

Balázs Németh

## LEARNING CITIES IN PROGRESS: COMPARING THE MODELS OF PÉCS AND CORK

### ABSTRACT

*This paper analyses the influence of the rise and development of learning cities and regions in adult education research work. Comparative adult education research has got great potential to investigate the concrete mechanism of learning city-region constructions and to analyse the changing nature and structures of learning city-region models. Therefore, the paper tries to underline the impact of some relevant theoretical focuses and related models perspectives and limitations to comparative adult education research work since it is important to examine how learning city-region collaborations at local-regional levels may enhance both participation and performance in the learning of adults, but also of other age groups, and affect the intergenerational dimensions of learning as well as community development. At the same time, this contribution signals the need for interdisciplinary approaches and positions in comparative research work on local and regional citizen participation in learning programmes.*

**Keywords:** *learning city-region, comparative adult education research, participation, Pécs Learning City, Cork Learning City*

### UČEČA SE MESTA V TEKU: PRIMERJAVA MODELOV MEST PÉCS IN CORK – POVZETEK

Članek analizira vpliv razvoja učečih se mest in regij na raziskovanje izobraževanja odraslih. Primerjalno raziskovanje izobraževanja odraslih ponuja veliko priložnosti za raziskovanje konkretnih mehanizmov, ki delujejo znotraj učečih se mest (ali regij), ter za analizo njihove spreminjajoče se narave in strukture njihovih modelov. Članek v ospredje postavlja vplive, ki jih imajo nekateri teoretični pogledi, in omejitve povezanih modelov na primerjalno raziskovanje izobraževanja odraslih, saj je pomembno raziskati, kako lahko sodelovanje učečih se mest-regij na lokalni-regionalni ravni izboljša tako udeležbo in učinkovitost učenja odraslih kot tudi učenje drugih starostnih skupin ter vpliva na medgeneracijske dimezije učenja in razvoja skupnosti. Hkrati prispevek kaže na potrebo po interdisciplinarnih pristopih v primerjalnem raziskovanju lokalne in regionalne participacije državljanov v učnih programih.

**Ključne besede:** *učeča se mesta-regije, primerjalno raziskovanje izobraževanja odraslih, udeležba, učeče se mesto Pécs, učeče se mesto Cork*

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*Balázs Németh, habil PhD, Associate Professor, Institute for Human Development and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pécs, [nemeth.balazs@pte.hu](mailto:nemeth.balazs@pte.hu)*

## INTRODUCTION

It is necessary to acknowledge that the topic of learning cities and regions has already been analysed from various perspectives in terms of both economic and social orientations. However, it is inevitable that a balanced approach must recognise some key issues and focuses which formed not only the conceptual foundations but also the evolution of related frames and narratives, which themselves played a certain role in emphasizing local and regional collaborations for better education, learning to combine community and individual aspirations.

The theoretical part will try to guide the reader in a thorough overview of the development of the learning city concept and the practice-oriented part will elaborate on the integration of recent concepts channelled into the models of Pécs and Cork, both responding to local and regional interest for raising collaborative forms of learning within particularly manageable structures to gain public interest and support.

However, the incorporation of this mainly neoliberal economy centred model into the lifelong learning policy track of the European Union at the turn of the millennium by way of the European Regions of Lifelong Learning (R3L) can be considered a shift towards balancing the economic with a certain level of the social, the employability factor with attention towards governance, citizenship, and community concerns (Longworth, 2001).

Osborne, Kearns, and Yang (2013) underline the necessity of recognising the stages of development, or rather the evolution, of learning cities. It has changed dramatically over the last ten years under the increased attention and activity of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its Global Network of Learning Cities. Moreover, the model has been attached to the overarching framework of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) at Goal No. 11. The evolutionary perspective may help us to match some drivers of realising the model in concrete national or local-regional contexts.

The cases of Cork and Pécs not only represent two different visions through different models, but they offer several lessons on the formation of learning communities to result in growing participation and community engagement. But it also turns out that a bottom-up approach is key to a successful learning city instead of top-down measures which usually resemble the nature of politics and of the political in the planning of learning city models.

## LEARNING CITIES AND REGIONS ON THE RISE

The birth of learning cities and regions can be traced back to 1972 when the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) initiated a seven city project called "Educating Cities". Vienna, Edinburgh, Kakegawa, Pittsburgh, Edmonton, Adelaide, and Gothenburg made education the focus of their strategies and policies in order to develop economic performance. That experience was turned into an example model

for other cities around the world (Longworth, 1999). The project had a lot of positive impact, but perhaps it is the fate of all projects, or perhaps it is the effect of politics, that in the 1990s, only the stakeholders in Gothenburg remembered their original aims and project-based results.

