

Lifelong Learning Book Series 35

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Global Perspectives on Learning Cities

 Springer

Lifelong Learning Book Series

Volume 35

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Competing visions and paradigms for lifelong learning co-exist at national as well as international levels. The fact that one 'official' discourse may be dominant at any one time does not mean that other ways of thinking about learning throughout the life course have disappeared. They are alive and well in a range of critical traditions and perspectives that retain their power to engage and persuade.

Lifelong learning is presented in this Series in all its versatility. Accordingly, lifelong learning is referred to as an idea, a concept, an approach, a method, a programme, a strategy, even a philosophy or worldview. Similarly, the approaches to lifelong learning presented in the Series are sometimes philosophical, sociological, economic, psychological or educational, and frequently multi-disciplinary. Common foci are the practices of individual, organisational and collective learning as well as the development of people, communities and societies.

The Series promotes critical, evidence-informed exploration of problems, themes and issues in the evolving field of lifelong learning. Each volume is firmly based on high quality scholarship and a keen awareness of both emergent and enduring issues in practice and policy. Our mission is to engage scholars, practitioners, policy makers and professionals with new insights from international research and practice, and to provoke fresh thinking and innovation in lifelong learning. Contributions that highlight previously under-researched groups, countries and territories are strongly encouraged.

The Lifelong Learning Series aims to bring together established authors building on a strong platform of previous work to develop their themes and positions, with new generation authors bringing novel ideas and perspectives. We welcome contributions from multi-disciplinary research collaborations that approach contemporary and emerging global and local challenges in creative ways.

Through advocacy of broad, diverse and inclusive approaches to learning throughout the life course, the series aspires to be a leading resource for researchers and practitioners who seek to rethink lifelong learning to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st Century.

The Lifelong Learning Book Series complements the Third International Handbook of Lifelong Learning <https://link.springer.com/referencework/10.1007/978-3-031-19592-1> with an elaboration of specific topics, themes and case studies in greater depth than is possible in the Handbook.

Séamus Ó Tuama • Eric Agbessi • Tina Neylon
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Global Perspectives on Learning Cities

 Springer

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ISSN 1871-322X

ISSN 2730-5325 (electronic)

Lifelong Learning Book Series

ISBN 978-3-031-91109-5

ISBN 978-3-031-91110-1 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-91110-1>

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Foreword

Lifelong learning comprises all the phases of learning and is fundamental as we adapt to developments in digital technology, transformation in the world of work, and demographic change. It also equips us with the necessary competencies to respond to the climate crisis, promote health and well-being, and strengthen citizenship.

Rapid urbanisation has been a defining feature of the last century, giving cities a critical role in advancing appropriate responses to these challenges. Accounting for 75% of global greenhouse gas emissions, cities are responsible for offering creative solutions that lay the foundations for more sustainable, resilient futures. With their vast resources, density, and capacity as hubs of complex stakeholder relations that cut across sectors, cities provide a highly favourable environment to tackle today's most pressing issues. One important way in which they can do this is through offering people opportunities to learn at all ages.

Learning cities—which strategically intertwine these two concepts—are, as such, at the forefront of enhancing access to and participation in lifelong learning. As the learning city movement has grown, numerous innovative and relevant initiatives have contributed to the construction of more inclusive societies that are ready to face the challenges of today and tomorrow.

One decade of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) was celebrated in 2023. What is encapsulated in this book is a reflection on the network's multifaceted contribution to cities.

The 16 chapters of *Global Perspectives on Learning Cities* aim to clarify and promote the learning city initiative, considering its development and implementation against a wide variety of circumstances, in numerous diverse contexts across the globe. Taken together, they explore the importance of fostering a culture of lifelong learning at local level from very different angles. As Norman Longworth notes in his dialogue with Carmel Berendi in Chap. 16, “a learning city in Hungary is very different from a learning city in Saudi Arabia, and different again from a learning city in Australia. They all have contrasting aims and objectives based upon

culture, education, tradition and sometimes national law. However, as we said, it is growing: more and more cities want to become learning cities.”

In this context, *Global Perspectives on Learning Cities* adds real value to the evolution of the learning cities concept. Reflecting on the varied and valuable experiences, examples, and important ideas described in this publication, let me share four thoughts on how learning cities are working to improve lives around the world.

