

Chapter 5

Lifelong Learning for All: Our City's Future

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Abstract In this chapter, we will discuss the need to re-examine the traditional education system, so as to develop inclusive and sustainable education systems. This reflects the need to develop more complex skills and competences that allow individuals to participate in the economic, social and cultural environment, allowing them to remain in their places and play a positive role in their personal and societal development, as well as the development of their cities. It will conclude with examining UNESCO's role in supporting cities through the Key Features of Learning Cities, in empowering individuals and promoting social cohesion, and in enhancing economic development and cultural prosperity.

Introduction

Urbanization is increasing rapidly, particularly in developing countries. It is expected that by 2050, 70% of the world's population will live in cities (United Nations 2014, p. 1), and that 94% of people who move to cities in the next decades will come from developing countries (Schwab 2014). On the one hand, therefore, cities are sites of enormous potential; as the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, pointed out at the first International Conference on Learning Cities, 'cities are our greatest source of growth, innovation and living together' (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2014: 51). On the other hand, however, urbanization presents us with an unprecedented set of challenges. Cities are affected by, and in some instances contribute to, rising inequalities in opportunities, wealth, power, gender and health. Furthermore, rapid urbanization inevitably increases the gap between cities and small towns, villages and rural areas. Cities are responsible for most of the world's energy consumption and carbon emissions, but they also often

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bear the brunt of global challenges such as population ageing, conflict, violence, environmental degradation and the devastating effects of climate change.

As cities expand, municipal governments are under increasing pressure to find solutions to such challenges. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted at the 2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Summit as an action plan for people, the planet and prosperity, emphasizes the critical role that cities will play in tackling global challenges. Furthermore, the eleventh Sustainable Development Goal centres on improving urban life, pledging to ‘make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’ (United Nations 2015c). To meet this goal, it is imperative that cities develop adequate responses to the learning needs of the world’s fast-growing urban communities. This will entail implementing policies and plans that enable citizens to acquire the skills and competences they need to contribute to economic, social, cultural and environmental development.

This chapter examines how cities are drawing on the power of lifelong learning to build inclusive, sustainable, creative and entrepreneurial societies that promote the health, well-being, prosperity and full participation of their citizens. The chapter begins by briefly summarizing the evolution of lifelong learning as a ‘new master narrative’ in education policy. It then outlines the development of the learning city concept, highlighting the important role played by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in the evolution of learning cities. Among the UIL-led learning city initiatives discussed here are two major conferences (the first and second International Conferences on Learning Cities), the establishment of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities, the launch of the UNESCO Learning City Award and the publication of key documents such as the Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities, the Key Features of Learning Cities and the guidelines for Building Learning Cities. In describing these milestones, this chapter provides some noteworthy examples of cities that are using the learning city approach to empower citizens, promote social cohesion, enhance economic development and cultural prosperity and protect the environment.

Promoting Lifelong Learning for All as an Engine for Sustainable Development

As far back as 1972, UNESCO’s *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* (Faure 1972)—commonly referred to as the Faure Report—advocated lifelong education as the master concept for educational policies in both developed and developing countries. In recognizing that education was no longer the privilege of an elite or one age group only, the Faure Report marked the beginning of a period of optimism in international education policy. The Faure Report argues that education should be both universal and lifelong, thereby moving to a humanistic, rights-based and holistic view of education (Ouane 2011).

More than 20 years later, in 1996, UNESCO published a report entitled *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Delors et al. 1996). This report appeared in the same year as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's *Lifelong Learning for All* report (1996). Both documents emphasized the multiple contexts of learning and firmly linked lifelong learning to the economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges that societies and communities face (Yang and Valdés-Cotera 2011).

For UNESCO, Lifelong Learning is rooted in the integration of learning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages (children, young people, adults and the elderly, girls and boys and women and men) in all life-wide contexts (family, school, community, workplace and so on) and through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal) which together meet a wide range of learning needs and demands. Education systems which promote lifelong learning adopt a holistic and sector-wide approach involving all sub-sectors and levels to ensure the provision of learning opportunities for all individuals (UNESCO 2015, p. 7).