It actually took until the 1990s for things to start developing in a much broader dimension (Longworth, 1999). Longworth labelled this period as the age of innocence – when researchers recognised that something was afoot but not quite what it was. Two conferences took place in the first half of the decade to gear up the initiative, both of them helping to push back the limits of knowledge and action. The Gothenburg gathering in 1992, also sponsored by the OECD, was a follow-up event to succeed the Educating Cities project. It thus initiated the international association of educating cities, which is currently based in Barcelona and has a membership of more than 370 cities worldwide.

The Rome conference was proposed and organised by the European Lifelong Learning Initiative (ELLI) and the American Council for Education in 1996 and this in turn generated the World Initiative on Lifelong Learning (WILL). Today both ELLI and WILL no longer exist, but in the 1990s they directly promoted the advancement of learning city knowledge. ELLI offered guidance for developing some of the early charters for learning regions – charters that demonstrated the commitment of a city-region to improving learning opportunities and methodologies for all its inhabitants.

This set the stage for a wider dialogue on promoting the local culture of learning. Cities as far apart as Adelaide in Australia, Halifax in Canada, Espoo in Finland, and Dublin in Ireland applied this charter formula and exploited it for their own goals to develop lifelong learning in their communities and neighbourhood regions.

Hitting a peak in the middle of the decade with the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996, it was taken very seriously by ELLI and relatively many universities (there was a funding initiative and programme connected to it), yet its value was unfortunately forgotten by many of the organisations that matter – cities and regions, schools, business and industry, and most people in the newly established European Union. In spite of this, there is no doubt that the cornerstones of today's work on learning cities and regions are based in the early work on adult and lifelong learning that was given an impetus by the European Year of Lifelong Learning.

A huge number of quality initiatives was either marginalised or ignored, and the process lingered on to the age of experimentation in the late 1990s when National Learning City networks began to appear, first in the United Kingdom and later in Finland and Sweden. Therefore, the North European approach very much signalled “the centre of gravity” for lifelong learning and learning city focuses (Longworth, 1999).

In this new age of experimentation, Learning City-Region projects began to receive financial support and one of them, “Towards a European Learning Society” (TELS), delivered what it called a Learning Cities Audit Tool and analysed the performance of 80 European

municipalities (Longworth, 2001). Unsurprisingly, it found that the words “Learning City and Learning Region” were almost unknown; indeed, in more than two thirds of those 80 cities they were non-existent. At this time several conferences and learning city launches in places like Liverpool, Espoo, Edinburgh, Glasgow and many others were taking place. Learning Festivals celebrated the joy of learning in Glasgow, Scotland and Sapporo, Japan.

As Europe was approaching the new millennium, the age of advancement was accelerated mainly by the European Commission’s (EC) Lisbon agenda, which put lifelong learning at the forefront of European policy. The development of learning cities and regions was one of the key strategies of this policy – and so the European policy paper on the local and regional dimension of lifelong learning was published in 2002. This important document was built on the results of TELS and written by Norman Longworth. The document clearly stated that “to promote a culture of learning across Europe, there is a need to develop learning communities, cities and regions and to establish local multifunctional learning centres” (EC, 2002, p. 6).

The OECD (2000a) also geared up the process in 2001 with its learning regions project in 5 European regions – Jena in Germany, Oresund in Sweden and Denmark, Vienne in France, Kent in the UK, and Andalusia in Spain. Among its findings were the perhaps surprising statement that secondary education appears to be the most important for regional development and the more predictable one that there is a need to encourage creativity at all levels of education. And that’s a theme that crops up time and time again in learning region folklore – creativity, innovation, and vision at all levels of education (Longworth, 2001).

Despite the fact that many cities and regions are still well behind the mark, in the new millennium the movement to create learning cities and regions threatened to become an avalanche; to provide a couple of examples among many, Germany established around 76 learning regions as part of the Lisbon Process, while every city, town, and municipality in Victoria, Australia became a learning entity (Longworth & Osborne, 2010). Moreover, the Chinese government decreed that every large city in China should become a learning city by 2010 and beyond. The term “Ideopolis” was born, described below by Tom Cannon and his collaborators:

A City or Region whose economy is driven by the creative search for, and the application of, new ideas, thinking and knowledge, and which is firmly rooted to the creative transfer of ideas, to opportunities, to innovation, and eventually to production. (Cannon, Nathan, & Westwood, 2003, p. 7)

There are those words again – creative, innovation, new ideas and thinking. These initiatives launched researchers into what might be called the age of understanding – and many of them finally thought they got it – knew, or thought they knew, what being a learning region entails and at the same time the number of European projects increased. From

every part of the Commission – Learning Cities and Regions was included in the Framework research programmes and a lifelong learning element had to be included in the vast majority of the Commission’s Social Fund and Socrates calls (EC, 2002). And yet the OECD would have you believe that all regions seek to sustain economic activity through various combinations of lifelong learning, innovation, and creative uses of information and communication technologies (OECD, 2000b).

