

The Changing Scope of Learning Cities and Regions

Prof Norman Longworth, PASCAL Associate

Traditionally Learning Cities and Regions concentrate on the first of the two words, often with the prefix 'lifelong' and it is generally acknowledged that the provenance of the term 'Learning City' lies within the context of the growth of interest in lifelong learning throughout the world. However, successive projects and interpretations since 1998 have enlarged the scope of a learning city to include concepts not normally associated with formal educational terminology and structures. This paper shows how the span of learning city and region understanding has, in the past 13 years, expanded into many other realms of place-making activity, referencing programmes and projects initiated by the European Commission.

One of the first EC projects to study learning city perceptions was named TELS (Toward a European Learning Society). Between 1998 and 2000, this pioneering project studied 80 cities and municipalities in 15 European countries to discover their level of activity in 10 categories and 26 sub-topics (see figure 1 below). For this it developed a 'Learning Cities Development Audit.' Although not a scientific study – the data was collected ad hoc from any city or town prepared to complete the audit - it nevertheless produced interesting information on the level of learning city knowledge in those that participated. In essence the concept was quite new to most respondents but, once it had been explained, it aroused great interest, and inspired an increase in the number of learning cities around Europe in the early 2000s. The notable aspect of this project, however, lies in the scope of the TELS categories. The audit did not take a purely educational approach, but also suggested that the new learning world in local authorities now includes such disparate items as social inclusion, technology use, wealth creation, leadership and employment, environment and active citizenship. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of these, and other categories, into sub-topics. The main objective of the project was to demonstrate to city leaders that learning really is at the heart of all the undertakings of a learning city.

Subsequent projects built upon this philosophy. The LILLIPUT project, started in 2002, created 14 modules, 57 topics and 200 hours of learning materials for cities and regions and their stakeholders in universities, schools, adult education and business and industry. It drew heavily from the experience of its Dublin partner, which had recently completed a consultation exercise with its major institutions, politicians, neighbourhood councils and citizens on the future of the city. Its notion of a learning city was wide-ranging and eclectic, covering many features of a city not even included in TELS. Figure 2 shows in diagrammatic form the topics it asked citizens and organisations to rank in order of importance for them (the adjectives are my own). Under the heading 'A city of possibilities', reflecting the can-do optimism of the time, it introduced new values of 'safe city', 'connected and informed city', sustainability, creativity, democracy and outward-looking attitudes. In many ways this was ahead of its time, not only because of the range of its concerns, but also because it managed to consult with more than half its inhabitants. Although the concept of a learning city came only fourth in public consciousness, the city leaders eventually decided that, since learning is central to every one of the categories, the soubriquet 'learning city' was a suitable title. LILLIPUT included many examples from Dublin in its materials.

Other projects followed. INDICATORS, another starting in 2002, concentrated on the role of stakeholders within cities and regions. As with TELS, it did not emphasise the educational responsibilities of schools, universities, adult education colleges and companies in its 'stakeholder audits', though it did encourage new approaches to learning there. Rather it influenced them to become learning organisations within a learning city and community, and introduced to them new ideas of contribution, partnership and

participation in helping to create these. The local authority stakeholder audit particularly added cultural, communication and consultation dimensions to its portfolio of learning city tasks, and recommended that the audit could be used for departmental and inter-departmental continuing professional development.

2004 saw the start of the LILARA (Learning in Local and Regional Authorities) project which pushed back the conceptual boundaries of Learning cities and regions even further. Its main objective was to determine the learning needs of local authority employees vis a vis the creation of a learning city or region, so that they could play a full part in its progress. Figure 3 below shows the span of topics included in LILARA. They now include financial, organisational, political and democracy issues, reflecting the many-sided activities, expertises and interests of local authority employees. The results of LILARA are themselves interesting in that they demonstrate an enormous increase in local authority learning need which can only be satisfied by using new techniques of learning such as those embedded in the LILLIPUT materials.