Today, the importance of lifelong learning as a holistic and sector-wide approach to learning is widely recognized. Indeed, some have argued that lifelong learning has become a 'new master narrative' (Ioannidou 2014: 208) in education policy, promoting a certain understanding of how education systems should be built in order to meet the challenges of the knowledge society. This recognition is no longer confined to specific countries or regions; it also informs global education plans. For example, the important role played by lifelong learning in ensuring sustainable development is clearly reflected in the fourth Sustainable Development Goal on 'Quality Education', which aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (United Nations 2015a).

Even though lifelong learning has become a global norm, it is still a major challenge for many countries to coordinate learning activities outside school and the workplace and integrate them into an education policy, as is ensuring that effective policies, strategies, systems and mechanisms are in place for a diversity of learning needs and life situations. There is, therefore, still a discrepancy in many UNESCO Member States between general advocacy on the one hand and a lack of clarity on the definition of lifelong learning on the other. This is leading to inefficient implementation of policies and strategies (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2015a).

Promoting lifelong learning entails providing a full range of learning opportunities in order to enable people, in particular disadvantaged and vulnerable people, to learn anywhere and at any time. Several UNESCO Member States have recognized that one important approach to promoting lifelong learning in people's daily lives entails linking the recognition, validation and accreditation of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning to various learning systems or national qualifications frameworks. Given the trend of globalization, urbanization and decentralization, a second approach exemplified in some Member States is the building of learning societies (villages, communities, cities and regions). With their relatively compact natures, high population densities and heavy concentration of existing

learning facilities, cities are uniquely placed to engage citizens from all sectors in lifelong learning. As the Faure Report pointed out, the city contains ‘immense educational potential—with its social and administrative structures and its cultural networks—not only because of the vitality of the exchanges that go on, but also because it constitutes a school for civic sentiment and fellow-feeling’ (Faure 1972: 162). In recent years, a growing number of cities have been developing innovative strategies that allow citizens of all ages to learn new skills and competencies, thereby transforming their cities into learning cities. Before providing concrete examples of such strategies, the following section will provide a brief overview of the development of the learning city concept.

The Development of the Learning City Concept

The modern concept of learning cities emerged in the early 1970s from the work of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on lifelong learning, which focused mainly on Europe (Yang 2012). The concept was further developed in 1990 in the First International Congress on Educating Cities, which was organized by Barcelona City Council and involved representatives of more than 140 cities worldwide (Messina and Valdés-Cotera 2013). Two years later, the Second International Congress on Educating Cities, held in Gothenburg, Sweden, presented a report entitled *City Strategies for Lifelong Learning*, which was later published by the OECD (Hirsch 1993). This report states that cities are the most important geographical entities for organizing lifelong learning. The report also showcases examples of seven cities that were in the process of becoming learning cities. Since then, the learning city concept has spread. Illustrative examples of learning city initiatives can be found in many parts of the world. Learning cities have experienced particularly dynamic development in East Asian countries (Kearns 2015).

UIL, which has a wealth of expertise on lifelong learning, has organized a series of policy dialogues on the conceptual evolution and implementation of lifelong learning. During Expo 2010 in Shanghai, China—which centred on the theme ‘Better City, Better Life’—UIL, together with the Shanghai Municipal People’s Government, the Chinese Society of Educational Development Strategy and the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO, co-organized the Shanghai International Forum on Lifelong Learning. This forum focused on translating the discourse of lifelong learning into practical guidelines for building lifelong learning systems. More than 200 participants and experts from all over the world helped develop learning concepts and practices within a lifelong learning perspective. Twenty-four presentations were collected in a volume entitled *Conceptual Evolution and Policy Developments in Lifelong Learning* (Yang and Valdés-Cotera 2011), which discussed the evolution of the concept of learning societies and learning cities, focusing on the development of learning cities in the Republic of Korea and China.

UIL continues to maintain dialogue with its extensive networks of policymakers, researchers, practitioners and civil society. This dialogue led to the organization of the first International Conference on Learning Cities (ICLC) in 2013.

