



## **PASCAL International Observatory - EcCoWell 2 Community Recovery Program**

### **Briefing Paper 6**

#### **Sustainability: Six steps towards 'recover better' from the COVID-19 pandemic**

**Peter Kearns**, Board Member, PASCAL International Observatory

*We are facing an irreversible humanitarian and economic crisis that will permanently change our world. (Conway, Hadem & Probst, 2020)*

*The pandemic represents a rare but narrow opportunity to reflect, reimagine, and reset our world. (Klaus Schwab, CEO World Economic Forum)*

#### **Key points**

- Supporting mental health and well-being is a priority.
- Build skills and attributes for a sustainable future.
- Recovery should include foundations for a resilient learning culture.
- Learning cities need to become longevity literate.
- Inclusive learning neighbourhoods can support all these steps.
- Build an innovation mindset.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a human tragedy with profound effects. It has led to a massive increase in anxiety, depression, fear, and a loss of confidence in the capacity of governments to manage a global crisis on this scale.

Moreover, the impact of the pandemic is not alone. The world is facing three mega challenges that the Secretary-General of OECD described in the following terms.

*We need ensure that in overcoming this challenge, we also manage the other key transitions that we are facing, climate change, digitalisation, and population ageing (OECD, 2020).*

The six steps discussed in this paper have regard to the challenges of digitalisation (Fourth Industrial Revolution) and population ageing, as well as recovery from the pandemic. They recognise that these challenges are intertwined in their effects, and growing in intensity and urgency (OECD, 2016).

Recovery from the pandemic will be complex and difficult. Many business leaders are thinking in terms of a number of stages. Sneader and Singhal (2020) in a McKinsey paper for business suggested five stages: resolve, resilience, return, reimagine, reform.

Learning cities will also need to think of recovery in a number of stages towards the 'next normal'. As a contribution to thinking, I am suggesting in this paper six steps in the "recovery better" route towards the goal of a sustainable future. Contexts differ, and readers will no doubt envision a different process in their communities.

Learning cities have the advantage that they have a social infrastructure that can be drawn on, where ideas can be shared with others. A critical requirement is to envision the future that is being aimed for, and then work backwards in imagining the steps to get there. A new five-year plan?

I would like to emphasise that imagination is an essential part of this process: imagination that leads to empathy and the capacity to envision a better world. I hope October reports from participants in EcCoWell 2 will reflect these qualities.

The six steps I discuss in this paper as steps along the "recover better" route are the following.

1. Support mental health and well being for all.
2. Build skills and attributes for the future to support employability and well-being.
3. Build some foundations for a resilient learning culture.
4. Make your learning city "longevity literate".
5. Build local neighbourhoods as inclusive people focussed "small societies".
6. Build an innovation mindset.

Comment follows on these suggestions.

### **1. Support mental health and well being for all.**

Mental health and well being has been one of the major themes of the PASCAL EcCoWell 2 Community Recovery Program. The stimulus paper (EcCoWell Briefing Paper 3) that Catherine Lido and I wrote contains a number of examples of good practice drawn from positive psychology ideas that assist people in maintaining well being in a time of crisis (Kearns & Lido, 2020).

The psycho-social issues to be addressed in recovery are central to helping communities recover from the pandemic, and are central to each of the three mega-transitions mentioned by the Secretary-General of OECD. More digitalisation will lead to more job loss while creating some new jobs (with different skill requirements) so that skilling the workforce to maintain employability in the

future needs to go along with action to maintain mental health and well-being. Building strong communities where people have a sense of belonging, and where relationships bring meaning and purpose to their lives is a necessary part of the transition to a sustainable future.

The longevity revolution with longer lives (*the hundred-year life*) will bring a raft of issues requiring us to rethink our norms and values in developing a 'new map of life' (Stanford, 2018). We need new narratives about life in an era of longevity, perhaps with fewer jobs, to give meaning and purpose to lives in positive and productive terms. I comment on this in Section 4 below.

Each of my suggestions connects with the others to support mental health and well-being. We need broad integrated thinking in taking EcCoWell ideas to a new level. My paper, with Denise Reghenzani-Kearns for the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, entitled 'The Longevity Dimension - Inclusion for Ageing Populations', comments on these issues in more detail.

## **2. Build skills for the future to support the employability and well-being of people**

In responding to a rapidly changing labour market with high unemployment levels, we need to build the capacity of people to reskill quickly to maintain their employability. In the longevity context of ageing populations, this will require that we rethink our qualifications and training structures, and delivery methods, so that unemployed people- and ageing people- can be assisted to reskill quickly.