The PALLACE project added a completely new set of dimensions by linking local authority stakeholders in 7 cities in 4 continents. Each partner concentrated on a different stakeholder relationship and linked with one other partner to develop materials that would be of use to both. For example South Australia and Finland created place-related guidelines on the schools role and relationship to its own community. Figure 4 shows the results from St Columba College. The Queensland and South Australia partners described the effect of a learning festival on the local community in Mount Isa and Marion respectively. Beijing gathered knowledge and ideas for its plan to convert a whole suburb of 800,000 people in Beijing into a large learning community. Over the whole project, the same broad view of the city's responsibility to its citizens was adopted.

PENR3L, a project to establish a European expertise network for Learning Cities and Regions, organised 2 workshops and a conference on Economic, Social and Networking topics. It suggested that capital building is not a compartmentalised activity between them, as many regions tend to believe in their strategies, but rather a holistic, interdependent and interconnected relationship, and that, therefore, national, regional and local authorities need to understand better the complex interactions between them if they are to flourish. This has led to more recent speculation on how local authorities can maximise their resources across a whole range of social, economic and environmental factors, as shown in figure 5 below.

Lastly the EUROlocal project, just recently completed, has taken a very broad view of learning cities and regions. As figure 6 shows, the knowledge, tools etc collected cover finance, heritage, innovation and creativity, international cooperation, festivals, learning organisations, active citizenship and community development, communication and consultation, all of them, and more, representative of what we call a learning city. The EUROlocal storehouse – <http://eurolocal.info> - is now the foremost reference point for learning city and region knowledge.

To summarise, the terms learning city, learning region, have always had a wide interpretation covering the whole range of what we would normally associate with the responsibility of a city administration. To add health and ecology, and other functions, would be simply an extension of this trend.

But all of this raises the question of why cities and regions should want to adopt the title of learning and what they stand to gain from it. If all the characteristics so far discussed are already the responsibility of every city and region, what distinguishes a learning city, a creative city, a transition town, an ecowell

city, an intelligent city from one which may not justify any of those titles? And which of these titles describes it the best? How can the guidelines for the UNESCO plan to kitemark standards for its GLCN Network be accomplished? How can PASCAL contribute to that?

This author suggests that the following might serve as discussion points to resolve these questions.

What distinguishes a learning city is

a) the extent to which the city engages its citizens in determining its future – for that it will need to introduce strategies that enable lifelong learning for all, giving them the tools and competences to make good decisions, helping to solve problems, becoming adaptable and flexible, versatile and entrepreneurial.

b) The extent to which the city engages its institutional stakeholders – businesses, higher and further education, schools, the local authority itself – in contributing to an environment in which economic, social and environmental development is well understood and delivered. This may involve becoming learning organisations, working in partnerships and mobilising the unique resources which each can offer.

c) The extent to which individuals and communities contribute to the welfare of others in the city through active citizenship and volunteering strategies. This may mean innovative strategies to mobilise and organise this effort

d) The extent to which the city encourages a wider vision in its organisations, including the local authority, and citizens and encourages them to understand and address local, national and international environmental and humanitarian problems. This may involve links with and between peoples and organisations from around the world to help understanding, tolerance and good practice.

e) The extent to which the city adopts innovative strategies to deal with poverty, social exclusion, health, disability and change and inculcates a sense of self-confidence and well-being in its people.

f) The extent to which the city has a strategy to maximise all its resources – intellectual, cultural, community, human, geographical, location, environmental, financial, health, educational and economic - in order to achieve its potential and build a more prosperous, stable and equitable future for its citizens

There are no doubt many others, but the fundamental requirement for implementing all of them is 'learning', both in its development and its application, for people and for organisations. It is at the heart of a city's, a region's growth into the future. And that is why this author favours the terms 'learning city, learning region' rather than one which describes only a part of the whole.

In short no longer cities of possibilities, but apprentice cities - cities that are learning to transform their possibilities into realities. Herein lies a role for PASCAL and UNESCO working together.