### **Bridging Learning and the Learning Economy**

In order to promote an understanding of the concept of learning cities and learning regions, it is worth indicating that there are four major different impacts on the idea itself. The first impact on the reconceptualisation of learning and learning economy/learning organisation can be traced to what now must be seen as a seminal paper by Lundvall and Johnson (1994) on the *learning economy*. Its approach to different types of learning and the difference between codified and tacit learning is well articulated – something not new to those in the fields of education and adult learning. Of special interest in this paper by Lundvall and Johnson (1994) are the explicit connections made to economy.

While *the role of learning in production and work is not new*, generally it was largely “assumed” and occurred invisibly (Razavi, 1997). What Lundvall and Johnson (1994) as well as others (Edquist, 1997; OECD, 2000) have identified and stressed is that in the newly emerging knowledge economy *learning is now a fundamental process and resource*.

A second impact on learning cities and learning regions derives from *the application of learning within and across organisations* (Senge, 1990). Economic geographers have also emphasized that what forms *the transfer and sharing of knowledge and ideas across informal networks within industry clusters* (sometimes referred to as collective learning) *seems to be a critical aspect of creativity and innovation* (Keeble, Lawson, Moore, & Wilkinson, 1999).

Since innovation is a basic element in the knowledge economy, ways to promote, support, and enhance innovation are important (Edquist, 1997). As for *case studies of technopoles and industrial complexes in Europe* (Cooke & Morgan, 1998), the UK, the USA and Canada (Wolfe & Gertler, 2001), there is growing evidence and awareness that *learning is the fundamental process at work in the new knowledge economy*. Far from a presumed and hidden force, it still needs to be made explicit, strengthened and backed up.

Apart from matching clusters and communities of practice, *the work of economic geographers signalled* a third important aspect of the conceptualisation of learning cities and learning regions – *the spatial context*. Florida (1995) established the idea of learning regions and others (Boekema, Morgan, Bakkers, & Rutten, 2000) described it as the basis of *regional innovation systems*. A very special idea was framed here – that in particular local learning, which was fostered and supported through *good learning infrastructure* (i.e. a regional innovation system), *enabled the locality to compete in a global economy*. This recognition of the regional scale provides *an important link to local economic*

*development and the importance of learning, social capital and human capital in community development.* By setting this link, it is open to move beyond a potentially narrowly defined regional innovation system which only focuses on business and industry *to take a wider community-as-a-whole approach where learning and learning processes can increasingly be the vehicle for equipping and empowering whole communities* (Amin & Thrift, 1999). Allison and Keane (2001) have broadened the spheres of activities and influence for learning *to underline a learning communities approach to local economic development.* In this approach *an explicit link between learning initiatives, partnerships and governance, social capital, and building local capacity together with capabilities and economic prosperity* is developed.

Parallel to this special approach to local economic development is the work of scholars in the field of education research. Tooke (2000), for example, argues that the broader value of learning has been recognised by those who work in and focus on education, lifelong learning, adult, and community education. Obviously, this scholarly tradition brings in *a timely and useful critique to the concept of learning regions provoking an effort to embrace wider social and community development issues.*

The TELS Project (Longworth, 1999) and the UK Learning Towns Project (Yarnit, 2000) presented *four critical objectives for learning and learning initiatives which encompass (i) economic prosperity, (ii) social inclusion, (iii) sustainability, and (iv) governance.*

These objectives resemble the most frequently indicated ones in local economic development strategies. It is the interconnection of these *different dimensions of 'learning' which result in a framework for a whole-of-community approach to learning cities, learning regions* to underline the economic and social life of communities in the global economy.

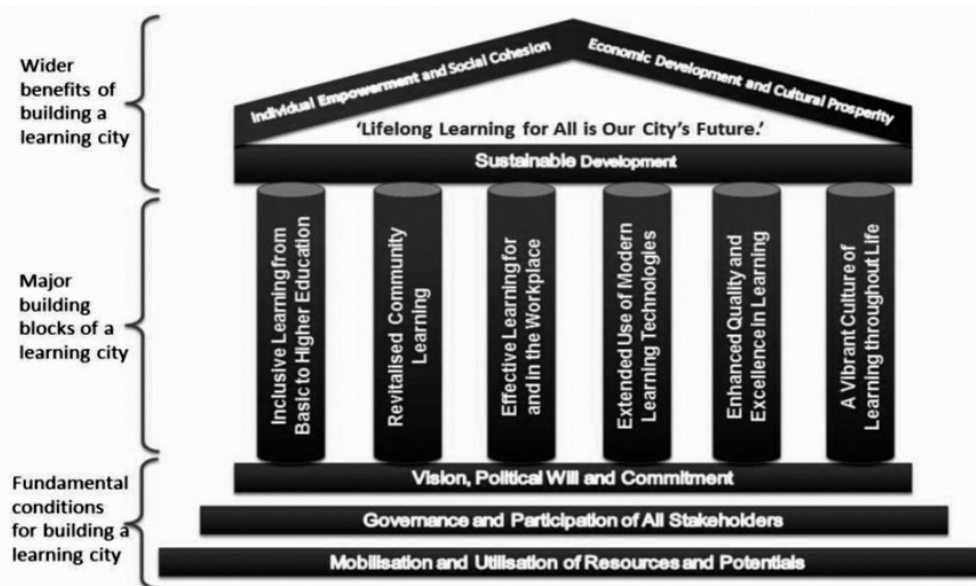
In this *broader conceptualisation*, the scope of actions and *value of learning goes well beyond a limited definition of industry clusters and issues of competitiveness or innovation* (as important as these are). Like the flow of learning initiatives described by Yarnit (2000), Longworth (1999), Longworth and Franson (2001), Allison and Keane (2001) and others, learning makes its way through/in the community in different manners.