This is a persistent labour market problem, now enhanced by the transitions I have mentioned, so that past solutions need to be adapted to the post-pandemic world.

### **The role of generic/soft skills**

Generic skills such as problem solving, communication and 'learning to learn' have often been seen as enabling people to learn new skills quickly. OECD has done much with its *De Se Co* project over some years which it has now updated with its Education 2030 report (OECD, 2018).

A feature of the OECD 2030 report is "transformative competences", competences that transform and shape our future. These are seen as

- Creating new values;
- Reconciling tensions and values;
- Taking responsibility (OECD, 2018).

Each of these transformative competences is relevant to the challenges we face post-pandemic. Conflicts will need to be resolved, and dilemmas confronted. Taking responsibility for self and others is fundamental if recovery is to be sustained.

Maria Liu Wong and Connie Walters in EcCoWell Briefing Paper 4 discuss transformative learning in an EcCoWell 2 approach, which they link to the integration of the arts, spirituality and faith, place and well being. This is seen as providing an expanded EcCoWell 2 approach directed at justice, hope, and wholeness. These are qualities that will be important in recovery from the pandemic.

Recovery will need some fundamental changes in societies if it is to be sustained in the era of the 'hundred-year life' and automation. OECD in its 2030 Agenda suggests some design principles for moving forward with eco-system changes (OECD, 2018: 6). There are also useful industry views on

rethinking basic aspects of our societies, such as health care, in innovative ecosystems terms (Singhal *et al.*, 2020). There is a good case that in a crisis like now, innovation is more critical than ever (Bar Am *et al.*, 2020).

There is considerable support for the view that a broader approach to skilling the workforce will be required post-pandemic, along with lifelong learning built into all stages of the longevity life course. This view is not new, and in my 2000 report on generic skills, in which I reviewed approaches in a number of countries, I summed up the need for what I called, 'an American model' (Kearns, 2000:1).

*An American model which involves a broad, more flexible, and more holistic set of generic skills which should include basic skills, personal attributes, values and ethics, learning to learn, as well as workplace competences of the Mayer type.*

### **World Economic Forum**

The World Economic Forum also sees the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, with a range of technologies such as AI and biotechnologies, as requiring a broad set of "intelligences" if people are to thrive in this environment. The CEO and founder of the Forum, Klaus Schwab, described these in the following terms:

- Contextual intelligence- the mind;
- Emotional intelligence- the heart;
- Inspired intelligence- the soul;
- Physical intelligence-the body.

This gives a broad framework for rethinking lifelong learning needs for the future. Emotional intelligence is vital to thriving in a world of turbulence and disruption where there are few guarantees. Resilience should now be one of the prime objectives of learning communities with emotional intelligence and social cohesion two of the main supports of resilient communities. Inspired intelligence is also necessary. Schwab puts it this way.

*The mind-boggling innovations triggered by the fourth industrial revolution (we can now add the COVID-19 pandemic), from biotechnology to AI, are redefining what it is to be human.*

(Schwab, 2018:98)

The longevity revolution with its '100-year life' poses the same question.

The Stanford University Centre on Longevity notes in its White Paper on *A Global Agenda for a New Map of Life* that the social norms and infrastructures that support us "appear to be unsustainable for two demographic reasons" (Barry *et al.*, 2018).

We need then, to rethink recovery from the pandemic in a broad integrated way that connects to our responses to climate change, digitisation, population ageing, and the pandemic. What are the first steps?

### **3. Build some foundations for a resilient learning culture**

Lifelong learning needs to be rethought in this context with the triple challenges mentioned by the Secretary-General of the OECD, and with the changing life course of the longevity era. An EcCoWell

stimulus paper will address this subject in September. Cultural change is complex and difficult, and requires sustained action over a significant period of time. However, might the pandemic serve as a trigger to take some steps in building a culture that values learning, community, social justice, and empathy? Are there foundations we can lay now along the 'recover better route'?

In 1999-2000 I reviewed, with George Papadopoulos, action taken by five OECD countries to build a learning and training culture: Germany, Sweden, UK, USA, Netherlands. We summed up our conclusions in three alternative models of approaches to build such a culture.

