

**Building Inclusive Resilient Learning Neighbourhoods
in EcCoWell 2
Community Recovery Program**

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EcCoWell 2 principles directed at integrated holistic development may be applied at both a city level and in neighbourhoods. Learning neighbourhoods have particular value in catering for diversity in cities and in encouraging local innovations to bring about cultural change and contribute to well-being and sustainability in a world of dislocation and uncertainty.

While learning cities set the framework for these developments, the neighbourhood is the place for fostering learning throughout life, building understanding and social coherence, and inculcating the civic and moral values that underpin well-being and sustainability in a context of constant change.

Learning neighbourhoods have already been important in the development of EcCoWell ideas. Cork has experimented with five learning neighbourhoods, while projects in the Harlem neighbourhood of New York, USA in Singapore, and the Datong district of Taipei show what can be achieved at a local level. These developments are discussed below.

Recovery from the coronavirus pandemic in communities will need to address the range of psycho-social issues resulting from the pandemic, including an increase in isolation, anxiety, and depression. Rebuilding social cohesion, inclusion, and community in the aftermath of the pandemic will present a daunting challenge requiring fresh ideas, strengthened partnerships, and vision and leadership.

Building a learning and innovation culture

The long term objectives of learning neighbourhood initiatives is to build a learning and innovation culture that enhances social justice in the community, builds social coherence and partnership, fosters learning throughout life for all, and overall develops a community able to adapt to change and be sustainable in turbulent times.

This will require a range of strategies in different contexts. These may include intergenerational learning approaches, community projects, strategies that deepen learning and which connect stakeholders such as community organisations, business, and educational institutions.

Building entrepreneurship in the community is a key aspect of building an enterprising culture in the neighbourhood able to adapt to change. PASCAL Policy Review Paper 15 on *Building entrepreneurship in sustainable learning cities* offers guidance in this area, (http://lcn.pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/briefing_paper_15_kearns_english.pdf), with some examples of good practice such as Singapore offers. Youth social enterprises provide a further example

with Brimbank in Melbourne as an example where a youth centre served as a hub for initiating and supporting youth social enterprises.

EcCoWell 2 development in the Datong district of Taipei shows how entrepreneurship can be fostered from the cultural resources of the community. This initiative built on the rice food tradition of the country and led to a Rice Food Theme Pavilion being set up in the Kuoshun neighbourhood of Datong. While the Pavilion served as a rice food learning site, it also operated as a micro-business place. This is rather like the role of the Brimbank Youth Centre in supporting youth social enterprises.

Intergenerational learning strategies can play an important role in addressing exclusion, and building social coherence in a community. A policy where unemployed young people are engaged to support elderly people in care facilities provides an example.

Cultural institutions, such as museums and libraries, along with education institutions, can have a key leadership role in building a vibrant inclusive learning neighbourhood. Activities built around heritage learning can add much to the sense of belonging, while these institutions can also serve to connect local to global perspectives in building a mindful global citizenship in communities.

Linking learning, health and environment

Finding ways to link learning, health, environment and community building lies at the heart of applying EcCoWell 2 principles in local neighbourhoods. The UNESCO Cork Call for Action on Learning Cities recognised this need to build Green, Healthy, Learning Cities (<http://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/learning-cities/cork-call-action-learning-cities>).

The educational, health, and cultural resources of a community can be drawn on in progressing this objective. In the city of Cork, the role of the Cork WHO Healthy City Committee has played an important role in addressing health issues such as mental health. Co-ordinating community resources that connect people to share interests and fellowship can do much to address exclusion leading to a sense of isolation and depression. Community events like festivals and heritage learning, such as the annual Cork Lifelong Learning Festival, can do much to foster happiness and well-being, and a sense of belonging. Addressing mental health is a priority for EcCoWell 2 during 2020. An EcCoWell 2 stimulus paper on mental health and well-being will be released in May.

Linking the arts, community, environment, and learning

A good example of an EcCoWell 2 project that links the arts, community, and environment is provided by the activities of the Wallis-Ortiz Gallery and centre in the Harlem neighbourhood of New York. This initiative has explored how the arts and place-based learning can be harnessed in transformative ways directed at community and environment objectives. This involved the community considering how revitalizing the outdoor public space of a partner, Fresh Oils Ministries, and then developing program opportunities in these spaces could enhance the sustainability of the community and understanding of environment and place.