The First International Conference on Learning Cities

Together with the Ministry of Education of China and Beijing Municipal Government, UNESCO co-organized the first International Conference on Learning Cities (ICLC) in Beijing in October 2013. This conference brought together 550 mayors, city education executives and experts from 102 countries, as well as representatives of UN agencies, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and multinational corporations. The conference adopted two key documents: the Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities and the Key Features of Learning Cities.

In affirming the vital importance of learning for the future of all human communities, the Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities defines a learning city as:

a city, town, village or community that effectively (1) mobilizes its resources in every sector to promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education; (2) re-vitalizes learning in families and communities; (3) facilitates learning for and in the workplace; (4) extends the use of modern learning technologies, (5) enhances quality and excellence in learning; and (6) fosters a culture of learning throughout life. In doing so, it will create and reinforce individual empowerment and social cohesion, economic and cultural prosperity and sustainable development (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2014, p. 27).

With twelve areas of focus, forty-two key features and sixty possible measurements, the Key Features of Learning Cities describe the fundamental conditions for building a learning city. The six major building blocks of a learning city depicted in Fig. 5.1 reflect the importance of encompassing all modes of learning and levels of education, of incorporating life-wide contexts and of targeting learners of all ages. This holistic approach promotes the development of education systems which respond to a range of learning needs. The *Key Features* are the result of a long consultation process which involved input from global experts in several different fields and drew upon a range of well-established conceptual frameworks and indicators for measuring social and economic development at regional and international level. As a robust alternative way of monitoring progress, the *Key Features of Learning Cities* form a comprehensive checklist of action points necessary to help stakeholders build learning cities, transform political and theoretical discourses into concrete strategies and approaches, measure progress over time and evaluate the benefits of the strategies that have been put in place.

Since the first ICLC, the practice of building learning cities has further accelerated and expanded in communities worldwide. Many cities have started to adopt the learning city approach to tackle specific challenges and put the outcome documents of the first conference into action. Moreover, as called for by the

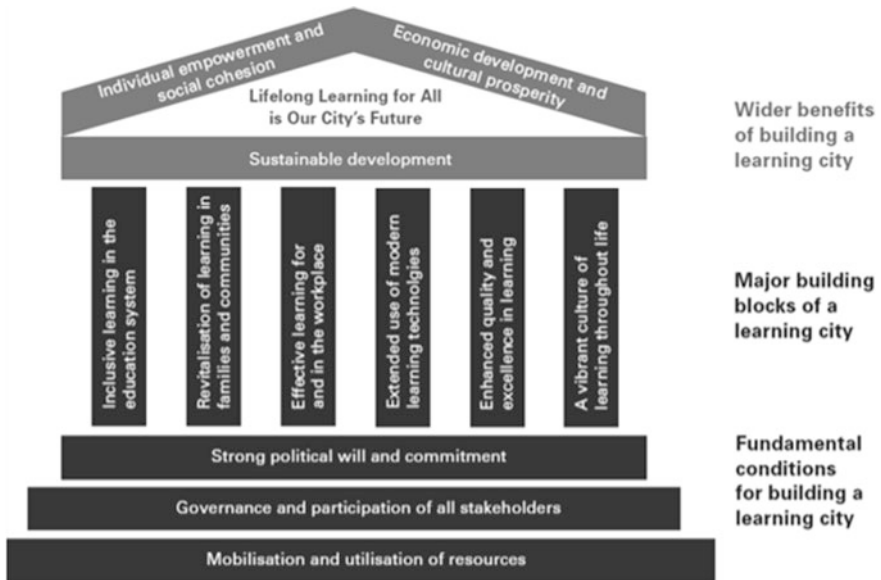


Fig. 5.1 Framework of Key Features of Learning Cities (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2014: 29)

participants of the first ICLC, UNESCO has established the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) “to support and accelerate the practice of lifelong learning in the world’s communities” (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2014: 5). The secretariat of this network, which is based in UIL, has been leading the following actions:

- facilitating and disseminating research on the enrichment of the concept of the learning city;
- developing tools and instruments for building learning cities;
- serving as a clearing house for successful practices in establishing learning cities;
- developing and providing capacity-development programmes for members and partners;
- promoting policy dialogue and peer learning among member cities; and
- advocating the importance of lifelong learning for all as an organizing principle for education policy and promoting policy reforms that support the building of learning cities (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2015b: 4).