The challenge is to describe this complexity in a way that city leaders, professionals and citizens can understand it and take appropriate action

Norman Longworth, 11/1/2012

Figure 1 TELS Categories

Category	Explanation	Sub-topics
a) Commitment to a Learning City	The extent to which the city or town has already started to implement plans and strategies which set it out on the path to becoming a Learning Community, and the thinking it has done to date	Strategies for Lifelong Learning Organisation of Lifelong Learning City Charters for Lifelong Learning European projects and orientation The City as a Learning organisation Readiness for Learning City
b) Information and Communication -	Ways in which Lifelong Learning ideas and plans are communicated to a) those responsible for implementing them and b) citizens at large. Including new curriculum development, teacher training, learning centres, use of the media, collection of information on learning requirements etc	Information Strategies Use of the Media Learning Literature Marketing of Lifelong Learning
c) Partnerships and Resources	- the extent to which links between different sectors of the city have been encouraged and enabled, and their effectiveness. Including links between schools, colleges, business and industry, universities, professional associations, special interest groups, local government and other organisations. Includes physical and human resource sharing, knowledge generation, mobilisation etc	Partnership types Use for New resources Combining Existing Resources
d) Leadership Development	the extent to which lifelong learning leaders have been developed and how. Including community leadership courses, project management, city management, organisational mix.	Existing Leaders New Leaders Materials development
e) Social Inclusion	projects and strategies to include those at present excluded - the mentally and physically handicapped, the unemployed, minorities, women returners, people with learning difficulties etc	Barriers to Learning Qualifications, Standards and Assessment Special Programmes European National
f) Environment and Citizenship	projects to inform and involve citizens in city environmental matters. How the city is informing its citizens of all ages about citizenship and involving them in its practical expression in the city	Environment Awareness and Learning - Adults and Children Environmental involvement Citizenship and Democracy
g) Technology and Networks -	innovative ways in which information and communications technology is used to link organisations and people internally, and with people and organisations in other communities. Includes use of open and distance learning, effective use of networks between all ages for learning and understanding of the internet.	Distance Learning Multimedia and Open Learning Using internet and networks Wired City
h) Wealth creation, employment and employability -	schemes and projects to improve the creation of both wealth and employment and to give citizens lifetime skills, knowledge and competencies to improve their employment prospects. Includes financial incentives, studies, links with industry, industry links with other communities etc.	Employment and Skills Wealth Creation Learning Requirements Analyses and Citizens Learning Audits Employability Initiatives
h) Mobilisation, participation and the Personal Development of Citizens	- the extent to which contribution is encouraged and enabled. Includes projects to gather and use the knowledge, skills and talents of people and to encourage their use for the common development of the city.	Lifelong Learning Tools and Techniques - Personal Learning Plans, Mentoring, Study Circles etc Personal Development of Citizens Teacher/Counsellor Development and Training Participation and Contribution Strategies
j) Learning Events and Family involvement -	projects, plans and events to increase the credibility, attractiveness, visibility and incidence of learning among citizens individually and in families. Includes learning festivals, booklet generation, celebrations of learning, learning competitions, recognition events etc	Learning celebrations - festivals, fairs etc. Learning recognition and rewards Family Learning strategies

