

Chapter 24

The Rise and Fall and Rise Again of Learning Cities

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Introduction

In this chapter we provide an overview of an aspect of lifelong learning implementation that has waxed and waned in importance over since the 1970s, the notion of creating learning cities and regions. It may be that this field of endeavour is about to attract international attention once again, with the impetus coming from Asia, in particular China, Korea, Vietnam and Japan, where activity now seems to be burgeoning at a time when initiatives in Europe seem with some notable exceptions haphazard and uncoordinated at EU, national and regional level. We provide a brief history of developments of within the field of learning cities and regions in Europe in recent decades and then focus on one particular project, EUROlocal, which has sought to gather and analyse the current state of development within the continent.

A Brief History of the City and Regional Learning Space

Over the past four decades, lifelong learning has increasingly become a priority for policymakers throughout Europe largely because of the demands of a more knowledge-intensive economy in which continuing learning at all levels has been

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prioritised. In this context the role of the learning region and city as a vehicle for stimulating lifelong learning has taken on greater significance. Longworth (2001) claims that a rapid change in the ‘learning economy’, for example, the explosion of information and knowledge and increasing individualisation amongst other factors, has provoked a significant movement from the paradigm of ‘education and training’ to one of ‘lifelong learning’. The emphasis now is much more on the learners themselves and how their perceptions of the importance of learning throughout life can be fostered and translated into the kind of skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to cope with deep changes in lifestyles and work demands. Such a transformation requires new approaches on the part of learning providers and a re-examination of assessment methods, ensuring that learners are not discouraged at a young age and that their personal circumstances are taken into account. This suggests a shift from a supply-side concept of education with an education offer determined by providers to the principle of continuous learning for everyone controlled at least to some extent by individuals themselves. As part of that change in emphasis, many European cities have been encouraged to develop themselves as learning cities in order to tackle the new challenges posed in the post-industrial period and faced by all countries in the developed world (see Hassink 2004; Gustavsen et al. 2007; Longworth and Osborne 2010). Similarly, there have been a number of initiatives in Europe promoted under the aegis of the *Learning Region*, most notably the R3L programme of the European Commission (2002), which states:

A learning city, town or region recognises and understands the key role of learning in the development of basic prosperity, social stability and personal fulfilment, and mobilises all its human, physical and financial resources creatively and sensitively to develop the full human potential of all its citizens. European Commission (2002, p. 11)

Similarly the definition of a learning region or city from Faris (1998) refers to:

...communities of place using lifelong learning as an organising principle and social/cultural goal as they mobilise the learning resources of all five of their community sectors, economic, civic, public, education and environmental to enhance their social, economic, and environmental conditions on a sustainable, socially inclusive basis. Faris (1998, p. 5)

As Duke et al. (2005) have observed, the concept of a learning city has been interpreted in a number of ways with the emphasis at one end of a continuum being about creating an underlying infrastructure of educational opportunity that might attract inward investment from business through to the creation of learning networks that promote and enhance social cohesion and inclusion. The terms learning region and learning city have in fact been used interchangeably throughout the period of growth in Europe and the notion of ‘learning region’ is useful in that it extends the learning city in scale and scope.¹ The literature suggests that over the last 30 years, some European cities have sought this status enthusiastically and that the rationale for wanting to become a learning city may principally be economic, social or environmental, but usually contains elements of each stimulus (Longworth and Osborne 2010).

¹ See reports from the recently completed R3L+ project funded by the European Commission at <http://www.learning-regions.net/> and within Eckert et al. (2012).