In addition, the UNESCO GNLC secretariat has published a collection of case studies of learning cities entitled *Unlocking the Potential of Urban Communities: Case Studies of Twelve Learning Cities* (Valdés-Cotera et al. 2015). This volume showcases successful practices in building learning cities in all five UNESCO regions. The cities described in the collection are role models, not in the sense that they have completed their development towards becoming a learning city (there is

no 'finishing line' for learning cities), but because they are the first to share their experiences. The showcased cities share their motivations for building learning cities, their vision, their legislative frameworks and their implementation approaches. They provide valuable insights on specific actions and programmes, providing know-how and inspiration for aspiring learning cities all over the world. They also reflect on specific challenges tackled in the process of building a learning city.

The case studies reveal that while motivations and approaches to building a learning city may differ due to cities' very different contexts, there are some unifying factors. Most cities recognize learning and community as interacting elements of city growth and emphasize the importance of monitoring progress through the *Key Features of Learning Cities*. All cities have strong and visionary aspirations for both their cities and their citizens, and all cities are creative and pioneering in their desire to respond to a changing world with new ideas. International experts from all five UNESCO regions worked with the secretariat of the UNESCO GNLC to devise a set of guidelines for building learning cities based on insights emerging from the collection of case studies. These guidelines are described in more detail below.

Guidelines for Building Learning Cities: Cities in Action

UNESCO's guidelines for Building Learning Cities aim to provide cities with strategic approaches for building dynamic and sustainable learning cities. The guidelines consist of a set of actionable recommendations that can be referred to at every stage of the process of becoming a learning city (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2015b).

The guidelines are divided into the following six key areas of action, which should be tailored to every city's unique context: (1) developing a plan for becoming a learning city; (2) creating a coordinated structure involving all stakeholders; (3) initiating and maintaining the process with celebratory events; (4) making sure that learning is accessible to all citizens; (5) establishing a monitoring and evaluation process; and (6) ensuring sustainable funding (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2015b: 1–4). The following sections will discuss these six areas of action, drawing on concrete examples from the collection of case studies.

Develop a Plan for Becoming a Learning City

The guidelines for Building Learning Cities emphasize that 'strong political leadership and steadfast commitment should be reflected in a concrete action plan' (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2015b: 1). By taking stock of what has already been achieved and by identifying the main challenges that lie ahead, cities can develop a strategic plan and define their medium- and long-term objectives.

The Swansea Bay Entrepreneurial Learning City Region Plan is a good example of such an action plan. This plan involves city leaders and representatives of different sectors and focuses on the development of entrepreneurial capacity through lifelong learning. The ultimate aim of the plan is that by 2030, Swansea Bay City Region ‘will be a confident, ambitious and connected European city region, recognized internationally for [its] emerging knowledge and innovation economy’ (Swansea Bay City Region 2014). Swansea’s plan outlines the actions that need to be taken to harness the potential of learning to create a culture of entrepreneurship and develop a city of innovation. It is envisaged that this in turn will improve the regional economy and narrow the economic, education and skills gaps between deprived and affluent areas. Swansea Bay City Region is committed to ensuring that new opportunities are available to people from disadvantaged communities.

Swansea’s plan is very much in line with Sustainable Development Goal 8, which centres on ‘promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all’ (United Nations 2015b). It is essential that cities work towards this goal by enabling citizens to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need for the world of work and indeed for life in general. Pursuing inclusive and sustainable economic growth will help cities to tackle issues such as poverty and growing youth unemployment, and to respond effectively to developments such as mass migration, technological advances and the constantly shifting demands of the labour market.