Figure 2: Dublin – a city of possibilities

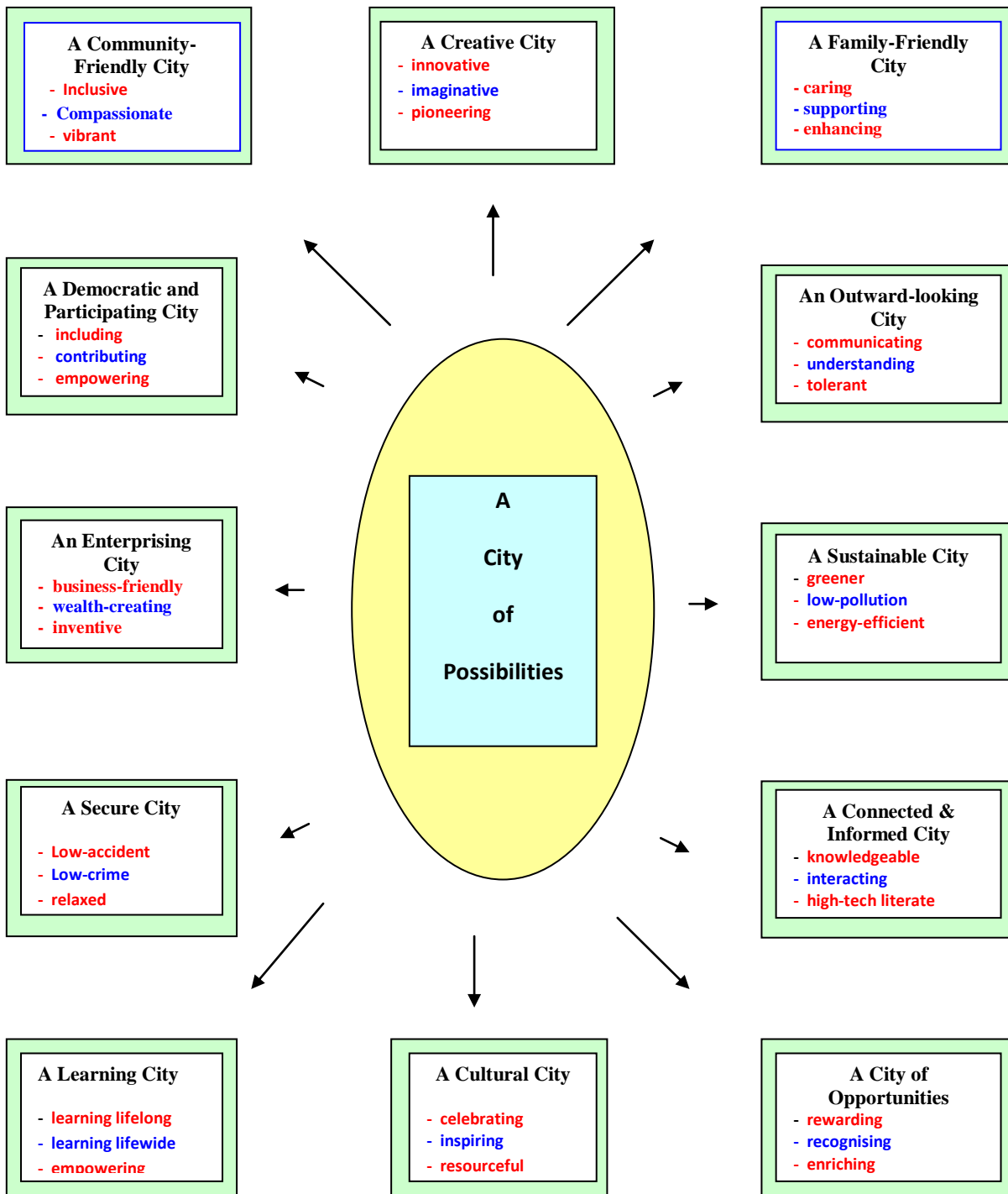


Figure 3: LILARA Local Authority Learning Needs Audit

	Learning City topics	Topic Examples	High	Med	Low
2.2.1	Basic knowledge, understanding and awareness Issues	Nature and characteristics of a Learning City. Why it is necessary. How it is different. Agents of change. Implications for me, for my family, for my fellow citizens. My role and responsibility. Constructing a Learning City. Examples of good practice.			
2.2.2	Organisational and planning issues	My area as a learning organisation. My role in strategy and policy development. Tools and techniques for improving performance. Continuous learning programmes. Quality management. Managing my learning. Developing leadership. Examples of good practice.			
2.2.3	Wealth creation issues	Employment and employability. Attracting industry and inward investment. Workplaces as learning organisations. Skills and competences for the future. The Learning City as an investment. Role of the regional development agency. Linking cities globally. Learning festivals. Marketing the area as a Learning City. Entrepreneurial education. Case studies.			
2.2.4	Social issues	Personal development tools and techniques. Learning incentives. Social inclusion. Developing Learning Communities and Learning Societies. Multiculturalism and diversity. Promoting tolerance and inter-ethnic communication. Work-life balance. Case studies of good practice.			
2.2.5.	Educational issues	Creating a culture of learning. Teaching and learning differences. New skills-based curricula for a learning age. Continuous professional development for all. Learner ownership. New learning methods. Learning styles. Mentoring schemes. Counselling. Improving access to learning. Removing barriers. Celebrating, rewarding and recognising learning success. Non-traditional students. Evaluation.			