EcCoWell principles can be applied in any combination of sectors provided that on-going learning and community building informs and adds value to the connections. The pattern of connections is likely to depend of the particular strengths and resources of a community. This approach can be applied in a holistic way to implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The experience of Cork has shown the value of green, healthy learning communities as a starting point for building connections

towards a holistic vision. In other cases cultural institutions functioning as community learning centres can provide a good launching pad offering creative opportunities for imaginative links.

Streets, neighbourhoods, and districts

Most neighbourhoods comprise a number of streets so that the street can be seen as a building block in forming learning neighbourhoods. In a dynamic learning neighbourhood, an ordinary street can be transformed into “a self-organising public space.”¹ This reality was recognised by the Beijing Learning City in offering awards for the best streets in the Learning City development.

Creating and maintaining public gardens provides an example of the kind of action possible at the level of the street. Learning neighbourhoods can take on some of the functions of a district in mediating between local “street neighbourhoods” and “functional communities (linked by religion, other philosophies, arts, and shared interests) and the city as a whole. A sustainable learning neighbourhood involves the complex interweaving of such strands in building a good learning city from the grassroots up. In very large learning cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, the district has a vital mediating role in the flow of learning city objectives down to local neighbourhoods. In smaller cities, such as Brisbane, the learning neighbourhood may take on this vital mediating function.

The value of community projects

EcCoWell experience in Taipei and Cork has shown the value of community projects in building a sense of belonging through collaboration in projects that have value for the whole community. A summary of projects undertaken in various neighbourhoods of Taipei and Cork may be seen on http://conference2016.pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/post-conference_meeting_report.pdf. The Taipei projects included wetland restoration, building a community woven bamboo performance house, and creating a “Happy Farm” for the community, while the Cork projects in Ballyphehane and Knocknaheeny showed Cork applying EcCoWell principles in two very different neighbourhoods.

Additional projects in Harlem (New York), Datong District (Taipei), Singapore and Cork were profiled at the later 2018 PASCAL International conference in Suwon: http://lcn.pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/eccowell2_report_suwon.pdf.

Collaborative community projects such as these can have considerable value in connecting up community organisations, education institutions, businesses, and other stakeholders in neighbourhoods. If well chosen, they can be used to promote the integration objectives of EcCoWell 2, and build communities that are green, healthy, learning communities.

Community projects can link to other initiatives such as community gardens and farms that foster a sense of community, and help to build social coherence and resilience. Community projects can also be used to deepen the learning experience of residents in their consciousness of local and global citizenship, and the role of the individual. Good community projects can bring meaning to lives through a sense of being deeply connected to other people in progressing shared community objectives.

Civic and personal well-being

¹ Hollis, L. (2013). *Cities are Good for You*. London: Bloomsbury, p. 36.

Civic and personal well-being are intimately linked as the ancient Greeks knew with their concept of *eudaimonia*. Active participation in community projects can be a means of challenged thriving in an era of radical change and uncertainty. PASCAL Policy Review papers on *Integrating happiness in sustainable learning cities* and *Learning to be as the core of learning in later life* provide insights into important aspects of challenged thriving throughout life, including during the senior years after retirement. Annual World Happiness reports offer further insights from around the world on happiness and well-being “ as the proper measure of social progress, and the goal of social progress”. Building mindful learning cultures in communities will find expression in personal development throughout life, local community action, and in fostering empathy, civic sentiment, and global consciousness.

The PASCAL/PIMA report on *Towards good active ageing for all*, cited below, provides further insights into active ageing as a means of extending well-being throughout life.

Making neighbourhoods age-friendly

Making neighbourhoods age-friendly can contribute much to both the inclusion and sustainability objectives of EcCoWell 2. Intergenerational learning activities can be useful, while the PASCAL/PIMA report on *Towards good active ageing for all* showed the value of community learning centres, under various names around the world, in fostering lifelong learning throughout the life course and building community (<http://pascalobservatory.org/pascalnow/pascal-activities/news/towards-good-active-ageing-all-context-deep-demographic-change-and->). A briefing paper prepared for PASCAL by the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute in America (OLLI) summarised OLLI research on ways of adapting education institutions to the diverse needs of older adults (<http://pascalobservatory.org/pascalnow/pascal-activities/news/cultivating-age-friendly-institutions-older-adults-insights-osher-0>). Finding new ways to harness the life experience of seniors can contribute much to the inclusivity objectives of EcCoWell 2 communities.