The origins and subsequent development of learning cities has been well documented. In brief, the learning city was defined geographically in the 1970s when the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) invited seven cities around the world to become an 'Educating City' (Adelaide, Edmonton, Edinburgh, Gothenburg, Kakegawa, Pittsburgh and Vienna). This status was offered on the basis that the cities concerned placed the broad concept of learning at the heart of their strategies. This idea is at the core of the objective of the learning region and city methodology, namely, that activities across a broad portfolio of services should revolve or stem from learning. The notion of using learning as a medium to foment positive change was perceived as being more effective than simply using economic levers to stimulate development. The popularity of the concept in the 1980s and 1990s reflected a tendency to emphasise the agency of both social and economic actors. In 1992, a Gothenburg conference organised by the OECD led to the formation of the International Association of Educating Cities (IAEC). Some of the values and aspirations which emerged at Gothenburg continue to have currency, not least the idea that partnerships and collaboration of interested regions and cities are essential if the ambitions of learning cities are to be realised (OECD/CERI 1992).

Subsequent developments have meant that *lifelong* learning now lies firmly at the heart of the learning city concept, emphasising the importance of learning throughout life for everyone. At a European level it has been the European Community (EC) that has taken the lead in making this link. In 1998 it initiated the TELS (Towards a European Learning Society) project, which surveyed 80 European municipalities from 14 countries by measuring their progress towards becoming 'learning cities, towns and regions' in 10 domains and 28 subdomains. TELS became the European Commission's major source of information on the local and regional dimension of lifelong learning, offering ten recommendations to governments and a further ten recommendations for embryo learning cities. As a result of TELS, seminars were held in Brussels for interested regional organisations and papers were produced. This in turn resulted in the production of a European Policy Paper on the 'Local and Regional Dimension of Lifelong Learning' (European Commission 2001a) distributed to all member states for comments. This in turn led to the European Commission's R3L pilot initiative, *European Networks to promote the local and regional dimensions of Lifelong Learning*, within the background of which is suggested that the learning region 'goes beyond its statutory duty to provide education and training... and instead creates a vibrant, participative, culturally aware and economically buoyant human environment through the provision, justification and active promotion of learning opportunities to enhance the potential of all of its citizens' (European Commission 2003, p. 11).

Already in 2000, both the Lisbon and Feira European Councils had provided impetus for the European Commission to focus on lifelong learning. The Lisbon Council set the now well-known strategic goal over the decade from 2000 to 2010, for the EU 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'. This was accompanied by a number of targets for raising employment rates across the continent, and it emphasised the importance of

lifelong learning, setting targets in various parts of the education and training system in order to create an alignment in achieving the Lisbon goals.

Regionally based lifelong learning was stressed in relation to these targets because of the substantial disparities that exist between regions in the EU (European Union). Strategies for lifelong learning would have to be tailored to the specific requirements of each region. This emphasis was included in the subsequent *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (European Commission 2000), which in turn initiated EU-wide consultation on an updated strategy for implementing lifelong learning policies. The results culminated in the European Commission's communication, *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality* (European Commission 2001b). The R3L programme was announced in 2002 as the principal way in which the European Commission would seek to develop this emerging policy priority for there to be a regional and local dimension of lifelong learning, meeting the commitment of the communication to 'support through its programmes the establishment of networks between those regions and cities with well-developed lifelong learning strategies, to facilitate the exchange of experience and good practice'.

The R3L aimed to:

- To help further develop good practice on issues relating to the 'learning region'
- To encourage a fruitful transnational sharing and exchange of this experience
- To promote the development of European networks between learning regions as a means of placing European cooperation in the lifelong learning field on a more durable and sustainable footing (European Commission 2002, p. 2)

However, despite laudable intentions, the impetus of this initiative was not sustained with most of the 17 pilot projects promoting little activity once their funding from the European Commission ended. Subsequently within the aegis of the Lifelong Learning Programme for the period 2007–2013, there have been further individual projects² concerned with learning cities and regions, the foci of which have been described by Longworth and Osborne (2010), but there has been relatively little co-ordinated action or overview of the territory in intervening years.