2.2.6.	Resource and financial issues	Investing in lifelong learning. Full service budgeting schemes. Service credit. Partnerships for increasing resource. Tapping into community human, financial and physical resources. Case studies of good practice.			
2.2.7.	Contribution and participation Issues	Personal contribution to building a learning area/community. Active citizenship. Volunteering. Corporate social responsibility. Time-off social programmes. Mobilising the community. Case studies of good practice.			
2.2.8.	Political and democracy issues	Learning and local politics. Consulting the people. Educating civic leaders. Civic education for all. Local and global responsibilities. Learning City charters, participation and contribution. Learning Communities and Neighbourhoods. Communicating the learning message to all.			
2.2.9.	Technology issues	Technology and the learning future. Smart cities. Wired Cities. Using the Internet and education technology tools for learning. Linking Learning Cities nationally and globally. Learning Region Networks. Distance learning and multimedia. Case studies of good practice.			
2.2.10	Stakeholder issues	Institutions as stakeholders - roles and responsibilities of schools, universities, adult colleges, business and industry, voluntary and community organisations. People as stakeholders, individuals and families, councillors, myself. Using previous learning experiences. Case studies			
2.2.11	Cultural issues	Culture in the Learning City. Local history. Role of museums, libraries, galleries etc. Street culture. Case studies of good practice. Citizen involvement			
2.2.12	Environmental Issues	Citizen involvement, Sustainability. Eco-diversity, Eco-awareness, Area regeneration, Rural and Urban Planning			