Another sound plan for developing a learning city can be found in the city of Espoo, Finland. The Espoo Local Development Plan for Education 2020 states that Espoo aims to be a competent municipality known for its fairness, its commitment to residents and clients and its pioneering yet responsible approach. Espoo’s goal is to be a good place to live, learn, work and do business in, and to be a place where residents can have their say. Ensuring the well-being and inclusion of all its citizens is, therefore, a key objective. Providing every citizen with opportunities for lifelong learning plays an important role in achieving this objective. When drawing up the plan, the city authorities organized capacity-building workshops for various sectors and stakeholders in order to develop an understanding of what building a learning city involves. Finnish society is becoming more multicultural and diverse, which tends to be most immediately apparent in metropolitan areas. Espoo’s lifelong education services will continue to play a special role in helping newcomers settle into the city while maintaining their own cultural identity (Valdés-Cotera et al. 2015).

Create a Coordinated Structure Involving All Stakeholders

As all organizations and citizens are stakeholders in a learning city, the guidelines recommend creating ‘a structure that involves all stakeholders in building the learning city through dialogue and consensus’ (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2015b: 2). It is essential to create a learning city development committee

comprising representatives from different sectors, each of whom should have a concrete role to play. This committee should reach agreement on the principles for developing, implementing, monitoring and financing the learning city initiative.

For example, the City of Melton in Australia established the Community Learning Board (CLB) to provide a governance mechanism that gives communities and organizations a direct influence on designing and overseeing lifelong learning strategies addressing social and economic issues. Members of the CLB are appointed for four years or for the duration of a Community Learning Plan. Current members of the CLB include leaders from a wide range of sectors, including: business and industry; non-governmental organizations and not-for-profit organizations; employment services; state and independent primary and secondary schools; universities and vocational education providers; adult education; mature age learning; early learning; the health sector; disability education providers; community representatives; and the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The CLB is chaired by Melton's mayor.

One challenge that the City of Melton's CLB sought to address was the mismatch between the training opportunities offered in the city and the skills that are actually needed in the industries where jobs are available. The CLB showed entrepreneurial spirit by actively seeking out innovation, service and continuous improvement. To this end, it developed a new initiative called Building Melton Together, which takes a holistic, cross-sectoral approach in brokering relationships between a large number of stakeholders, including jobseekers, employment service providers, volume and domestic builders, building sub-contractors, education and training providers and relevant non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations. Of course, it will remain crucial for Melton to ensure that all stakeholders continue to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities in designing and implementing the learning city plan.

Initiate and Maintain the Process with Celebratory Events

The guidelines point out that 'the more people and organizations that react positively to the idea of a learning city and engage with it, the better its chances of flourishing are' (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2015b: 2). One concrete way to generate enthusiasm in implementing lifelong learning is by holding events such as learning festivals, seminars and celebratory events.

A good illustration is provided by Cork City in Ireland, which has been running the Cork Lifelong Learning Festival since 2004. This festival invites all relevant organizations to exhibit their courses, products and materials and offer hands-on activities that encourage citizens to get involved. The festival asks the media to promote and celebrate learning while twin cities are invited to participate and share their experience, knowledge, ideas and best practice. The festival involves about 500 different events accompanied by a series of seminars and discussions.

Cork's Lifelong Learning Festival has successfully generated enthusiasm and stimulated broad public engagement in building the learning city.

Another example is the Spring in the Learning City Festival in Ybycuí, a city of 21,000 inhabitants in the North of Paraguay. The festival is part of the 'Ybycuí Learns and Develops' strategy, which encourages members of the community to teach and learn together. The Spring in the Learning City festival includes a parade with floats visually depicting lifelong learning, promoting the idea that everywhere can become a learning environment. Thousands of people participate in the festival, which also promotes recycling and the conservation of the environment. Besides drawing attention to lifelong learning and the development of the learning city, such a festival strengthens residents' pride and sense of community. Both Ybycuí's Spring in the Learning City Festival and Cork's constantly growing Lifelong Learning Festival are successful examples of how a city can showcase its efforts to create a learning city. Media attention and direct contact to residents offer invaluable opportunities for the promotion of the efforts these cities make throughout the year. Furthermore, such celebratory events renew all stakeholders' interests in the learning city agenda. Ultimately, the organizations participating and supporting these joyful events also benefit as they can exhibit their courses, products and materials and offer hands-on activities that encourage all citizens to get involved.

