

Learning Communities Suggestions for European Policy-making

For

Policy Input Seminar

**The local and regional dimension of Life Long Learning
The contribution of learning cities/regions**

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Norman Longworth
Advisory Professor of Lifelong Learning, Napier University, Edinburgh
Email: norman.longworth@gmail.com

Learning Communities - Suggestions for European Policy-making

There is now a strong recognition that, in an increasingly globalised world, Europe must develop an interactive Learning Society in order to be able to compete with other regions and countries. We believe that this should be based on local and regional initiatives if it is to succeed. However, by definition, such initiatives to create Learning Communities are local and regional. But, because of its wider access to resources and its wider vision, there is also an important role for national and supra-national government in fostering their development. Look back at the diagram shown this morning.

We defined a learning community as a web of organisations and people linked together in a common cause - to create a pervasive learning environment through learning with and from each other. Modern communications technology now makes it possible for Learning Communities to be twinned with others and to become part of a world-wide network exchanging information and experience for the benefit of all.

It is in this international environment that the European Commission has a policy-making role in order to take advantage of the obvious social, political, economic, educational and cultural benefits accruing from the establishment of a pan-European Learning Society. In effect, a Learning Community developing only with reference to itself becomes inhibited in its vision. Many of its activities should be essentially outward-looking (importing and exporting good practice, developing trade links, enhancing cultural and inter-community understanding through networks, links between sectors etc). This is where Europe can act as the catalyst for binding local Learning Communities and Regions into a European family of Learning Communities.

The European Commission has already initiated many fine examples at a regional level. Territorial employment pacts, new objective 1 and 2 guidelines and projects like TELS, POLIS, Eurotools and other lifelong learning initiatives are a few. Learning is an integral part of them even if it *has* been done within the 20th Century paradigm of Education and Training.

Policy-makers may wish to consider the following 21st Century aspects of Lifelong Learning as important for the development of Learning Society in Europe. It is difficult to recommend an order of importance, since all of them are significant in their own context, but here they follow the author's perception in this respect.

(Diagram – 4 Mb omitted)

1. Providing incentives for the formation of new regional, national, and European infrastructures which help Learning Community concepts to develop more quickly

Objective: to build interlocking frameworks at several levels which would a) quicken up the process of acquiring knowledge and initiating action and b) provide focus points usable by regional national and supra-national organisations, including the Commission. In particular the following is suggested:

a) At European Level

At European level there is an immense number of tasks to be done to stimulate local initiatives promoting a European Learning Society. Satisfying the thousands of municipalities with millions of people and hundreds of thousands of organisations cannot be done by any one Association. At this level, there will be a need for several organisations, each with their own strengths, target populations and orientations. Existing European Learning Community organisations should work together much more harmoniously, perhaps within the cadre of the Commission.

b) At National Level

Equally a few examples already exist at national level - for example in Finland an informal network of the ten major municipalities meets occasionally to discuss common problems and opportunities. In UK, a formal network of Learning Communities has the backing of Government and is very active. Such Associations should be encouraged in all member states and the new countries, and linked to a central facility able to continually update and offer ideas, experiences, links to expertise, events and so on. Some of the TELS partners have offered to establish such associations and link them to the interactive web-site. Such Associations could:

- Run seminars, workshops and conferences for their members nationally
- Encourage the completion of audits, surveys and studies nationally within a European survey
- Run national Learning City competitions within a European competition
- Act as reference points in Learning City matters for their Governments
- Establish twinning networks with cities from other countries.
- Help organise Learning City festivals, weeks, days etc.
- Write and distribute newsletters to their members.
- Commission Learning City Research as partners with specialist University Departments (see 4 below)

c) At Regional/Local level

In some municipalities and regions of Europe, Lifelong Learning partnerships have been formed comprising organisations and people from all the sectors traditionally concerned with educational matters. In the UK, for example there are now more than 100 of these. It is a concept which needs to be extended to all regions of Europe. However, since Lifelong Learning can be both formal and informal such partnerships should also include organisations and people from all sectors of public, social, economic and political life.