Initiatives have also occurred at the level of the nation state, with examples of learning city or region networks created in a number of countries including Germany, Italy and the UK. However as with R3L, evidence for the sustainability of such networks is limited (see, e.g. Hamilton and Jordan 2011; Thinesse-Demel 2010). Since the 1990s in some places, the concept of learning cities has been absorbed or mainstreamed into strategic policy and as a consequence may not necessarily be evident through labelling as such. For example, Glasgow in Scotland, which had previously strongly promoted the learning city, now argues that whilst learning is still at the core of their work driving policy and practice forward, the banner of

²These include the Learning in Local and Regional Authorities (Lilara) (see <http://pie.pascalobservatory.org/content/lilara-executive-summary>), PASCAL European Network of Lifelong Learning Regions (PENR3L) (see <http://eurolocal.info/project/penr3l-european-commission-project-establish-expertise-network-learning-regions>) and Quality Framework for Learning Regions (R3L+) (see <http://www.learning-regions.net/>) projects.

'learning regions or cities' is no longer the preferred current terminology (Hamilton and Jordan 2011). In other places, there has been a lack of sustainability of initial developments whether work initiated within individual cities and regions or through larger-scale network initiatives such as R3L (Souto-Otero and McCosham 2006).

The challenge now for regions and cities throughout Europe is how to sustain a culture of lifelong learning that exploits the potential of contributions of a range of stakeholders in a synergetic fashion to the benefit of all citizens against the backdrop of the current difficult economic circumstances that the continent faces. For Goncalves (2008) the idea of learning cities in the twenty-first century has two key pillars of equity and sustainability, thereby playing a role in ensuring active citizenship and social inclusion alongside economic development that takes into account the reality of a fragile ecosystem.

One example currently being planned is the UNESCO *Global Learning Cities Network* (GLCN), an initiative to provide a Kitemark standard by which learning cities can measure and monitor their progress. The 12 generic indicators used recognise that the concept of the learning city has moved on. Instead of being purely associated with the implementation of lifelong learning principles within the city, the perception is that sustainability issues have expanded the learning city responsibility. No longer is it simply concerned with the well-being of its own citizens, it must now attend to some of the pressing issues raised by climate change, renewable energy sources, air and water pollution and loss of biodiversity. In other words, its remit extends to the survival of the planet, a mission frequently reiterated in the recent RIO+20 summit of June 2012. The duopoly of social and economic which has been the staple of city focus for many years is now a triumvirate of social, economic and environmental, each with their own focuses. Even that is now superseded by the holism of the modern city. For example, economic growth must now be sustainable if we are to avoid the excesses that will destroy our fragile ecosystems. In addition, sustainable economic growth will not happen without the input of a lifelong learning system of education and training. Thus, the future of cities is a fusion of all three: interdependency, interconnectedness and interaction.

The UNESCO model is in three sections. On the one hand, there are the variables that provide the underlying motivation – individual empowerment and social cohesion, sustainable development and cultural and economic prosperity. Secondly come the building blocks that will allow a learning city to establish itself as such. These include creating a culture of learning, learning organisations, local and international partnerships, innovation and change and the engagement and contribution of stakeholders. None of these will, however, take place without the third elements of political will and commitment and good governance. The project is still very much work in progress, but there is a determination to make it succeed with help from the PASCAL Observatory.³

³The PASCAL Observatory for place management, social capital and learning regions has based in Glasgow, Illinois, Melbourne and Pretoria and emerged from work of the OECD in the field of learning cities and regions in the early 2000s.

EUROlocal: The European Storehouse on Learning Regions and Cities

One initiative within Europe that has gathered knowledge of learning regions and cities and analysed the current situation in terms of their development and progress is EUROlocal,⁴ a recently completed international project funded by the European Commission through the Transversal Key Activity (KA) 4 of the LLP with partners that included a number of the leading proponents of learning region development. Four collaborating organisations with a history of experience in learning regions and cities were involved: the PASCAL Observatory, University of Glasgow (UK), Learning Regions Deutschland (LRD) (Germany), Universitas Bari (Italy) and the University of Pecs (Hungary). The principal aim of this project was to provide a central repository in the form of a website to store more than two decades of data, tools, indicators, reports, videos, projects, recommendations, plans, strategies and learning materials for the benefit of European cities and regions. The approach of EUROlocal project was both collaborative and interactive by providing an easily accessible web-based resource of existing and extant initiatives and by seeking input and feedback from new and prospective entrants.