Make Sure that Learning Is Accessible to All Citizens

The guidelines explain that 'learning must be made enjoyable, available and accessible to all citizens so that they are inspired and empowered to continue learning throughout life' (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2015b: 3). To facilitate this, a learning city must establish, promote and maintain community-based learning spaces and provide resources for learning in families and communities.

The Republic of Korea is one of the few countries in the world to have established a constitutional obligation to promote lifelong learning to all its citizens (Article 31 [5], Constitution of the Republic of Korea 1987). The national government sees building a learning city as a means of increasing citizens' quality of life, social integration and sense of community (NILE 2012). One example of a highly successful learning city initiative in the Republic of Korea is Namyangju's '1-2-3 Lifelong Learning Infrastructure' project, which is improving access to learning for citizens of all ages. As part of this project, citizens have turned unused spaces around the city into community learning spaces known as 'Learning Lighthouses'. The government of Namyangju ultimately intends to ensure that no resident is more than a ten-minute walk away from the nearest Learning Lighthouse. These community learning spaces not only make learning accessible to virtually all citizens; they also promote community, cooperation and active citizenship.

Many people in Amman, Jordan, who could not finish basic education, possess valuable knowledge and skills. However, such knowledge and skills are not always recognized. To help remedy this situation, Amman provides special support in the

form of flexible arrangements for marginalized groups. The city is also developing procedures to identify, validate and accredit the learning outcomes of non-formal learning. Amman's 'Jeera' project, a collaborative initiative between the Arab Education Forum and Greater Amman Municipality, aims to combat the marginalization of informal and non-formal learning and to encourage citizens to recognize that they all have valuable roles to play both as teachers and learners. The project focuses on Amman as a 'Learning and Convivial City', as the concepts of neighbourliness, hospitality and conviviality have a rich tradition in Arab culture and are central to Jeera's efforts to provide the citizens of Amman with positive learning experiences beyond the structures of formal education. The ultimate objectives are not just to promote lifelong learning at a community level throughout the city, but also to help promote integration and a sense of belonging in this multicultural city.

Cities such as Namyangju and Amman are making great efforts to make learning accessible to as many of their citizens as possible. By strengthening connections between formal education and training and the world of work, by supporting cross-sector cooperation, by promoting non-formal and informal learning settings and by fostering entrepreneurial skills, cities can offer all citizens—especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds—more diverse and flexible development opportunities in both their private and professional lives.

Establish a Monitoring and Evaluation Process to Ensure Learning City Progress

The guidelines emphasize the importance of continuously monitoring and evaluating progress made in building a learning city.

In 2001, Beijing began developing a set of evaluation indicators for learning districts/counties, sub-districts and townships, enterprises and schools to steer learning society development activities. This led to the publication in 2013 of the Beijing Evaluation Index, which enables city authorities to monitor the performance of the learning city. This index, which incorporates elements of the Key Features of Learning Cities but also draws upon the local context, is based on the 'Structure–Process–Product' model (Wu et al. 2014). This model has three tiers. The first tier comprises the following four indicators: (1) 'Guarantee of input and conditions', which measures structure and is comparable to the 'fundamental conditions' in the Key Features of Learning Cities; (2) 'Development of lifelong education and learning service systems' and (3) 'Development of learning communities and organizations', both of which measure process and are equivalent to the 'building blocks' in the Key Features; and (4) 'City development and management innovation', which measures the benefits of the learning city and is the counterpart of the 'wider benefits' in the Key Features. These four tier-one indicators are further broken down into eighteen tier-two indicators and seventy tier-three indicators

covering factors such as policy, legislation, media coverage, organization, management, funding, human resources, research, innovation and implementation across all levels, from preschool to education for older people, immigrants and disadvantaged groups. In 2014, the Beijing Evaluation Index was used to conduct a round of assessments on learning city developments in four districts and counties. This pilot exercise found that the evaluation index can be very useful for measuring a district or county's stage of development as well as its strengths and challenges. However, the exercise also revealed the necessity of adjusting certain indicators to local contexts. The results of the exercise were used to refine and improve the evaluation index for monitoring and evaluating the development of learning cities in Beijing.