The neighbourhood as a 21st century village

A good learning neighbourhood may be seen as a 21st century village with all the human qualities and benefits of a village. In some cases this metaphor has been adopted, as in the Hume Global Learning Village in Melbourne. The Hume experience over a decade pointed to the importance of a community hub that serves to draw community networks and relationships together for holistic development. In the case of the Hume development, the library, named the Hume Global Learning Centre, was developed as a community hub serving these purposes. The case examples in the PASCAL/PIMA report on Good Active Ageing showed how community learning centres such as Volkshochschulen in Germany, Kominkan in Japan, and Neighbourhood Houses in Australia can serve much of this role. A key issue for learning neighbourhoods in 2020, in the era of the coronavirus pandemic, is to examine how institutions such as these can perform this role, including, in particular, addressing inclusion objectives for vulnerable groups, and community aspects of mental health objectives.

An EcCoWell 2 local community innovation model

Several local neighbourhoods participating in the EcCoWell 2 Community Revival Program illustrate an EcCoWell 2 local neighbourhood innovation model. These include the Harlem New York EcCoWell 2 project and the Datong Taipei learning neighbourhoods. In each case, an institution applied EcCoWell 2 principles in engaging the community in a broad cross-sectoral approach across areas such as the arts, environment, culture, health and well-being. This approach, as developed in Harlem New York since 2016, will be outlined by Maria Liu Wong and Connie Walters in the July EcCoWell 2 stimulus paper titled *Arts, spirituality and*

well-being in a transformative EcCoWell 2 learning neighbourhood approach. The May and June stimulus papers will also be relevant to our thinking about building inclusive and sustainable neighbourhoods.

Reimagining learning communities after the coronavirus pandemic

While much has been achieved already through EcCoWell learning neighbourhood initiatives, the challenge confronting communities everywhere requires, as UNESCO has urged, that *we reimagine knowledge, education and learning* in the looming environment of a *world of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and precarity*. This challenge, articulated by UNESCO in 2019 in establishing its International Commission on the Futures of Education, is highly relevant to the task of rethinking learning neighbourhoods as a pathway to a good sustainable future after the coronavirus pandemic.

For example, should we reimagine a learning city as a dynamic conglomerate of interacting learning neighbourhoods linked in a mission to build a good sustainable and purposeful world? It is hoped that the participants in the EcCoWell 2 Community Recovery Program will explore creative ways of applying EcCoWell 2 principles at a local community level as a pathway to such a good, sustainable future.

The recovery of communities from the social and economic effects of the COVID-19 epidemic provides an opportunity to apply EcCoWell 2 principles in strengthening the social infrastructure and resilience of communities, and the well-being of their people. A range of social and psychological effects will need to be addressed. These may include an epidemic of loneliness and mental illness, rising unemployment, loss of confidence and a sense of meaning in life, and the further breakdown of vulnerable groups. EcCoWell2 development in 2020-21 will address a number of these challenges, including a focus on learning, health, and well-being, and the extension of learning neighbourhoods into more communities.

Exchanges of experience between learning neighbourhoods around the world participating in EcCoWell 2 will have value in sharing good practice and finding ways to implement EcCoWell 2 principles in a range of contexts under harsh conditions. Making EcCoWell 2 future-oriented in this context is a key challenge. The city of Cork has been an international leader in learning city development oriented to EcCoWell principles, and is now joined by other innovative learning cities in the PASCAL EcCoWell 2 Community Recovery Program, including Harlem New York and Datong Taipei who have been creative leaders in examining ways to build innovative learning neighbourhoods in communities with considerable disadvantage.

October report on learning neighbourhoods

Learning neighbourhoods participating in the PASCAL EcCoWell 2 Community Recovery Program will contribute to the same six objectives set out in the PASCAL paper outlining this program, and will contribute a report in October 2020 on the selection of these objectives that they decide to focus on. Innovative learning neighbourhoods participating in the EcCoWell 2 Community Recovery Program can contribute much to the personal and social recovery objectives of this program from the perspective of local communities and their families.

What shape will local neighbourhoods take in the post-coronavirus world in the quest for a sustainable future?