As well as creating a rich reservoir of materials, EUROlocal has also collated more than 800 regional development contacts from throughout Europe. It has also developed existing audit tools concerned with learning region development and translated and tested these in different sectorial areas, including schools, adult education institutions, local authorities and universities. Learning materials were devised for others interested in learning regions and cities to use. At various points during the project, stakeholders were consulted and recommendations for policy changes in the field were revised on the basis of their comments.

Longer-term targets in relation to dissemination, exploitation and sustainability have also been developed and reached. For example, the work of the project is feeding directly into the developments within UNESCO's GLCN initiative. Interested parties have already met to discuss how the work can be developed in the future. Other objectives were met through the purchase of a dissemination package from the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) which provides a separate web section within its website.

One of the main criticisms of projects funded within the framework of the LLP is sustainability and impact, and this has been a fundamental problem of many previous initiatives in the field of learning cities and regions. By establishing strong sets of connections with other networks, regions and cities as well as individuals, and by being maintained after the life of the project by a global network, the PASCAL Observatory, unusually high prospects for longevity exist for EUROlocal. Furthermore, the project was designed to have maximum impact on

⁴ See <http://eurolocal.info/>

the development of linked strategies for lifelong learning regions at a EU level. It does this by having

- Provided a wealth of potentially valuable knowledge for European regions that urgently needed to be brought together and made available in one place. Furthermore, commentary and analysis of these materials, both thematically and by geographic region, add value to content.
- Made the knowledge available in an innovative way. The innovativeness and extensive use of a website that contains many features of modern Internet custom and convention (e.g. blogs, rich media, interaction and ‘digging’) enhance the project’s impact on those who intend to develop learning regions in the future. The design of the site also facilitates the organisation of material in ways that facilitate thematic and geographical analysis and by permitting remote user submissions always to a degree ways in which knowledge can be co-constructed.
- Provided learning and publicity materials that enable all European regions to develop a strategy that exploits the available wealth of knowledge for its stakeholders in VET institutions, universities, schools, enterprises, local administrations and adult education institutions.
- Devised a dissemination plan that targets regional development agencies in all EU countries.
- Provided the guidelines and recommendations for a new expanded European policy in this area.

Each one of the previous targets has a significant impact on the development of lifelong learning. Together they add up to a step forward for local and European policy and practice. Furthermore, EU policies in cognate areas are addressed, including the high level objective of integration, ‘the process of overcoming, by common accord, political, physical, economic and social barriers that divide countries from their neighbours, and of collaborating in the management of shared resources and regional commons’ (European Commission 2008).

Through the various work packages of the project, the website and the final seminar, EUROlocal was able to make contributions to this objective in several ways. Through the sharing of mutual experiences and the provision of reciprocal support, EU regions have been able to enhance their own regional work. One opportunity came in Ostersund, Sweden, in 2010 at the Jamtli Museum during the ‘*Heritage, Regional Development and Social Cohesion*’ conference. The event was hosted by the PASCAL Observatory and facilitated the sharing of experiences and research findings by regions across a wide range of interests. The themes included whether cultural and natural heritage was a resource for development and how to make links between the heritage movement, social inclusion and lifelong learning for all. The EUROlocal final seminar ‘*Investing in the Future: Building Learning Cities and Regions in Europe*’ in October 2011 was held in Murten, Switzerland, and was aimed at for key decision-makers in European regions. This event maximised impact through discussion and exchange of experiences and expertise between

European regions. The culmination of the work provided the guidelines and recommendations for European policy in this area.