Other cities around the world have not yet defined indicators for monitoring progress, but they are nonetheless able to report on the outcomes of specific strategies. For example, the learning city initiative has helped residents of all ages in Mexico City to become healthier, develop greater civic and environmental awareness, and be better prepared for natural disasters. Mexico City's SaludARTE programme, for instance, aims to improve the health, nutrition, personal hygiene, well-being and civic awareness of public primary school children in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Mexico City. SaludARTE has had an impact on children's lives, as an evaluation conducted by the National Institute of Public Health has demonstrated (Valdés-Cotera et al. 2015: 107). This evaluation found that the programme increased children's physical activity, as demonstrated by the fact that the amount of time they spent watching television fell by 7%. There was also a notable decrease—from 21.3 to 17%—in the levels of obesity among children in schools participating in the programme. In addition, children's dental plaque decreased by 9%, and almost 15% of the children participating in the programme acquired the habit of washing their hands before and after eating.

Evaluating the effectiveness of learning cities to solve local problems and improve social conditions is complex. However, it is the only way to assess the benefits of the strategies that have been put in place.

Ensure Sustainable Funding

One of the biggest challenges facing urban communities is securing sufficient financial resources to build and maintain the basic structure of the learning city. The guidelines state that 'in order to realize the multiple benefits of becoming and sustaining a learning city, multiple sources of sustainable funding should be secured and allocated in a fair way'.

Multistakeholder partnerships can help ensure that a learning city has sustainable funding. One good example of this approach can be found in the City of Balanga in the Philippines, where the learning city project centres on becoming a 'university town'. By replicating some of the structural features of renowned university towns around the world, Balanga aims to create an environment that encourages learning

not just among university students, but also among citizens of all ages. Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) have enabled the City Government of Balanga to implement several projects that are part of the university town master plan. The redevelopment of the Plaza Mayor to make it a public learning space, for example, was realized through investments made by the private sector that support the city's vision.

The guidelines identify a wide range of potential collaborators for PPPs, including companies, foundations, philanthropists, international partners, local and national governments and supranational organizations. Considering such partners as stakeholders in developing learning cities is crucial for maintaining their support (see also Section “[Create a Coordinated Structure Involving all Stakeholders](#)”), while celebratory events, as discussed in Section “[Initiate and Maintain the Process with Celebratory Events](#)”, present good opportunities for strengthening partnerships with stakeholders. Finally, monitoring and evaluation (see Section “[Establish a Monitoring and Evaluation Process to Ensure Learning City Progress](#)”) enable learning cities to prove that learning resources provided by stakeholders are being put to effective use.

Looking at the twelve role models discussed in *Unlocking the Potential of Urban Communities: Case Studies of Twelve Learning Cities*, it is clear that, when it comes to ensuring sustainable funding, there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all approach. While the guidelines offer some useful suggestions, such as developing cost-sharing mechanisms through PPPs, every city will find itself in a unique position.

The Second International Conference on Learning Cities

To celebrate the progress that has been made in promoting lifelong learning in cities across the world since the first International Conference on Learning Cities (ICLC) and to discuss strategic directions for sustainable learning cities, more than 650 people—including ministers, vice-ministers, mayors, vice-mayors, education executives, education experts and representatives of UN agencies, the private sector and regional, international and civil society organizations—travelled from 95 countries to gather in Mexico City for the second ICLC. The theme of the conference, which took place in September 2015, was ‘*Building Sustainable Learning Cities*’. The term ‘sustainable learning cities’ refers to the stability and vitality of the learning city itself, but also to environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability (Juceviciene 2010: 420).

The conference gave participants an opportunity to discuss ideas, share experiences and build synergies. It took place just after world leaders had met in New York to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals that will define the next fifteen years of human development. As mentioned above, learning cities have an important role to play in implementing the global Sustainable Development Agenda.

