

PASCAL International Exchanges (PIE)

PIE Discussion Paper 1

Building 21st Century Sustainable Learning Cities

Peter Kearns – 25 Mar 2011

A paper on the PASCAL website on the United Kingdom experience with Learning Cities includes an observation that after a promising start many learning cities in both the UK and Europe generally have fallen short of their original aspirations¹. In addition to the UK situation, a significant proportion of the Learning Region Networks in Germany, funded by the German Government and the European Social Fund between 2001 and 2008, disbanded after government funding ceased. Likewise, many Australian learning communities initiated early in the first decade of this century no longer exist².

There is a paradox in this apparent pattern that needs to be examined in working towards a sustainable concept of 21st Century Learning Cities. At a time when the pressures for a lifelong learning capability for all, for social, cultural and economic reasons have never been greater, why have so many learning community initiatives failed to be sustained? What are the requirements for sustainable Learning Cities responsive to 21st century conditions and challenges?

In this context, challenges emerging from globalisation, shifts in patterns of economic development, mass migration, demographic change with ageing populations in many countries, inter-generational shifts in attitudes and values, and the very pace of change pose a broad spectrum of challenges that require vision, leadership, commitment, substantial partnership development, and values and a conceptual framework that unifies collaborative action.

¹ Robert Hamilton & Lynette Jordan (2001) *Learning Cities: United Kingdom experience*, p.7.

² Most of the learning communities funded by the Australian National Training Authority under its National Learning Community Project 2001, managed by the author of this paper, no longer exist.

In this paper it is asserted that the Learning City model can be responsive to these challenges and provide a basis for sustainable initiatives provided six essential orientations are put in place to underpin development and ensure sustainability. These orientations for 21st Century learning cities are:

1. Inclusion
2. Being creative and innovative
3. Policy aligned
4. Capacity to address key issues of community concern
5. Making development holistic and integrated.
6. Communication, partnership, and leadership

Sustainable learning cities will develop through strategies that progress these orientations in interactive ways so as to build a shared vision, substantial partnerships and social capital, collaborative creativity, and a capacity to address major issues of concern to the community.

While these orientations involve a mix of traditional objectives that drove the first generation of learning communities, such as inclusion, the overall balance is different in the emphasis placed on policy alignment, addressing major objectives in a co-operative way, and fostering collaborative creativity and a capacity for innovation. It is asserted that sustainable Learning Cities should be both very local and very global in their development. Comment follows on these orientations:

1. Inclusion

The objective of providing lifelong opportunities for all as a foundation for quality of life, employability, and inclusion in cohesive communities remains critical for learning cities. Social justice objectives remain central to the vision along with idealism that has ignited learning community initiatives across the globe.

The democratic values that continue to underpin and drive learning communities initiatives were well put by Darlene Clover in a paper prepared for the PASCAL Östersund conference in June 2010:

“I recognise the baseline values of justice, equality, and sustainability, the promotion of a more knowledgeable, engaged and critical citizenry and the adult education vision of a more just, healthy and sustainable world where education has a key role to play”³

While these baseline values and aspirations for an inclusive society with opportunities for all remain valid, achieving this goal has in some respects become harder as contributions from Dar Es Salaam, Hong Kong, and Lesotho to the PIE dialogue make clear.

On the other hand, innovations in engaging disengaged people reported in cities such as Vancouver, Cork, and Hume point to promising ways forward with the Vancouver Curiosity + Popular Cultures and district strategies, Cork’s enterprising use of a Learning Festival and Hume’s battery of strategies to raise aspirations and opportunities. There is further a sense that the enormous potential of media and technology in fostering learning throughout life and inclusion has not yet been realised.

This remains a prime area for creative innovations and exchanges of ideas and experience.

2. Being Creative and Innovative

It is clear that Learning Cities need to be creative and innovative in responding to the myriad of challenges confronting them. This will require shifts in mindsets and values, substantial partnership development (including unusual partnerships), and

³ Darlene Clover (2010) *Adult Education and Learning in Canadian Cultural and Natural Heritage: Potentials and Tensions*, forthcoming in 2011 with the PASCAL Östersund papers.

policies to foster creativity in many contexts throughout life, including in schools, responding to the needs of disengaged youth, stimulating enterprise and business, and in active ageing strategies.

While libraries and cultural institutions will have a key role in building a creative learning culture throughout the community, a range of strategies will need to converge in furthering these objectives of sustainable learning cities.

Progressing these objectives is discussed further in Discussion Paper 2 where it is asserted that learning cities and creative cities have much in common.