## **UNESCO'S GLOBAL LEARNING CITY INITIATIVE**

Almost ten years after the OECD's learning regions project, UNESCO, another inter-governmental organisation (IGO), initiated a new plan to realise a global learning city network based on the fact that more than a thousand cities in the world had developed into or were building Learning/Educating Cities. This obviously shows that the building of cities which put learning at the forefront of their policies and strategies has become a significant world-wide phenomenon. Cities rarely work in isolation and practical examples have reflected that those cities that are members of a dynamic network of local authorities at national, regional and international levels, have accelerated their growth and competitiveness as learning cities.

There are also many cities still unaware or uncertain of the benefits that a truly global network of learning cities can bring to the development of lifelong learning and the learning society. For these reasons and more this initiative is timely. As UNESCO's centre of excellence for promoting lifelong learning, and in response to the call of Member States to adopt a more pragmatic and instrumental approach to building a learning society, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) has recently proposed the establishment of the UNESCO Global Learning Cities Network (UNESCO GLCN) to enhance and accelerate the practice of lifelong learning in the world's conurbations (UIL, 2019c).

Figure 1: The Framework of the UNESCO Global Learning City Index



Source: UIL, 2015, p. 11.

The overall aim of the establishment of the UNESCO GLCN has been to create and develop a global platform in order to mobilise cities and demonstrate how to use their resources effectively in every sector to develop and enrich all their human potential for fostering lifelong personal growth, for developing equality and social justice, for maintaining harmonious social cohesion, and for creating sustainable prosperity. The UNESCO GLCN is intended to be a timely and innovative initiative to offer appropriate means by which cities can themselves develop, according to Figure 1, into learning cities and create a better environment for their citizens (UNESCO, 2013).

Based on the UNESCO guidelines and key features of learning cities, the first UNESCO co-ordinated learning cities gathered in Beijing in the autumn of 2013 during the first UNESCO International Conference of Learning Cities. It was there that the representatives of Cork reflected that they would work to become a Global Learning City based on

their achievement of several goals that had been formulated in association with PASCAL International Observatory, a global think-tank group on learning cities (UIL, 2014; PASCAL Observatory, 2019).

It was also the project-based partnership with PASCAL which moved the University of Pécs to join the global survey of UNESCO UIL on learning cities in 2013 (UIL, 2015) and enabled the City of Pécs to initiate further collaborative actions with UIL.

## **ON BECOMING GLOBAL LEARNING CITIES: THE ROUTES OF PÉCS AND CORK COMPARED**

While we try to underline here that learning cities and regions should be included into comparative adult education research, our explanation comes from the reality that learning cities today demonstrate a social, political, and economic alliance in order to balance diverse needs through learning that may bring about and support the development of open and inclusive societies in contrast with closed and exclusive communities.

It must be clarified that the selection of Pécs and Cork is supported by several similar factors. A special aspect is that both cities were European Capitals of Culture, which generated a profound community focus towards learning communities. Another significant issue to be recognised as a similarity is the relationship between the two cities and their universities with PASCAL International Observatory and its networks. Although Cork has mainly been devoted to PASCAL's so-called "EccoWell" programme and initiated its model accordingly, Pécs joined PASCAL's LCN programme (PASCAL's Learning Cities Networks) and its culture oriented platform of "Harnessing Cultural Policies in Building Sustainable Learning Cities"<sup>1</sup>. A third composite source is the link to universities and university lifelong learning. Both University College Cork and the University of Pécs, as European Universities Continuing Education Network (eucen) members, have been strongly committed to the social responsibility of higher education and have consequently been engaged in the development of learning cities.

In this respect, the main purpose of this analysis is to look into some particular aspects of the development of Cork and Pécs as learning cities and, more precisely, to highlight some similarities and differences around which reasons can be found for comparative studies in adult learning and education.