In the Interim Report of the LLP (European Commission 2011, p. 14), the Commission talks about how to make the work of the programme more effective and suggests that those active in the lifelong learning programmes should ‘Share good practice among the Member States and various stakeholders, ... Make better use of KA1 of the Transversal programme to analyse the needs of the target groups, undertake outreach initiatives to associations of enterprises, non-formal and informal education providers’. EUROlocal has achieved this through the interactive website, the development of an extensive database and learning materials, the dissemination of audits, contacts, information on projects and festivals in both cities and regions. Additionally through stakeholder audits and tools testing, the project has undertaken an analysis of which groups are relevant in which sector and what their actual needs are. Through a final seminar it worked to ‘strengthen the involvement of national and sub-national policy makers and other stakeholders in the cooperation process at the EU level (peer learning activities and other fora of learning) as well as in the implementation of the LLP’s actions’ (p. 89).

EUROlocal Contribution to EU Policy

The first European Commission Policy Document on the Local and Regional Dimension of Lifelong Learning (Longworth 2006) was a result of one of the first European Commission Learning City/Region projects, TELS. It contained a series of recommendations for implementation by local authorities and by the European Commission. As we have reported previously, the recommendation to initiate an European Commission programme on learning regions was implemented in 2002 (R3L), when 17 projects were approved to kick-start the process of lifelong learning region development.

The EUROlocal final seminar provided additional recommendations for the future. EUROlocal urged that the EU strongly consider the following:

1. Reintroduce the concept of learning cities and regions into the new programme for lifelong learning development, *Erasmus for All*.
2. Recognise the place of learning cities and regions in the development of jobs, employment and Europe 2020⁵ and promote new projects to establish these as frameworks for development.
3. Recognise the interactivity, interconnectedness and interdependence of economic, social and environmental capital in local development, and promote research and development projects, which activate good practice.
4. Work with active learning city organisations, cities and regions abroad; learn from them and implement projects, which mirror their success.

⁵ See Europe 2020 at http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/targets/index_en.htm

5. Encourage member states to implement learning city and region development projects and networks.
6. Work with other intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) such as UNESCO and the OECD to help them establish worldwide networks of good practice in learning cities and regions.
7. Encourage innovative approaches, which link European cities with others abroad to exchange good practice and creative solutions. Use these to help cities and regions in underdeveloped or dangerous parts of the world.
8. Encourage all schools at all levels to establish links with other schools in other countries throughout the world for joint curriculum development and creative projects that promote understanding, tolerance and peace.
9. Make the EUROlocal storehouse available to all, worldwide, and use it to create recommendations for action in the learning cities and regions field.
10. Establish links between the Lifelong Learning Programme and Social and European Regional Development Funds to increase the number of learning regions throughout Europe. Use the experts who have organised and run DG EaC learning region projects to implement these.
11. Embed learning region concepts into all lifelong learning projects in the new *ERASMUS for All* programme (see European Commission 2012).
12. Encourage integration projects and partnerships between learning providers and city/region stakeholders.
13. Accept projects that encourage citizens to identify with, and contribute to, the economic, social and environmental development of their own region.
14. Establish links with the Committee of the Regions to give more attention to learning city and region development.
15. Use the tools and learning materials in the EUROlocal storehouse to increase the number of learning regions and cities in Europe. Encourage the writing of more such tools and materials.

This would enable learning regions throughout Europe to meet the criteria of the policy of the past as well as that of the future. EUROlocal has played a part in the Lisbon Council strategic goal, for the EU ‘to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’ by gathering the knowledge in one place which will contribute to this growth and social cohesion.

