministry of Education. Best practice is also recognised at a local level in organisations and streets.

Read more in the PIE papers from Shanghai and Beijing.

4. Enhancing a sense of belonging

Cities in the PIE programme show a number of ways in which a sense of belonging is pivotal. While these include community building in a number of ways, physical planning and placemaking also make a contribution.

Community building may be seen in eco-community projects in Taipei, and in the role of devices such as community gardens. New York, the home of the Project on Public Spaces, is often seen as a City of Neighbourhoods, while initiatives such as the New York Streets Renaissance and innovative urban parks (such as the High Line and the new Brooklyn Bridge Park) enhance the sense of place in various neighbourhoods and contribute to building a sense of belonging in a community. Initiatives such as the Historic Districts legislation enhance neighbourhood heritage in a number of districts, and so contribute to a sense of belonging in places worth preserving.

Read more in the PIE papers from Taipei and New York.

5. Strengthening the work of cultural institutions in social change

The strengthening of the role of cultural institutions as agents of social change has been identified as an important strategy. This can be, for example, by developing the role of museums in challenging prejudice and intolerance and in the promotion of social justice. Success factors identified include the importance of partnership in advancing social justice objectives.

Read more in the PIE paper from Glasgow.

6. Adopting a strategic approach

One of the main lessons emerging from the PIE experience is the need for a strategic approach which integrates short-term objectives with a long-term vision.

The Hume Global Learning Village provides a good example of a strategic approach with development in three-year action plans linked to a long-term vision for Hume set out in *Learning Together 2030* and to be achieved through a number of steps set out in the three-year action plans. The action plans include a number of initiatives, decided after consultation with the community, to progress inclusion objectives. These include strengthening learning in the early childhood years, facilitating pathways to employment, enhancing the technology role, and generally taking action to build a culture of learning.

Building a long-term vision to facilitate strategic development may also be seen in Shanghai and Beijing. In the case of Shanghai, a number of phases in building a learning society have been identified. This vision includes strengthening the role of civil society to complement and support the roles of government and market, and to building “a socialist harmonious society”.

Kaunas provides another example of a city that has adopted a strategic approach to its development as a learning city. Following a conference in 2001 on *The Learning City – A Vision of Kaunas’s Future*, Kaunas made efforts to progress key aspects of this vision, including strengthening formal and non-formal education. A broad approach to building an innovative community of sustainable life and development has been adopted. Kaunas is now participating in the Entrepreneurial Learning City Network to explore ways to further develop this concept of the future of Kaunas.

Read more in the PIE papers from Hume Global Learning Village, Shanghai and Kaunas.

Inclusion in Learning Cities for the Future

The examples of good practice in a number of cities around the world that were documented in the PIE exchanges provide insights into ways in which learning cities can promote lifelong learning and promote inclusion.

The PIE exchanges demonstrate that the two critical steps in fostering inclusion in learning cities involve providing education and learning opportunities for all throughout life, and building community at all levels. Successful learning city strategies can advance both objectives. Promoting inclusion in a universal learning society is a key aspiration and objective for learning cities for the future.

There is good evidence about successful strategies such as those identified here. The challenge is now to bring these insights together as a framework for Learning Cities for the

Future which provides opportunities for all to continue learning throughout life and contribute to building an inclusive learning society. This will require connecting up the dimensions discussed in this paper in a process of redefining community as a broad ecology in the sustainable 21st century learning city. This need is well put by Leo Hollis in his book on *Cities are Good for You*.

'Community may be many things: a shared space, a way of behaving, as well as people; yet the process of belonging is more than any one of these things alone. It is an ecology that combines place, people, and the way they interact.'

Next steps

PASCAL has now launched its new Learning Cities 2020 Networks programme to build on these foundations. There is within this new programme an Inclusion Network which will have the main role in this further development. Other Networks within the programme will find the strategies explored here relevant to their work and can in turn contribute to this process. The paper by Norman Longworth titled *Social Inclusion in a Learning City* provides a base for initial steps beyond the situation reached in the PIE exchanges. Each Network is encouraged to respond to this paper from the perspective of the subject area of their Network, perhaps with a focus on the questions at the end of the paper. Cities from around the world are invited to join the network.

For more information visit: <http://lcn.pascalobservatory.org> .

Further reading

All PIE stimulus papers cited in this paper may be read on the PIE website <http://pie.pascalobservatory.org> .

Leo Hollis (2013), *Cities are good for you*, Bloomsbury, London

Norman Longworth (2014) *Social Inclusion in a Learning City* <http://pobs.cc/ysl1>

Peter Kearns, Yvonne Lane, Tina Neylon, & Michael Osborne (2013), *The Learning festival: pathway to sustainable Learning Cities? The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*, Adult Learner 2013