2. Monitoring, Measuring, Data-gathering Surveys and Studies - Indicators of Growth

- Objectives:**
- a) To provide unbiased information helpful to the Commission, to National Governments and to Municipalities for planning the growth of Learning Communities.
 - b) To isolate best practice examples in several areas of Learning Community activity
 - c) To determine and apply key indicators of progress towards a Learning Community
 - d) To provide guidelines on Learning Community development for administrators and leaders in cities, towns and regions

European policy should encourage continuous measurement and monitoring of learning growth in Cities, Towns and Regions as a service to its member states, its institutions and the cities themselves. OECD and the TELS project have already gathered much data on current activities in cities and regions. In the latter the Learning Cities Audit has served an additional function as a sensitiser of key people and as an ideas generator. But there are many more cities and towns in Europe as yet untouched by those ideas. The process of data gathering should continue and be linked to a central European web-based data-handling facility disseminating the results. Two levels of data collection offer themselves

- General macro data about Cities and their lifelong learning progress (e.g. the Learning City Audit). This would be useful for planners in Municipalities, in regions and at European level
- New Micro-Surveys of Sectoral Lifelong Learning practice in the city/town/region based on a set of Lifelong Learning Indicators, roles and best practice examples. These would be useful to planners and administrators in government in Member States, in municipalities and in the institutions studied. These might include:
 - a) Lifelong Learning in Schools including their relationship to Learning City development
 - b) SMEs and Learning development including opportunities through European cooperation
 - c) Lifelong Learning in Industry including collaborative learning with other sectors
 - d) Lifelong Learning in Universities including University roles in Learning City development
 - e) Lifelong Learning in Adult Education Colleges and second-chance learning
 - f) Lifelong Learning in Local Government Organisations and their role in Learning City development
 - g) Lifelong Learning practice in Teacher Training Establishments and the new skills of teachers to help create a Learning Society
 - h) Lifelong Learning in Voluntary Organisations, and their contribution to a Learning Society
 - i) Effectiveness of City Lifelong Learning Partnerships

The studies could be carried out by the proposed network of Research Expertise Centres in 4 below. If the proposed National Associations (part 1) administered them it would also serve as an opportunity to grow their own membership. However, this will need careful handling and coordination. City administrators are already beset by numerous requests for data from a variety of sources, including from within the municipality itself. Municipalities have been willing to spend time on the TELS Audit because it has offered a quid pro quo in the shape of enhanced understanding of the issues in Learning Community development. Questionnaires can be carefully designed to improve knowledge and promote change where it is desired. Indeed, it is believed that many of the UK Lifelong Learning Partnerships and municipalities submitting Learning City plans under the UK's single regeneration budget have so used it without providing the data. Some cities have refused to provide data giving the reason that they have no time or have been advised not to by a variety of sources, although they too have used the information in the Audit.

Planners and administrators in the European Commission, national government, the regions, the municipalities, Associations and the institutions themselves will obviously benefit from the collecting of accurate data. The TELS Audit has shown that it can generate a large quantity of new knowledge, while at the same time dispensing ideas and expertise. It would benefit from a more scientifically generated sample with the official stamp of the Commission. At the same time there is a need for a variety of approaches and new data, sensitively collected, leading to new knowledge and new action.

3. Initiating High-profile European Initiatives to improve Awareness of the Learning City concept.

Objective: To raise the awareness of Learning Community concepts in municipalities throughout Europe through participation in high-visibility events which also enhance the learning perceptions of citizens.

The European Commission is in a key position to create highly visible events which highlight the importance of a Learning Society for Europe, for Member States and for the development of Learning Communities and Regions. Such events should also involve citizens in the construction of a Lifelong Learning society. While the TELS studies have uncovered a willingness in many municipalities to examine the implications of becoming Learning Communities, they have also detected a lack of awareness of what these are. They have also encountered a wall of incomprehension in many municipalities, both from those who believe that they are already Lifelong Learning Communities (those that participated quickly discovered that they are not) and from those which did not relate to the term. By initiating highly visible projects, Europe can do much to stimulate towns and cities to recognise the place of Learning in their own development. A key recommendation, realisable at European level might be

- One or more European Cities of Learning - as in the European Cities of Culture. This may be linked to 'European Festivals of Learning' (for example: the Japanese Government funds 2 cities per year to run a week-long festival of learning whose major purpose is to bring thousands of people (back) into learning see paper - A Visitors Guide to the Hokkaido Learning festival)
- Again, this may or may not be linked to an 'Annual European City of the Year' Competition - National Heats carried out by the proposed National Associations in cooperation with Governments, and a European Final of the heat winners in cooperation with the Commission. It could be based on the aggregate of Learning Community indicators, as outlined in the TELS Audit, or along thematic lines within a Learning Community.