This paper does not have direct data analysis at the core of its focus, but it tries to assess the impact of policy guided system development in adult learning and education in the context of learning cities and learning communities. This approach is mainly embedded into the reality of the UNESCO dimension of global learning cities and their connection to sustainability and quality concerns. Another aspect of this analysis is how learning cities provide an effective model for integrating different forms of learning with various focuses on community engagement at equitable and sustainable levels.

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1 See: <http://lcn.pascalobservatory.org/>.



## **The Pécs Learning City-Region Forum: Combining Global Initiatives with Community Development**

The University of Pécs has always played a key role in the development of the Learning City model in Pécs, Hungary. It started in 2003 when the University, a member of eucen since 1999, joined PASCAL International Observatory and some of its key EU-funded Erasmus and Grundtvig projects based on the development of learning city-regions across Europe. These former projects, for example, LILARA (Learning in Local and Regional Authorities), PENR3L (PASCAL University Network of Regions of Lifelong Learning), and Grundtvig R3L+, accelerated our partnership with the City of Pécs and its local authority together with several other distinguished stakeholders in education, training, and culture (PASCAL Observatory, 2019). These former PASCAL projects, together with the special session of the Commission of Education (EDUC) Committee of the Regions in 2006 and the 2007 PASCAL Conference in Pécs, laid the groundwork for further platform building amongst the relevant bodies engaged in effective knowledge transfer lifelong learning activities.

The Pécs Learning City-Region Forum was formally grounded in 2010 amongst thirteen different institutions of education, training and culture, together with the local and regional authorities of Pécs and Baranya County and that of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Based on a decade-old international project-based partnership that dealt with Learning City-Region innovations in association with PASCAL and UIL, the University of Pécs and its Faculty of Adult Education and HRD re-initiated the establishment of the Pécs Learning City-Region Forum in 2013 to develop a direct tool in certain areas of pedagogical/andragogical work targeting training trainers, educators, and facilitators of learning. The project was incorporated into the project of the University of Pécs, financed by the Hungarian Government's Social Renewal Operative Programme (TÁMOP 4.1.2.B – Developing Teachers-Educators/*Pedagógusfejlesztés*), focusing on the development of teachers.

Its so-called K4 project's sub-group decided to develop structural models for collecting and sharing knowledge and experience among teachers, trainers, mentors, and facilitators engaged in the promotion of quality learning and skills-development in formal, non-formal, and informal settings. The Pécs Learning City-Region Forum started its activities in the autumn of 2014 in three major fields by accelerating partnerships and dialogues (Németh, 2015):

- *the Atypical/Non-Formal Learning platform* tries to help cultural organisers, curators, managers be more successful with their educational programmes organised for adults and also for school-teachers engaged in the development of cultural programmes for children. Such a collaborative frame involves more than 8 organisations/institutions and their representatives in order to identify innovative learning methods, tools, and methodologies with atypical contexts.

- *the School and Environment platform* supports dialogue amongst professionals developing specific environment-oriented programmes for local youth and their parents so as to become Nature-friendly, and conscious in protecting their environment. Around nine member organisations/institutions work actively in the Forum through delegates, professional experts, by providing a platform-based exchange of ideas on bringing school pupils and their families closer to the environment and nurture environmentally-friendly, green-thinking actions and change-management, with attention to interdisciplinary thinking and human behaviour.
- *the Inclusion and Handicapped Situations platform* teachers engage in collaborative actions, providing dialogue to understand problems that emerge in working with young children with learning difficulties, e.g. autism. This platform supports our urban community of schools in addressing the problems caused by early school leaving and matters of adult basic education in the neglected area of second chance schooling.

The three dimensions of the Forum's platforms have enabled us to recognise *some key barriers to collecting and sharing good practices* on particular development works of partner organisations and institutions, which are:

- low levels of culture in mutual partnerships and collaborative actions to share experiences and to develop professional skills and the competence of educators/trainers, and facilitators;
- limited time available for educators/trainers, and facilitators to develop skills and share knowledge and experience;
- meagre resources that constrain participation in the Forum's programmes and, at the same time, a heavy workload dominating the majority of working time.

The Learning City-Region Forum has identified some potential issues which may accelerate the development of our learning city-region model. The aspects of Pécs' progress as a learning city listed below were highlighted in the dialogue among partners of the Forum to develop festivals and other related actions:

- a growing interest among decision-makers and stakeholders to develop and maintain new and effective ways and methods for useful and problem-based knowledge transfer between institutions/organisations in the school sector, labour market, cultural organisations, institutions, and other respected informal learning spaces and environments;
- the European funds available through the European Social Fund for collaborative actions among educational, cultural, and environmental organisations to increase participation and provide counselling for better performance in learning;
- the need for a Common Identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to learning city-region development;
- the necessary improvement of learning conditions and collaborative spaces for young people with learning difficulties through inclusive learning environments.