- The Nordic model found in Sweden, but also in other Scandinavian countries such as Denmark, Norway, Finland.
- The British model, which Australia inherited, and which involved at the time joined up policies to change the culture and build a learning society.
- The American model, which is market driven and characterised by substantial diversity in policy, strategy, and outcomes including significant inequality.

The Nordic model with its long interest in inclusion, lifelong learning and balanced development has been marked over time by initiatives such as folk high schools and recurrent education. These developments have paid off in the strong performance of the Nordic countries in a range of measures relevant to the well-being of the population such as the *World Happiness Reports*. Social cohesion has been shown in various periods of crisis to be one of the main factors that supports resilient communities, along with the integration of services and resources (Rodin, 2014). Recovering from the pandemic and taking steps to build a resilient learning culture requires both foundations.

There is no single path for building a sustainable culture of lifelong learning, but vision, broad partnerships, well articulated equality and social justice objectives linked to an education system reflecting these objectives will take a country a long way.

While it is important to have a long term vision to drive your recovery from the pandemic, there is a range of short term steps that can be taken to support community recovery while, at the same time, building some foundations for an agile sustainable learning culture able to adapt to changing circumstances. A few suggestions follow:

- Revive your learning festival as soon as possible.
- Celebrate learning achievements as a norm in your community.
- Give awards for best learning achievements, e.g. small business, vulnerable groups and heritage organisations.
- Foster curiosity and imagination, e.g. materials for schools. Foundations can help.
- Encourage non-traditional partnerships.
- Encourage intergenerational collaboration, e.g. youth and seniors.
- Develop active partnerships with other countries and cultures, e.g. sister cities.
- Explore the ethnic cultures in your community, e.g. library national days.
- Use your museum for special exhibitions to open up subjects of historical interest, e.g. borders in history.
- Foster heritage groups linked to your libraries.
- Ensure all your community has basic digital skills, e.g. 'tech savvy' seniors programs.

These are a few things which can facilitate the recovery process while laying good foundations for the future.

#### 4. Make your learning city longevity literate

Inclusion for ageing populations has been caught up in one of the great transformations in human history: the progression to a longevity society (Kearns & Reghenzani-Kearns 2020). Growth in the number of older persons is now a global phenomenon. This is demonstrated in the following statistics showing growth in population ageing up to 2050.

Table 1: Number and distribution of persons aged 60 years and over by region, in 2017 and 2050

	<i>Number of persons aged 60 years or older in 2017 (millions)</i>	<i>Number of persons aged 60 years or over in 2050 (millions)</i>	<i>Percentage change between 2017 and 2050</i>	<i>Distribution of older persons in 2017 (percentage)</i>	<i>Distribution of older persons in 2050 (percentage)</i>
World	962.3	2080.5	116.2	100.0	100.0
Africa	68.7	225.8	228.5	7.1	10.9
Asia	549.2	1273.2	131.8	57.1	61.2
Europe	183.0	247.2	35.1	19.0	11.9
Latin America/ Caribbean	76.0	198.2	160.7	7.9	9.5
Oceania	6.9	13.3	92.6	0.7	0.6

*Data Source: UN (Department of Economic and Social Affairs). World Population Ageing 2017: Highlights: 5.*

These statistics highlight the following key aspects of the demographic challenge.

- Growth in the number of older persons is a global phenomenon.
- The greatest change up to 2050 will occur in developing countries.
- Globally, the population aged 65 and over is growing faster than all other age groups.
- The most significant increases will occur in Africa requiring fresh ideas and policies.
- Significant increases will occur in Latin America and Asia. (Kearns & Reghenzani-Kearns, 2020).

The arrival of the era of the ‘hundred-year life’ (Gratton & Scott, 2017) means that we must shift our thinking from ageing populations to the longevity life. The Stanford University Center on Longevity White Paper on *A Global Agenda for a New Map of Life* described the features of a longevity approach in the following terms.

*A longevity perspective recognises that development is a recursive process with many interconnected stages that requires a broad range of interventions and measures covering education, work, finances, health, community, environment and relationships. We must not only care for the elderly but prepare children for century long lives.*

(Barry et al. 2019)

Thinking in terms of the longevity hundred year life opens opportunities for learning cities to reimagine the life stages in a hundred year life, and to develop some ideas on how lifelong learning can be adapted to support people in making the key transitions in the ‘many interconnected stages’ in such a life. What should happen in such a life to maintain the employability and well-being of people?