Other high profile events might also include:

- The development of 'A European Charter for Learning Cities' outlining the City's responsibilities vis-à-vis its citizens as learners, which cities sign up to. This can be displayed in all city institutional, educational and industrial environments.
- Funded Learning City days, Learning City weeks as in National Adult Education Week but at a city level
- A Large Conference on the subject to celebrate the EC Presidency in Sweden
- Environmental involvement in the city - programmes/competitions
- European Inter-schools activities and competitions - innovative learning schemes, 'earth-days' - national heats - European Finals
- A Virtual 'European University of the Second Chance' - faculties from existing universities in several countries specialising in second-chance students, offer special degree-level courses to those without degrees.
- Support for Universities of the 3rd Age
- European Learning Society Competitions linked to the depth of European Awareness

The beneficiaries of such large-scale initiatives would be the municipalities, which could use them to implement the creation of a Learning Community within the cadre of a European event, and the member states, which could use the publicity and the ideas so generated to enhance their own role in Lifelong Learning.

4. Help Develop Specialist departments in European Universities to carry out Action Research into Learning and Learning Cities in Universities

Objective: To create a European network of one or more university departments in each country able to specialise in Learning City Research and Development

The development of a European Learning Society through local and regional initiatives will profit from the carrying out of Action Research Projects, particularly those which know how to see the learning community as a research laboratory and involve citizens in the research. Policy-makers may wish to consider how to establish a number of research centres based on Universities in each country of Europe. These would be Centres of Expertise within their own nations, linked together through joint European research and linked to municipalities to provide the research test-bed. They would have several functions

- a) implementing the measuring and monitoring function described in 2 above,
- b) training governmental staff, city and region leaders and others in Learning Community matters
- c) developing new courses and diplomas in learning community topics
- d) developing web-based materials as in 5 below
- e) specialising in research in Learning Community matters such as
 - New learning methods improving the capacity of citizens to learn
 - New methods of financing the Learning City
 - Developing and testing Learning tools and techniques (as in 6 below)
 - Developing audit Tools and carrying out audits of learning needs in industry, local government and the community at large
 - Developing and disseminating examples of good practice
 - Researching examples of partnerships as generators of New Resources
 - Design and delivery of tailored courses, conferences, seminars and workshops for people in all walks of city life
 - Learning City and Regional strategy design and development
 - Advising on the effective use of electronic networks and the internet for lifelong learning
 - Developing booklets, leaflets and brochures for Learning communities
 - Providing facilities for people to study Learning Community matters
 - Stimulating effective interaction between people of all ages
 - In depth studies of chosen Learning Cities

There are advantages in this proposal for all sections. Local and Regional communities would benefit from the teaching and research work and the expertise built up in the municipalities, Member States would have a point of reference for Learning Community research and development and Europe would have a growing network of such centres able to recommend and implement special projects.

5. Stimulating the development and use of sophisticated Web Tools to improve knowledge of the Learning Community and Region

Objective: To develop an all-encompassing, easy-to-use, web-based Learning Community simulation tool and make it accessible to all.

Policy Makers may wish to consider how the web can assist Learning Cities and Regions. Already the web tool developed by TELS is an interactive one permitting a variety of activities, such as finding experts and linking them with each other interactively, events posting, forums for city professionals, information sources, the insertion of recommended reading etc. This is a valuable tool for cities, as yet grossly underused, partly because of a lack of web literacy in Europe. Future developments should bear this in mind when designing web tools and offer clear instructions and pathways.

However, there are far more exciting uses of the web to improve awareness and create action. For example, a web model of the learning community can be developed so that citizens can

- Attend virtual council, school board, community centre etc meetings and comment on the debates.
- Sit in the electronic schoolroom and receive courses directly from the web
- Use the electronic Post Office
- Attend virtual rallies on Learning Community Matters
- Receive interactive continuous Education from the Virtual University
- Go to the electronic town market and purchase goods
- Construct their own electronic newspaper
- Join the local ornithological society
- Find a local mentor to help with a course on time-space relativity.

And several thousands of other actions. The possibilities for learning, contributing, developing, interacting and time-planning in this way are endless. There is now the possibility of constructing a series of web portals which would lead to a complete virtual Lifelong Learning city. It could be used for teaching and learning in schools, adult education colleges, universities, business and industry, local government, in the home, the office and wherever people are.