On the one hand, the Pécs Learning City-Region Forum has renewed its membership in PASCAL International Observatory's Learning Cities Networks (LCN), more precisely, in the group called "Harnessing Cultural Policies in Building Sustainable Learning

Cities” in order to continue its ties to this international platform which was formally established in 2007 when Pécs hosted PASCAL’s annual international conference on learning city-regions (Németh, 2016a).

On the other hand, the University of Pécs initiated the realisation of close ties to UNESCO’s Global Network of Learning Cities in 2016 so as to prepare for the Global Learning City Award of UNESCO which may help in further developing collaborative actions amongst key providers of lifelong learning in and around the city of Pécs.

In this regard, the University of Pécs and the local authority/municipality of Pécs decided to launch a campaign to use the Learning City-Region Forum to establish an annual Learning Festival where both the concept and the three areas of action of the Forum can be multiplied into a real learning community of around seventy institutions and organisations under the same umbrella movement.

### **The Making and Progression of Learning Festivals in Pécs**

The Learning City Programme of Pécs set up its first Learning Festival in 2017 and established a set of three thematic topics in order to provide flexible platforms which would include each and every learning provider with their particular programmes based on the participation of local citizens from school-age to retired members of the community.

The three topics were set in order to represent a broad range of interests and, simultaneously, to incorporate different interests channelled into representative topics and signal both global and local focuses with popular calls. Those 2017 learning city topics were (UIL, 2019b): (1) Culture and Arts, (2) Environment, Green Pécs and (3) Knowledge Transfer and Skills Development.

These topics generated growing participation since more than seventy organisations and institutions got involved in the one hundred and thirty programmes of the first Learning Festival on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> September 2017. One can argue about whether it was a good decision and direction to have the House of Civic Communities take a central role in the organisation of the Learning Festival, but having evaluated the impact of the first Learning Festival, we can conclude that the learning community of Pécs took a big step towards getting used to the formation of the Learning City model and its flagship initiative called the Pécs Learning Festival. This focus cemented a bottom-up approach based on trust and partnership, but the initiative could not avoid a lack of funding and limited political attention, even though the City of Pécs received the Global Learning City Award on 18th September at the 3<sup>rd</sup> UNESCO International Conference on Learning Cities (Németh, 2016b).

The organisers of the Learning Festival had collected public proposals for festival topics, and it was a great achievement that participating platforms of learning providers came to a consensus to provide three authentic topics of lifelong learning which definitely meet the characteristics of Pécs as a city of culture, where high culture is influenced by multicultural, multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multi-religious dimensions. This particular focus was highlighted in the GNLC report on Pécs as a Global Learning City and incorporated

into the publication of UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning as well as its website (UIL, 2019b).

According to the key features of learning cities, the Learning City Programme of Pécs and its Learning Festival has emphasized, from its beginning, the connection and partnership building with local and regional businesses, corporations, and other market-led groups like the local Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UIL, 2015). This approach and special attention was carried through the organisation process of the first Learning Festival in 2017 to initiate and promote the particular angle of business- and economy-driven narratives, understanding the benefits of learning and of skills development. Companies like the local forestry group, the local public bus transportation corporation, and the local powerplant joined the festival with its programmes and learning models, like environmental learning in the forest/woods, learning community skills on buses, and learning about the new dimensions of energy supply for residential and business areas (Németh, 2016c).

A necessary conclusion is that the initiation of the Learning Festival resulted in moving the notion of learning away from negative meanings and contexts; moreover, it helped increase participation, address the growing needs of community learning, intergenerational collaboration, and the inclusion of depressed, underdeveloped districts of the city.

Those three topics helped to move Pécs in the direction of a smart and creative city with a culture-based orientation (Németh, 2016c).

Planning for the second Learning Festival of Pécs began in February 2018 in association with more than seventy organisations and institutions which claimed that they would continue with their active engagement and participation in the festival and its programme for the second time. Three topics were decided on to support the overall theme of *Experimental Learning* (UIL, 2019b): (1) Environmentally Conscious? Sustainable Environment in and Around Pécs; (2) Place and Values – Cultural Heritage of Pécs; and (3) Is It Easier to do Things Together? Intergenerational Learnings and Partnerships for Skills Development.

A great number of people worked on the planning and development of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Learning Festival of Pécs, which took place from 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2018 and brought together several communities with activities ranging from kindergarten-based harvest-festival programmes to the special learning activities of senior citizens and their special Senior Academy run with the support and organisational assistance of the University of Pécs and its Institute for Human Development and Cultural Studies. The UNESCO Global Learning City Award generated attention, respect, and equitable status to the Learning Festival amongst other culture-based festivals in the City of Pécs.