3. Policy Aligned

There are grounds for believing that the disappearance of many first generation learning communities was due to the absence of supporting government policies (at local, state and federal levels) that recognise the role and value of collaborative efforts to foster lifelong learning and its applications in many contexts for social, cultural and economic development for the overall good of society.

Policy alignment involves both the supporting policies of central government as well as the critical alignment for Learning City development with the policies and strategies of local government authorities. The current interest in concepts such as the “Big Society” in the UK, add to the relevance of policy alignment issues.

A good example of a Learning City initiative aligned with the strategic development of a local government council is provided by the *Learning Together 2030: Shaping Living Learning in Hume City to 2030* strategy of Hume Global Learning Village which has been aligned with the strategic development policy of Hume City Council for the same period. This alignment means that Hume City Council is a stakeholder in the success of the Learning City initiative with compelling reasons to continue support for the initiative.

A corollary of such policy alignment is a requirement for a sound statistical monitoring system so that progress towards the shared long term objectives can be evaluated with adjustments in strategies and priorities as required. While Hume has such a monitoring system, there is a question whether the experience of the European Lifelong Learning Indicators (ELLI) and the Canadian Composite Learning Index could add value and refinement to the indicators used.

4. Addressing Key Issues of Community Concern

While social justice objectives remain central to Learning City initiatives, sustainability will be enhanced if it is clear to the community that the learning city initiative has become a vehicle for partnership and collaborative action in addressing the big issues of concern to the community.

This will involve building on the six orientations discussed in this paper so that creative and innovative ways are found to mobilise community resources, harness new ideas, and build a shared vision and collaborative partnerships to address such issues.

A good example is provided by the city of Bari, in developing a broad community partnership to address crime and public safety in the city. Similar action could be taken in a Learning City framework to address issues such as global warming, preserving the environment, fostering intercultural understanding and racial harmony, creating a city that supports an ageing population, and community action to recover from a natural disaster.

A range of big community needs were identified in the Stimulus Papers, these include the revitalisation of the Old Town of Kaunas, responding to the needs of migrants from mainland China into Hong Kong, and dealing with the urgent problems of rapid growth, unemployment, and poverty in Dar Es Salaam.

The Dar es Salaam experience reflects the rapid growth of urbanisation in Africa and Asia with the myriad of problems arising from growth. UN statistics show that half the world's population now live in urban areas with further growth in urbanisation predicted. While the population growth in OECD countries is largely stagnant, a London School of Economics assessment predicted that by 2050 86% of more developed countries and 67% of less developed countries' populations will live in cities. These statistics reflect a massive growth of urbanisation in Africa and Asia, with Dar es Salaam a typical example.

In this context, the Dar es Salaam Response Note points to three key issues to be addressed:

1. The multidimensional problems of Dar City;
2. The need and a case for support for municipal councils;
3. The role of Universities in the learning game.

These issues warrant extensive discussion in the PIE dialogue in working towards shared views on the contribution that Learning City initiatives can make to the problems of urban growth and development, especially in Africa and Asia. The capacity to address key issues of community concern is surely a hallmark of sustainable learning cities.

5. Making Development Holistic and Integrated

The application of learning strategies and building a learning culture in a city is relevant to the social, cultural, educational, and economic development of the city. Cities need to be clever in building linkages across these domains of city development, so that development is holistic and integrated, with synergies achieved.

There are a number of promising developments reported in the Stimulus Papers and Blog discussions that go in these directions. These included the broadening role of

cultural institutions to progress social and economic agendas as in the developments in Glasgow Museums that support both social justice and tourism objectives.

A further good example is provided by Kaunas where broad sustainable development is underpinned by principles articulated by Becker⁴ that support social, cultural, environment, and economic sustainability.

The great potential of learning through cultural engagement to support social and economic development is argued in a paper by Henrik Zipsane in the PIE Library⁵. The role of cultural policies in building key generic competences relevant to life and work is asserted in this paper and in several other papers presented at the PASCAL Östersund conference in 2010.

6. Communication, Partnership, and Leadership

While Learning City initiatives typically start with a small body of champions, the sustainability of initiatives requires broad community understanding and support. This requires leadership, effective communication strategies, and much partnership development. Strategies such as the Learning Festival conducted by Cork (and other places such as the Bad Tölz Learning Region), joint projects that bring in community networks as partners, and information approaches ranging from community portals to newsletters and magazines all have a place. The experience of the Hume Global Learning Village suggests that as initiatives mature, they tend to progress from an entrepreneurial phase of start-up leadership to a form of collective leadership where the community more broadly takes responsibility and ownership for the initiative.