The new web tools should be interactive, accessible and innovative. The European policy maker might consider how the web can help enhance the role of Europe in the local and regional communities and stimulate interaction between them at all levels - economic, political, social, cultural. One key requirement is that it should be easily used.

The advantages of this for all sections are evident. Europe gains a facility which enhances its role, the cities and regions gain a facility for educating their citizens, the Member States gain a facility for interacting in both directions and for training their own Civil Servants and Scientists.

6. Creating a Technical Assistance Facility to Support the development and delivery of Courses and Materials and Lifelong Learning Tools which help create knowledge and participation in the Learning Community

Objectives:

- a) To provide technical assistance to improve the knowledge of key people about Lifelong Learning in Cities, Towns and Regions and help them activate citizens from all walks of life to become learners and contributors.
- b) To raise the profile and importance of the Learning Community in the minds of leaders, administrators and citizens through the development of courses, materials and tools.

a) Courses and Materials

European Policy-makers may consider how Europe can help Learning Communities grow by funding the development of new courses and materials on Lifelong Learning for specific key target populations, in particular, the following.

- city learning leaders
- elected representatives
- learning marketers
- teachers and lecturers
- industrialists
- adult educators
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Such people are the movers and shakers of the Learning Community and without the insights which up-to-date education in Learning Community matters can give, the growth of the Learning Community will be retarded. The TELS audit detected very few in existence. Courses may be developed and delivered by the centres of expertise mentioned in 4 above together with local colleges and universities. The materials should be innovative, emphasising the role of each target audience in the development of the Learning Community, and helping participants to understand how the concepts of Lifelong Learning enhance and extend the old Education and Training perceptions. They should promote a cascade teaching process to increase the number of people reached.

At the same time many of these courses may become diploma or degree related in order to enhance the profile of the Learning Community as an object of study.

b) Lifelong Learning Tools

Courses and materials improve knowledge and awareness and stimulate action. However, there are several active tools and techniques for stimulating individuals to improve their own learning performance in cities and towns. They include personal learning plans, mentoring programmes, learning needs audits, family learning plans and other tools which either support the learner or require him/her to take personal ownership of it. The TELS audit detected that very few cities are using these tools, partly because of the difficulty of developing them but largely through a lack of awareness that they exist. Possible tools include

- Templates for tailored city/regional personal learning plans - to encourage citizens to record their plans for learning over 1,3 and 5 years for leisure, for life, for work
- Guidelines for local, national and pan-European mentoring programmes - in the community, in schools, in industry etc
- Personal Learning Requirements Audits - encouraging Learning Providers, communities and companies to discover the learning needs and requirements of their people and building up a local/national/European database
- Development of Family Learning Plans - encouraging families to learn together.

- Effective partnerships and how they help Learning City development
- Local and Regional Study Circles

and, in particular

the widespread use of the NICT tools to stimulate learning, interaction, contribution and planning in and between communities should be encouraged in innovative projects. These include

- the use of the internet to increase communication between citizens of all ages in different cities.
- The use of open and distance learning techniques to include a wider range of learners
- The information-giving to improve access to learning opportunities in the city
- multimedia software to increase the range of learning methodologies

The 'Wired City' Concept

Europe may have a special role to play in the effective development of the 'wired city' concept - using the latest developments in cable, satellite, cellphone, isdn, digital television, to

- link education and information providers,
- deliver innovative and interactive educational materials,
- deliver neighbourhood events - eg the school play into homes
- encourage home-school interaction
- improve learning methods
- encourage personal contribution
- mentoring programmes
- provide up to date examples in courses (eg via satellite links to European Parliament.)

There are many more examples and their usefulness can be at local, national and European level. While some individual communities are investing in such equipment (cf the TELS data), it is not widely or wisely used. Europe has the resources to help communities do this. Indeed there are already many examples where it is doing so, but the issues of dissemination of results need to be addressed.

One issue to be addressed is that of the many small private consultants who work on city matters. These are usually unable to match fund, and hence to become partners in European projects. A city or town passing on the task of carrying out a survey, a piece of development work or other activities to a small private consultant would have difficulty with this.

There are again advantages for all in this section. The local community gains through the proliferation of courses, diplomas, tools, materials and educated and informed leaders, the Member States also gain education for their administrators and interaction with the communities, while Europe gains through its ability to spread the concepts of a Learning Community, and hence a Learning Society, widely throughout the continent.