In accordance with this progress, a special Learning City Conference was organised for 20<sup>th</sup> September 2018 with several participants to discuss the topic of “Learning Cities and Culture Working Together” in three strands (UIL, 2019b):

- The Impact of Heritage, Values and Culture in Learning Cities and Regions;
- Smart and Learning Cities, Technological Innovations and System Developments;
- Learning Cities to Promote Intergenerational Learning.

These three strands provided a good opportunity to examine the innovative potential of the Learning City initiative and some particular perspectives of development and of challenges to tackle by giving more attention to the needs of stakeholders and of individuals, local citizens, regardless of age. Pécs could position its Learning City Programme well with the support of the University of Pécs to provide research and innovation to support this valuable initiative and, consequently, the festival concept became recognised through those many collaborative actions based on the Learning City brand by 2018.

More than seventy participating organisations and institutions carried out one-hundred and twenty programmes and involved a big part of the lifelong learners in the city centre of Pécs in their colourful programme and interactive, mostly intergenerational events, lectures, presentations, games, concerts, dialogues, platform talks, etc., through which learning was again in a position where it was able to demonstrate joy, entertainment, community building, access, inclusion, care, and solidarity. One example of this was a little roundtable with short presentations on the “Routes of Learning” with special attention to drama games and motivation for learning, learning as a source of happiness, early childhood integral development, inclusive pedagogy, a focus on “A City to Touch”, and the Pygmalion effect and its relation to learning (Szederkényi & Németh, 2018).

We have to recognise and pay tribute to the House of Civic Communities for co-ordinating and managing most of the Learning Festival related programmes for those two days of action. In this regard, the House became the engine and real headquarters of the Learning Festival in Pécs and began preparing for a 3<sup>rd</sup> Learning Festival in September 2019.

### **Cork Learning City: A Community-Focused Development Model**

It was the Cork Learning City Forum and its wide range of stakeholders which established the Cork Learning Festival in 2004. This programme steadily grew into an annual week-long festival with around five-hundred activities offered by different types of providers. Compared to the Pécs Learning City-Region Forum and its Learning Festival, the scale of participation is substantially higher, and the project has brought together both local innovations practices and engagement with global networks of cities.

The development of Cork Learning City is very much based on a special learning environment, which represent four circles of learning embedded into a community model. This model reflects a community with strong local resonance and global reach as part of the UNESCO Learning Cities network and the PASCAL International Exchange (PIE). The circles of the learning environment demonstrate certain dimensions of a learning city which overlap with each other, yet signal some specific aspects at the same time. They are the Cork Learning Festival, the UNESCO Learning City Award and Growing Lifelong Learning in Cork, Learning Neighbourhoods as a pilot project of UNESCO in

partnerships with PIE, and finally, EcCoWell, which is aimed at environmental, economic, health, well-being, and lifelong learning in order to reach for good societies (Ó Tuama, 2016; UIL, 2019a).

The Lifelong Learning Festival of Cork has got deep community roots and has been devoted to participatory actions with intercultural and intergenerational aspirations. In this respect adult and lifelong learning play an important role in shaping its programmes and depend on the focus to increase participation in events, gatherings, and local discoveries by collecting and sharing valuable knowledge and experience amongst the members of the community based on learning. Moreover, the festival connects ten Community Education Networks which were established following the 2000 governmental paper called *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* (Department of Education and Science, 2000). These networks offer actions and programmes as parts of the festival and have a special approach to certain specific groups in the community, for example, disadvantaged groups. Distinguished stakeholder groups play an important role in the planning and achievement of their programmes.

It must be added here that various forms and ways of communication are regularly used to capture the attention of different kinds of people: not only modern and electronic communication but traditional posters and brochures are also used to attract potential visitors and participants. One has to point out that there is significant free citizen engagement in the festival based on the principles of equality and inclusion so as to provide an opportunity to participate in learning (Neylon & Barrett, 2013; PASCAL Observatory Conference on Cities Learning Together and Regions in Hong Kong, 2013). In this regard, inclusiveness, free entry and open access to all are ongoing themes of the festival (Keane, Lane, Neylon, & Osborne, 2013).

The UNESCO Learning City initiative has also played a significant role in the achievements of Cork Learning City. Both the establishment of the Cork Learning City Forum and the initiation of the Lifelong Learning Festival provided significant forces to realising the vision of people behind the original plans to make Cork a learning city and community. The attention of PASCAL International Observatory towards learning city developments and innovative approaches made PASCAL want to get Cork involved in its network.

That step brought Cork closer to international partnerships which soon accelerated the engagement with UNESCO's agenda on learning cities in 2012. The example of Cork also reflects outstanding partnerships with wide stakeholder groups so as to engage them with the mission and goals of the project. The Learning Neighbourhoods initiative signalled a serious focus on local people, especially concentrating on the needs of city districts and people living in those municipal areas of Cork with specific social, economic, and cultural conditions and aspirations (Ó Tuama, 2016).