Participants shared ideas on developing innovative strategies with a focus on lifelong learning to empower citizens, improve social cohesion and equality, increase economic and cultural prosperity and protect the environment. They identified effective ways of nurturing the kind of multistakeholder partnerships that are essential for fulfilling the Sustainable Development Agenda. Discussions focused not only on how learning cities can help citizens to develop the attitudes, skills, values and knowledge to secure a sustainable future, but also on how the process of building learning cities can itself be sustained.

The UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) officially opened to membership at the conference. The UNESCO GNLC does not ask for a membership fee, and all cities willing to adopt the learning city concept are eligible to join. Some of the key benefits of becoming a member of the UNESCO GNLC include the following:

- receiving guidance and support during the process of building a learning city;
- being part of a dynamic network and strengthening the city's own partnerships and networks;
- receiving recognition for the efforts and showcasing the actions of the city; and
- being eligible for the UNESCO Learning City Award (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2015a).

One month after the conference took place in Mexico City, the secretariat of the UNESCO GNLC started receiving the first membership application forms. These forms provide basic information about the cities' profiles, motivations for adopting the learning city concept, plans for implementing lifelong learning, challenges faced and support requested. This information will enrich the network's Website, which will feature case studies illustrating how learning cities all over the world are developing.

The conference also saw the launch of the biennial UNESCO Learning City Award. The UNESCO Learning City Award is not an award of excellence, nor does it constitute an official label. Instead, its purpose is to recognize and reward outstanding efforts devoted to developing learning cities in communities around the world. It is awarded to cities that, by putting in place the building blocks of a learning city, have achieved exceptional progress in promoting lifelong learning (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2015c). The inaugural award was conferred on twelve cities that had made outstanding progress in implementing the Key Features of Learning Cities since the first conference: Melton (Australia), Sorocaba (Brazil), Beijing (China), Bahir Dar (Ethiopia), Espoo (Finland), Cork (Ireland), Amman (Jordan), Mexico City (Mexico), Ybycuí (Paraguay), Balanga (Philippines), Namyangju (Republic of Korea) and Swansea (United Kingdom).

The conference culminated in the adoption of the Mexico City Statement on Sustainable Learning Cities and the Guidelines for Building Learning Cities. The Statement identifies strategic directions for building sustainable learning cities and outlines eight action points to further the development of learning cities and to ensure lifelong learning as a driver of social, economic and environmental sustainability in cities throughout the world (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

2015d). As discussed in more detail in Section “[Establish a Monitoring and Evaluation Process to Ensure Learning City Progress](#)” above, the Guidelines are a set of actionable recommendations for becoming a learning city.

The conference also led to the development of the $3 \times 3 \times 3$ Youth Statement on Learning Cities, which was devised after the conference with the support of youth delegates. The Youth Statement defines three recognitions, three calls upon UNESCO, three encouragements for local and national governments and three commitments from the youth to help build learning cities (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning [2015e](#)).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how cities in different contexts have formed a variety of strategic approaches to developing into a learning city. These cities' specific social and economic realities provide the foundation for their approaches and shape the main 'themes' that are pursued, such as entrepreneurialism, creativity, health and inclusivity. What the cities have in common is that they all add a well-organized lifelong learning dimension to sustainability in all its aspects: social, economic, cultural and environmental.

The learning city approach is a practical, holistic and comprehensive way to implement lifelong learning in all sectors and at all levels, from families, communities and municipalities to national levels. Learning cities foster inclusive and sustainable learning systems that provide broad and flexible lifelong learning opportunities through formal and non-formal pathways. They thereby help create inclusive, sustainable, creative and entrepreneurial societies that promote the health, well-being, prosperity and civic engagement of their citizens.

This chapter also described how the rapidly growing UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities is supporting the practice of lifelong learning. Given the critical role that cities will play in tackling global challenges, the network represents a unique platform for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local level.

While learning cities are making great progress, much remains to be done. UNESCO will continue expanding the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities and synchronizing its actions with cities and partners to ensure the development of education and lifelong learning.

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