While these complex questions will require much thought and analysis, there are things that can be brought into Community Recovery Plans that point in the direction of preparing for the longevity life. Participants in the EcCoWell Community Recovery Program have the opportunity to be international leaders in exploring how learning cities can adapt their strategies in preparing for the era of the longevity hundred-year life and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

An important area for thinking involves relations between the generations in the longevity life, particularly between youth and seniors. The economic and financial consequences of the pandemic have raised serious issues about who bears the financial costs of the pandemic, issues which can further fragment our societies. There are some good practice examples already of unemployed young people collaborating with seniors in joint efforts. Intergenerational collaboration is one of the key areas for thinking in building cohesive, sustainable communities.

Governments will be obliged to address the implications of the demographic revolution. The Japanese Government took a lead in September 2017 when they established a Council for Designing the 100-Year Life Society with the Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, personally involved. In June 2018, the Council produced its basic design for the Human Resources Development Revolution. This plan recognises the importance of recurrent education throughout the course of the ‘hundred-year life’.

##### **5. Build local small neighbourhoods as inclusive people focussed “small societies”**

For my penultimate step, I am returning to the first stimulus paper prepared for this EcCoWell 2 Community Recovery Program: *Building inclusive resilient learning neighbourhoods*.

I do this to make the point that all the components in the EcCoWell2 Community Recovery program are connected in ways that add value when the connections are achieved. Has thinking about mental health and well-being, and later the role of environment action , added value to thinking in learning cities about the role of learning neighbourhoods?

While local neighbourhoods are certainly important from mental health and well-being, and environment perspectives, there are further reasons to have a close look at the potential of building inclusive learning neighbourhoods as a foundation of cities that are cohesive, sustainable, and good places to live, and becoming a foundation for the longevity society.

The potential of these ‘small societies’ is a subject requiring much more research and development. The city of Cork now has six learning neighbourhoods after commencing with two, while Limerick has also initiated several learning neighbourhoods. I hope the experience of these communities will be brought into the October reports.

The longevity revolution brings the need to think through how we build a society for all ages. The neighbourhood is a fundamental building block. A 2011 report from the UK Department of Communities and Local Government used the term ‘lifetime neighbourhoods’ to explore what a society for all ages would like at a local community level (Bevan & Croucher, 2011). Some interesting case studies of good practice were included in their report. The work of Manchester City Council in its *Valuing Older People to create an age-friendly city* provides a good example with some interesting governance and accountability arrangements.

Maria Liu Wong and Connie Walters link learning neighbourhood development to the ideas in their stimulus paper on the arts, spirituality and transformative learning that they raise issues about taking EcCoWell 2 ideas to a new level of development. It seems likely that the turbulence and disruption of recovery from the pandemic will require this. Learning neighbourhoods also provide a context to implement ideas on the environment that Bernie Connolly has raised in Briefing Paper 5.

## **6. Build an innovation mindset**

I would also like to suggest that harnessing the power of local communities is a good area for innovation in planning for community recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic – innovation perhaps in non-traditional partnerships, in governance arrangements, in supporting mental health during phases of recovery, in enhancing the roles of libraries and museums, in giving vulnerable groups a sense of belonging, in developing partnerships with communities in different cultures for exchanges of experience and ideas.

The “recover better” route is going to require considerable innovation, in fact building an innovation mindset into the culture of cities. A promising sign is a spate of creative innovations around the world. A good local example is the initiative by Wyndham and Melton City Councils to hold a Global Learning Festival on 1-4 September 2020. This is a splendid new way to share experience on the role of learning festivals.

### **The Great Reset**

On the big picture global stage, a good example is provided by the decision of the World Economic Forum to turn their usual January meeting into the *Great Reset: a Unique Twin Summit* that will echo around the world, and that will be both in person in Davos and virtual around the world.

- “The Great Reset” is a commitment to jointly and urgently build the foundations of our economic and social system for a more fair, sustainable and resilient future.
- It requires a new social contract centred on human dignity, social justice and where societal progress does not fall behind economic development. (World Economic Forum 2020)

The Great Reset dialogue means that the annual WEF meeting of government and business leaders will be framed in a global multi-stakeholder summit driven by the younger generation. This will involve thousands of young people in over 400 cities around the world linked as the Global Shapers Community. I take this as an example of innovation in turning traditional ideas on their heads, and reimagining a sustainable future in new ways. I hope the October reports will reflect such thinking



that we can share with others, including learning cities around the world, in the report on the PASCAL EcCoWell 2 Community Recovery Program.

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