First, the rich material gathered in the 16 chapters emphasises the importance of an intersectoral approach to lifelong learning at the local level and beyond. Indeed, learning cities exemplify this, forging strong links and fostering partnerships that cut across sectors to advance lifelong learning for all. As you will see throughout the book, across diverse contexts, different stakeholders have been at the helm of implementing learning city-related efforts, making cross-sectoral strategies all the more pertinent.

All chapters reflect the value of intersectoral collaboration in this context. The integrated, holistic EcCoWell approach to sustainable development described by Peter Kearns in Chap. 14 speaks to this in particular, emphasising the overall impact, as opposed to isolated sectoral advancements in specific domains.

This intersectoral spirit remains at the core of the learning city approach. Indeed, as members around the world have confronted the COVID-19 pandemic, migration crises, and the climate crisis, cross-cutting efforts to advance learning for individuals of all ages have assisted cities in responding to urgent, often unforeseen, circumstances, with a view to building back stronger. Many of the chapters that follow reference how partnerships promoting lifelong learning have responded to challenging scenarios, but that on Wyndham, Australia, stands out for its focus on how the city addressed the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, as you will read in Chap. 8 by Jac Torres-Gomez and Diane Tabbagh, Wyndham’s response to the crisis relied on its capacity to tap into robust, authentic partnerships, which also support its Learning Community Strategy, through an empathy lens.

Second, linked to this, learning cities have been able to advance strategic, innovative, often collaborative endeavours, which have garnered fruitful learning opportunities for individuals across the globe. Indeed, while they are, of course, guided by international networks and initiatives, cities have also taken an active role in shaping and reshaping these networks and what they can offer, in a way that has permitted them to respond to the needs of learners in a vast array of contexts. Just as much as the network has allowed members to thrive, members have allowed it to flourish.

For instance, learning cities have proactively set up regional, national, and sub-national groupings, within the framework of the UNESCO GNLC. Today, there are more than 10 national learning city networks and four regional sub-networks. The case of the Republic of Korea—as explored by Dr Sunok Jo in Chap. 4—is particularly inspiring in this respect, considering the gains made by the country’s national network.

These groupings and the concept of learning territories, as discussed by Nicolas Duracka in Chap. 6, illustrate that learning relations are not always confined to spatial boundaries, but can take shape at a number of intersecting levels, from mutual support in the family home and neighbourhood to the forging of ties between cities in distinct world regions. Indeed, the learning city concept's flexibility has connected the local with the global in diverse ways, through allowing cities to take innovative action and forge strategic ties in a manner that addresses what learners in their communities require to thrive.

Third, learning cities are actively working to promote action and needs-oriented approaches to lifelong learning at the local level. Indeed, within the framework of the GNLC, this emphasis has led to tangible results and practical action that is making a difference for learners worldwide, every day. All of the cities featured in this book are united by such an objective, which Arne Carlsen encapsulates in Chap. 15.

While at the national level, it is key to ensure a robust legal framework, a clear vision, and appropriate monitoring and evaluation tools are in place to advance lifelong learning for all, at the local level, cities harness such opportunities to respond to urgent crises and cope with day-to-day challenges. This makes an action-oriented approach that directly accounts for the needs of learners crucial, in the wide variety of contexts the GNLC covers. Such an approach can make lifelong learning a reality in contexts lacking a cohesive national policy, as seen in Chap. 9, by Abiy Menkir Gizaw and Turuwark Zalalam Warkineh, who share the case of Bahir Dar, Ethiopia. It is also in evidence in the impressive cooperation of important partners such as higher education institutions, as described in Chap. 11 by Balázs Németh and Carmel Berendi.

Finally, learning cities are placing vulnerable groups at the core of their mandate. Most of the chapters in this volume reflect the value of the learning city model in ensuring lifelong learning opportunities are available and accessible to all members of society, including the most marginalised.

Indeed, a common misconception about the network has been its supposed exclusive interest in enhancing learning throughout the lifespan in urban centres. As the stories of learning cities illustrate, this has been far from the case, with members advancing informed efforts to establish opportunities in surrounding rural zones, as well as urban peripheries, in the framework of the GNLC. Ultimately, through working side by side with cities, some of them have made a transformative difference: namely, ensuring some of the most vulnerable in society have the opportunity to learn throughout their lives.

Reflecting on this book, it is clear to me that the learning city capacity to articulate the implementation of a central, global concept in a way that resonates with a wide array of realities, in manifold contexts, will continue to be of value today, tomorrow, and in the future. This fosters the provision of inclusive lifelong learning

opportunities through coherently bringing the local and the global together. This power to link an international concept with diverse local circumstances is a central strand that unites each author's contribution.