In the Interim Report for the evaluation of this lifelong learning programme, the European Commission (2011, p. 8) recognised the many achievements of the lifelong learning programme such as ‘the benefits of improved content and practice of education and training but it also’, but it also identified several matters of concern. In terms of effectiveness of the education and training in Europe, the Panel were eager to address these matters before the end of the programme in 2013. One of the issues included ‘Inequalities in education hindering individuals from lower-economic backgrounds to acquire the high levels of competence they need to contribute to and benefit from a knowledge society’. Through the mutual exchange and knowledge from the EUROlocal site, learning regions will be able to make a

difference in terms of both building economies and contributing to social inclusion practices. There will be more links between different and similar organisations and institutes. For example, those dealing with employment will link with those focused on social inclusion.

It was agreed that future European Commission programmes will be even more integrated and cover all aspects of education and training as in the case for the Erasmus for All programme to be introduced in 2014. The Interim Report of the LLP (European Commission 2011) identified that we need to develop as 'partnerships between the education and the world of work, regional and local authorities and NGOs'. The European Commission Interim Panel for this report suggested that EU actors should 'also further enlarge the possibilities of cooperation with non-EU countries' and give more attention to transversal actions. The Commission took note that 'most answers and feedbacks received come from current beneficiaries of the Lifelong Learning Programme and reflect the quite usual tendency to ask for continuity and stability'. Erasmus for All will bring further investment in education and training and 'is the key to unlocking people's potential, regardless of their age or background. It helps them to increase their personal development, gain new skills and boost their job prospects' (European Commission 2012, p. 1).

The Future of the Work

The EUROlocal project created a website, which is a virtual platform for researchers, developers and managers focusing on establishing, managing or developing learning cities, regions or communities. The website frames and sets out the basic precepts of learning cities and regions in Europe so as to engage designers, planners, decision-makers and other stakeholders who are interested in promoting the idea and practice of learning cities and regions. EUROlocal can be used as a reader/source for people wanting to be informed of or to learn about learning cities and regions in Europe. Moreover, the PASCAL Observatory has linked EUROlocal to its website which widens the scope and assures the sustainability of the work.

One precondition for the development of a successful learning region is the identification of dedicated people and institutions that follow the same aim: developing a structure that is reaching people flexibly and creatively and that reduces competitiveness and makes common working fields accessible. Building a network of educational institutions with regional partners from the scientific, social, economic and cultural background is the way towards a knowledge-based economic area, which means a learning region. EUROlocal identified several areas for action, including the:

- Development of new tools for use in cities and regions
- Consolidation of EUROlocal outputs in specific areas of the lifelong learning
- Increased visibility of EUROlocal to European cities and regions
- Expansion of the scope of learning cities and regions into the aspects of learning city/region development other than educational and training that is presently active in Europe

More work needs to be done by EUROlocal in terms of exploitation, and this is an ongoing and never-ending task. However, in order to make the exploitation of the EUROlocal project more effective, there may be a need to reduce the gap between projects and policymakers by considering the creation of an ‘observatory’ for the Lifelong Learning Programme itself.

During the course of the project, we encountered cities and regions with many other nomenclatures outside of our remit, such as creative cities, resilient cities, transition towns, green cities, healthy cities, smart cities, slow cities, ecowell cities, cities of possibilities, cities alliance for poverty reduction and sustainable development, cool cities, intelligent cities, sustainable cities, educating cities, energy cities, future cities, culture cities, Eurocities and Eurotowns.⁶ We know that others exist that may have fallen under the radar.

All of them have created networks; all of them are active in Europe, many of them also interacting with other cities worldwide. Most are active in several aspects of local and regional lifelong learning development; all of them can potentially contribute to the learning of all their stakeholders in formal, non-formal and informal learning; and all of them can learn much from each other. EUROlocal has recognised that there is also further urgent work to be done to collect the knowledge, tools and materials that these new entities have created, in order to further economic, social and environmental development in European cities and beyond.

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⁶Some URL examples are as follows: energy cities (<http://www.energy-cities.eu/>), sustainable cities (<http://sustainablecities.net/>), creative cities (<http://creativecities.org/>), educating cities (<http://www.bcn.es/edcities/aice/>) and green cities (<http://greencities.com>).

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