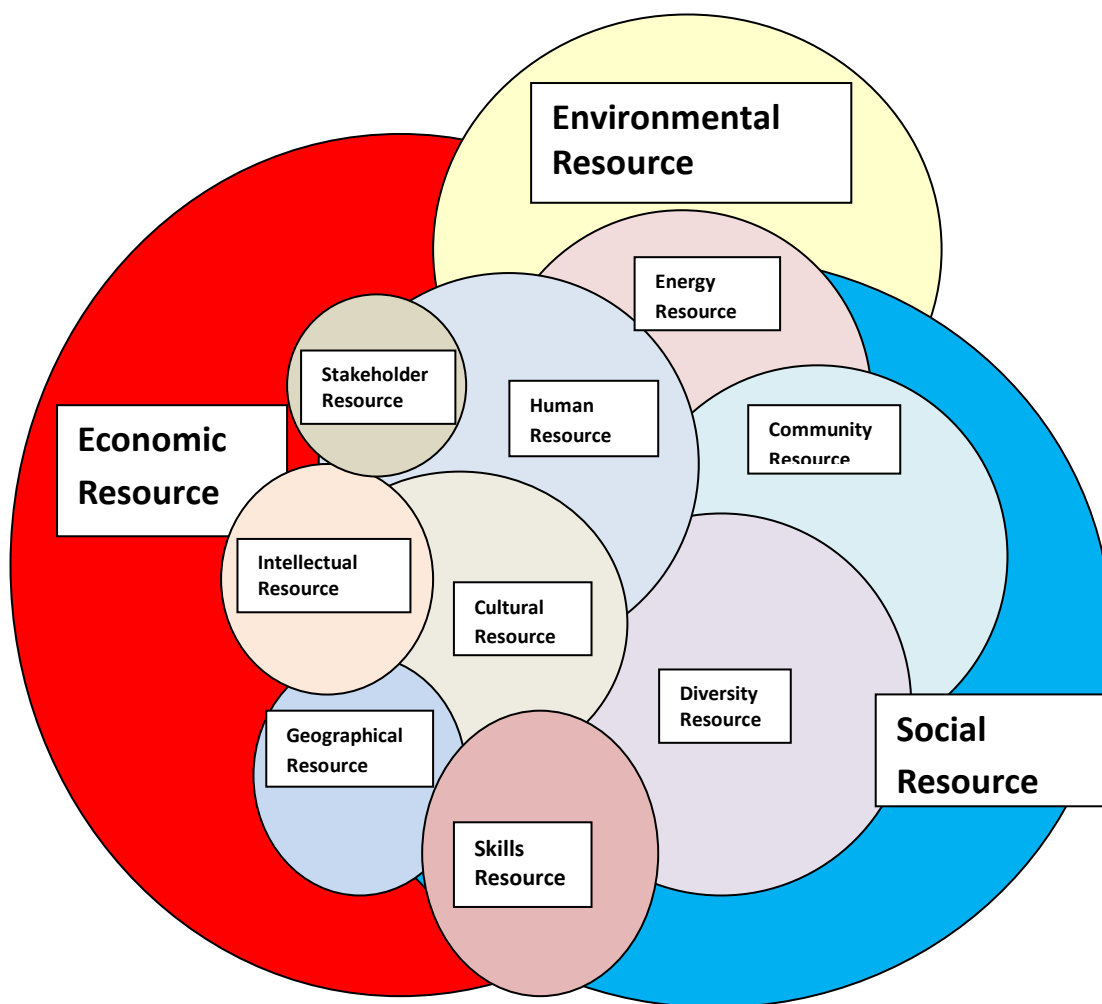
Figure 4, St Columba Community Learning

St Columba, a mixed Anglican and Catholic school in South Australia, participated in the PALLACE project (see chapter 8 of the book 'Learning Cities, Learning Regions, Learning Communities) and re-examined its relationship with the community in which it existed. This is the charter it drew up as a result of collaboration between teachers, children, parents and local leaders.

We believe the facilities at St Columba offer the wider community opportunities to experience lifelong learning	A	B
1. The courses that could be offered will be for a variety of age groups.		
2. Our facilities will be available for Community use where appropriate.		
3. We seek to nurture in the wider Community a life long love of learning.		
4. We seek to build partnerships with Local Council, Further Education Providers, The Business Enterprise Centre, Service Providers and our local Parishes.		
5. We seek to provide courses of training that are needed in the wider community.		
6. We seek opportunities to be a "Satellite" Centre for programs offered in other Regional Centres.		
7. We see our Library/Resource Centre/ Careers Centre/Recreational facilities as practical dimensions of a <i>St Columba Learning Centre</i> .		

Our Hopes for the Wider Community		
1. Build the confidence and skills of the members.		
2. Enthuse members' love of Learning.		
3. Enable members to create new opportunities in their lives.		
4. To see St Columba as a vibrant part of their community life.		
5. Have opportunities to search and develop their spirituality.		
6. Use particularly our Entertainment Facilities to celebrate family and community functions.		
7. Build bridges between all cultures of the community and the various aged groups.		
8. To have a positive self-belief in their ability to succeed and make a difference.		

Figure 5 Resources in Cities and Regions



Interaction between economic, social and environmental resources (potentials)

Most resources contribute in some way to the economic and social development of a city or region. Human, intellectual, community, location and cultural resource, which themselves contain interactions and interconnections, become, perhaps controversially, partly embedded in Social resource. This in turn is a component of economic development. Growth and potential are produced by optimising all the categories. Although many cities and regions have not yet taken an inventory of economic growth using also the social factors that contribute to it, they undoubtedly have a real contribution to make. Some resources have more impact than others and this would be shown by the relative size of the circle. There would also be differences from region to region, while different resources may also be added.

Describing economic potential in this holistic way helps to highlight the relativities and provides a way of understanding the complexities of learning city and region development. Each resource can be broken down into a set of indicators that describe it and its contribution to the whole, pointing the way to the sort of joined up local and regional government that will take employees out of their silos and into the interconnected world of the learning region of the future.

Figure 6 Eurolocal Dimensions