There have been several impacts and challenges to the Cork Learning City initiative and project. But the collective action of the city communities has strengthened the alliances between the participants and brought higher level institutions into contact with marginalised groups. UNESCO interest may also help renew the commitment of politicians and

stakeholders to the initiative, for example, the University of Cork, which has a strong concern both from the perspective of research and from the perspective of development as part of university lifelong learning.

In this regard, Cork may provide a good lesson for Pécs to expand initiatives into a wider public project and movement: start small and build up systematically, keep participation voluntary, ask all your participants to publicize their events to establish special ownership and sense of belonging to the programmes and networking. Make sure that the kinds of learning showcased are as broad as possible, do not restrict participation to the state sector, publicly recognise and thank all those who organise events and, finally, never forget that it is a festival – fun and celebration are a powerful means of changing attitudes to learning (Neylon, 2016).

### **Reasons Behind the Similarities and Differences in the Two Cases**

We have been able to recognise that there are some similarities and differences in the evolution and the learning city models of Pécs and Cork. The identification of those similarities and differences will help us to understand the scale and the scope of each of the two learning city models we have compared upon their grounding drivers, development, composite grounding forces, vision, and the central direction of actions/topics. It is also necessary to consider the economic and social realities of the two models.

Pécs and Cork are similar in that neither is a capital city. They were both European Capitals of Culture during the Lisbon decade, Cork at the beginning and Pécs right at the very end.

Pécs and Cork have both made use of the particular values of their communities, traditions and cultural activities, institutions and other respected formations so as to reconceptualise their visions and mission through learning.

Pécs and Cork have built on the voluntary work and participation of their citizens to celebrate learning through a Learning Festival. Cork, however, has already organised several festivals on the basis of its strong community and political commitment and participation, while Pécs has only organised three learning festivals so far and with the limited public attention of between one and one thousand five hundred people.

Both Pécs and Cork have opened up to international partnerships and networking in learning city-region developments and innovations through PASCAL Observatory, but Cork joined the PIE network and Pécs was invited to the LCN platform and its cultural network of PASCAL. Both Pécs and Cork have focused dominantly upon the participatory aspect of learning city innovations and thus favoured the involvement of adult and lifelong learners in their programmes and events. This particular participatory and community focus has shifted Cork and Pécs more towards UNESCO's balanced approach on learning cities, towards sustainability instead of the OECD's reductionist focus on smart cities and learning economies.

Finally, both Pécs and Cork have made use of their former cultural capital status to aspire to a Learning City title and, consequently, to apply for being selected as a UNESCO Global Learning City and potentially be recognised with a special *Global Learning City Award*.

Based in its larger scale of inhabitants, Cork has got a rather well-developed and balanced structure of adult education institutions and associations in place, while adult learning and education in Pécs has got a deformed structure, mainly focusing on VET and the labour market with state monopolies. Cultural and community institutions and organisations, in this respect, have special roles and functions to provide spaces for atypical forms of lifelong and lifewide learning.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It is obvious that learning cities and regions can be investigated as frameworks and special structures that provide adult learning and education on the one hand, and that incorporate informal learning of adults and/or intergenerational/tandem learning on the other.

This paper tried to emphasize that researchers in adult and lifelong learning have always been close or even active participants of this initiative in many places in Europe and other continents. Moreover, UNESCO connected adult and lifelong learning to learning city developments in order to help increase participation in learning and in community development or both.

This short analysis helps us to understand how different scales of resources, approaches and political attention will result in different limits to the growth of the learning city model. However, it also underlines the argument that learning city developments are mainly influenced by the approach and consideration of the initiating bodies who bring their views and values into the process to form the ways and structures of collaborative action in community organisations. At the same time, we could only compare those formative aspects that are reflected in the structures, goals, participating bodies, international relations, and embeddedness of the two global learning cities.

In this measure, university lifelong learning has also been reflected on as the two higher education institutions of Cork and Pécs have made use of their own project-based experiences, having positioned themselves in line with international platforms like PASCAL International Observatory, eucen, ASEM Lifelong Learning HUB, and UIL GNLC. In a reverse angle, the impact of these international platforms has also emphasized the partnership-based progress of stakeholders in the framework of the learning city and learning city networks where cities can learn from each other while also openly demonstrating their local-regional values and experiences in learning, community building, and skills development both in economic and social terms.

Consequently, we propose that further developments are needed in this frame through the concentrated actions of comparative studies. This focus, on the one hand, is currently embedded into the UN Agenda 2030 discourse on SDGs, especially into dimensions of SDG11 on Learning Cities. On the other, it is also present in the new UNESCO Handbook for Lifelong Learning: Policy and Practice, to be published in spring 2020, with a separate chapter on learning cities referring to implementation at the local level. It may



help governments make use of this concept and demonstrate that in lifelong learning and education no one is left behind!

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