As I mentioned at the start, this publication came at a particularly significant time for the GNLC, as it marked a major milestone. Yet, the book's utility will endure for years to come, through its role in fostering and informing the network's ongoing expansion, improvement, and strategic direction, with and for members.

I wish you a pleasant read and sincerely hope you find the following chapters to be as inspiring as I have.

UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities,
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Raúl Valdés Cotera

Series Editors' Note

The *Lifelong Learning Book Series* was launched in 2004 and, by 2025, had published over 30 volumes on topics of international significance. The series continues to contribute to cross-cultural dialogue by exploring and sharing research and new perspectives on lifelong learning and its complex intersections with social, economic, and cultural developments.

This new edited volume brings fresh perspectives to the ongoing cross-national dialogue within the series, making an original and timely contribution through a comprehensive exploration of the role of learning cities as inclusive communities that foster dynamic learning ecosystems. The concept of learning cities has emerged as a global model, gradually gaining importance and recognition, particularly over the past two decades, brought to attention by UNESCO's work and initiatives as part of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities. In the twenty-first century, economic, political, and social challenges have highlighted the need for resilient and adaptable learning environments worldwide, enabling new opportunities and fostering innovative approaches to social inclusion, economic development, and environmental sustainability. In addition, advancements in technology, artificial intelligence, and new methods of communication continue to transform the learning landscape, creating both opportunities and challenges for lifelong learning and development.

These complexities are well captured in this book, particularly through its in-depth consideration of the learning cities movement and its evolution in response to major societal changes and challenges. The notion of learning cities is carefully examined and defined, highlighting its multidimensional nature, which allows individuals to pursue personal development while collectively contributing to their city's growth and advancement. The book provides a comprehensive overview of the development of learning cities as a concept and showcases innovative examples and case studies from around the world.

The chapters offer an impressive compilation of country- and region-specific explorations of best practices, incorporating perspectives from Asia, Australia, Africa, and Europe. Each chapter provides a nuanced discussion of the learning cities movement, explores national concepts and practices, and presents illustrative

examples of how citizens are empowered through learning—acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to flourish and to participate fully in society. This comparative lens enhances the understanding of lifelong learning and learning cities across different regions and countries. Furthermore, the book analyses key elements of best practices and the interrelations between learning cities and the broader concept of a learning society. The chapters emphasise the importance of local policies and practices, which play a crucial role in the success of learning cities while also acknowledging the influence of global discussions and frameworks that shape their development. The book highlights the challenges and opportunities that arise when implementing learning city initiatives, offering valuable insights into factors that contribute to their sustainability and impact. Notably, by examining diverse case studies, the authors not only showcase success stories but also identify areas for improvement, providing a well-rounded perspective on the evolving landscape of lifelong learning.

What is particularly valuable is that the book takes a forward-looking approach, demonstrating that ensuring a sustainable future requires learning cities to not only address immediate challenges but also cultivate a long-term vision where learning becomes an integral part of urban life. The contributors convincingly illustrate how this is achieved through continuous evolution and adaptation, allowing learning cities to sustain social and economic development while driving positive change. Throughout the chapters, the discussion showcases how learning cities, by responding effectively to both emerging global trends and local needs, enhance the quality of life for individuals and foster inclusive and resilient communities.

This volume provides valuable lessons for both policy and practice. One of its key strengths lies in its comprehensive approach, presenting learning cities as a practical framework for fostering inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban communities. It serves to inspire other cities to adopt similar strategies and contribute to the global network of learning cities. The case studies demonstrate the diverse ways in which cities can foster learning, promote social cohesion, and drive sustainable development.

This book will be of interest to both national and international audiences, including academics, practitioners, and policymakers who seek to understand how lifelong learning intertwines with communities to create inclusive ecosystems where all individuals can thrive. The book offers rich diversity and breadth, encompassing a wide range of countries and authorship, with a variety of perspectives presented. Through an in-depth exploration of country-specific cases, the book makes a strong argument that fostering a culture of learning and promoting inclusivity positions the learning cities movement as a significant global initiative to advance and sustain lifelong learning, social inclusion, and empowerment.

This book was produced with the support of the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub and eucen.

Natasha Kersh
Karen Evans

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