7. Promoting Europe-wide interactions and partnerships between Local Government, Industry and others for Wealth/Employment Creation and International Employability

Objective: To stimulate Europe-wide wealth and employment creation and greater employability for Europeans through initiatives to link Communities across borders.

Maintaining full employment will be one of the most important functions of local communities. In a highly competitive international environment, in which labour-intensive manufacturing industry has migrated from the developed to the developing world, the production of high added-value goods and services becomes increasingly important. This in turn demands a new focus on lifetime high-order skills and competencies in highly adaptable and flexible citizens, with continuous upgrading and change to keep them both employed and employable. The provision of an education service which can create such knowledge, values and attitudes is one way to stimulate wealth-creation. The link between education and growth - both personal and economic - has been well established in many studies.

Equally young Europeans are much more mobile than their parents and this trend should be encouraged for the development of 'European-ness'. In this way Europe has an interest in both fostering this interaction between the sectors at local level and in encouraging interaction between communities to create wealth at a European level. It has already supported initiatives to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit in a caring enterprise society, and the success of the Territorial Employment Pacts, for example, leads to other innovative European ideas to help communities and regions flourish. These might include:

- Learning 'Twinning' schemes between European Cities and Towns to encourage trade development, language teaching, learning celebration, exchange of ideas and experiences etc
- Creating and supporting cross-border inter-regional synergies (eg Ostersond, Transmanche) for similar purposes and inserting the 'European dimension'
- Enhancing the Role of Industry in helping to develop Learning Cities/Regions - using the European cachet to attract Industry into 'Learning/Trade Development Pacts'
- Helping to create Regional Lifelong Learning Partnerships
- Helping the City to reach out into its own region
- Thematic development at a European level for employment, employability and wealth creation

The advantages for all partners in a European effort to exploit the growth of Learning Communities in order to increase wealth and employability are clear.

8. Establishing Links with global organisations and countries

Objective: To share good practice and foster joint cultural, economic and educational development in the area of Learning Communities.

Policy makers may also wish to consider how the European dimension could include links with countries and regions outside of Europe for increased knowledge, trade, understanding and aid. These may be extensions of existing links such as the EU-Canada cooperation agreement or new twinning links between cities in developed and developing countries to assist in learning matters. For example the following are known to be carrying out creative work in Learning Cities/Communities

Japan and the Far East

USA

Canada

Australasia

OECD

UNESCO

Council of Europe

South Africa

Etc

Links could be (and in many cases are, though not necessarily with the Learning Communities Focus) established at inter-governmental, national, regional or city level. The advantages for all partners are clear. The exchange of ideas, good practice, experience, expertise and knowledge leads to economic, cultural and political benefit.

10. Other Lifelong Learning Topics

Objective: To establish and exploit the links between Lifelong Learning approaches generally and those issues for the development of a Learning Community

Lastly, policy makers may wish to take into account the following list of Lifelong Learning approaches at city level and consider how they may be incorporated into a European policy. It has already been noted that the Learning Community is the place where many of these concepts will be implemented.

- **Developing City Learning Charters based on the European template mentioned in 3 above**
- **Social inclusion**
 - **Immigrant acclimatisation**
 - **Learning for Special Needs**
 - **Learning for the unemployed**
 - **Learning for the reluctant learner**
 - **Women returners and Learning**
 - **Second-chance learning**
- **APEL strategies**
- **The many ways Learning Celebration in the City/Region**
- **Reward and Recognition Strategies in the Learning Community**
- **Information and Communication of Learning Opportunities - Local, National, European**
- **New Financial Strategies for Lifelong Learning in the local Community**
- **Participation and Contribution of Citizens in the city for active citizenship**
- **The Marketing of Learning**
- **Using the Media to improve learning**
- **The Learning component of City Regeneration Strategies**

10. *Financing*

TELS has detected some resistance in several cities and towns to carrying out work outside of their planned activities, including time taken to complete questionnaires and Audits. City budgets are under continuous scrutiny and the added value of participation in European projects has to be clearly demonstrated. In one sense this is a marketing issue - cities and towns need to be first convinced of the value of being a Learning Community - but it is also a financial issue in that many cities are reluctant to commit resources at 50% and more to projects from which the benefits are not clearly and unequivocally spelt out.