This is a critical area in achieving sustainability, and I invite comments on the experience of other cities.

⁴ In *Kaunas Stimulus Paper* online, p. 1.

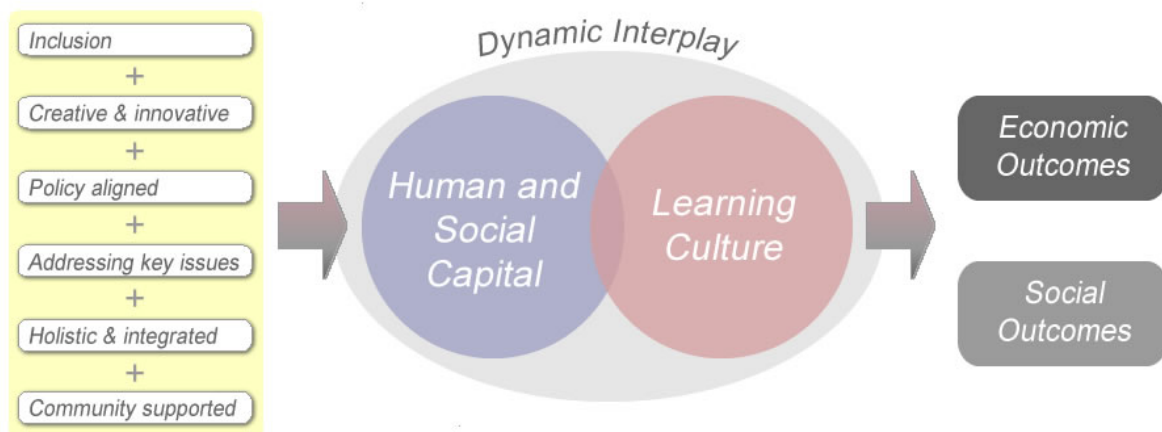
⁵ Henrik Zipsane: *We are more The overlooked potential of learning through cultural engagement*

Making Development Interactive and Cumulative

While each of the orientations of sustainable Learning Cities discussed above is important, the reality is that it is the interaction of these thrusts in cumulative strategies that will drive shifts in mindsets, cultural change, and the gradual emergence over time of an enterprising learning culture to support social and economic development. Devising strategies and activities to foster such interaction is a key to sustainability of Learning City initiatives.

Figure 1, following, suggests economic and social outcomes from the interaction of these orientations derived from work by the Canadian Council on Learning, adapted in the 2010 report on *European Lifelong Learning Indicators*⁶. This interaction over time will build social and human capital and a civic learning culture to sustain and progress the Learning City.

FIGURE 1 - Six Key Orientations for Sustainable Learning Cities



Source: Adapted from the ELLI Index Europe 2010

Hence, we need to be clever in finding ways to develop connections and synergies between these key orientations of innovative and sustainable Learning Cities. Some

⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung (2010) *The ELLI Index Europe 2010*, p.34.

promising examples exist in the Stimulus Papers and Blog discussion, but we need to take these points of intersection and integration further in future PIE dialogue. This is a key area for innovative Learning City development.

Outcomes of the PIE Dialogue

While a promising start has been made to the PIE dialogue through the Stimulus Papers and Blog contributions, there is value in discussing what form the outcomes of the PIE dialogue might take.

One model is provided by the Limerick Declaration which was a product of the PENR3L project managed by PASCAL and which is available on the PASCAL web site in the PENR3L space. Should the insights and lessons from the PIE dialogue be brought into some form of statement (Declaration, Charter, PASCAL Policy Paper etc) to assist Learning City initiatives in such areas as strategic planning and communication with stakeholders.

If you favour such an outcome, what form of document would you prefer, and how might it be prepared. For example, should the Limerick Declaration be revised to take account of the PIE experience, or should a PIE Charter be developed based on the key themes, issues, and ideas of the PIE dialogue?

For Discussion

1. Do you agree that the sustainability of Learning City initiatives depends on progressing the six orientations discussed in this paper? Should anything be added or deleted?
2. Where does your city stand in respect of each of these policy orientations (strengths and weaknesses)? What do you see as the priority for your future development?

3. Can you suggest further ways in which the objective of holistic integrated development can be progressed?
4. In cities where policy alignment as discussed in this paper is absent, what steps could be taken to move towards such an alignment locally and in respect of national policy?
5. Would you like the PIE dialogue to lead to some form of statement on Learning Cities as guidance for cities? If so, what form do you prefer (Declaration, Charter, PASCAL Policy Paper), and how might it be prepared?

Contact

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