

Beyond Schooling: Learning Cities and Adult Education in the Global South

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter provides an overview of adult and lifelong education through the lens of the learning city, considering the history of this concept's formation and the ways in which it is defined and evaluated, in particular in the global south. The chapter provides a number of examples as to what a learning city looks like in practice and includes a discussion regarding the ways in which learning cities have been actualized across the globe. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the value of creating networks and sharing initiatives, taking into account that this should recognize that learning city initiatives often have a local and place-specific context.

Keywords: learning city, global perspective, second chance, educational opportunity, global educational policy

Introduction

Adult and lifelong education (ALE), in many parts of the world, has transitioned from being a second-chance educational opportunity for adults to becoming a fundamental part of providing “education for all,” central to many educational systems worldwide.¹ As has been rehearsed in the lifelong learning literature since the 1990s, globalization and the rapid rise in new information and technologies have changed the world in profound ways, impacting upon every facet of social life and upon the way in which education is understood globally. Education is no longer confined to schooling at the level of primary and secondary education but is now understood as something that occurs over the life course. Notions of lifelong and life-wide learning cut across formal and non-formal education, with the concept of the learning city increasingly becoming a vehicle that expresses the ideal of what a comprehensive place-based educational offer might comprise. In an rapidly changing world, lifelong learning has gained importance, “not just as a key organising principle for all forms of education and learning, but as an absolute necessity for everyone” (Hanemann, 2016, p. 46). Quality and comprehensive ALE is also a “key component of education and lifelong learning is critical for the achievement of the Sustain-

able Development Goals” (SDGs) (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2018, p. 8) and especially so within a lifelong learning philosophy (Hinzen & Duke, 2019). The city has assumed particular importance in the context of the challenges that the SDGs have presented. We are in a period of rapid urbanization and mass migration from rural areas. The world’s urban population is expected to double by 2050, and it will, as UN-Habitat (2016) argues, not simply be that people will be concentrated in cities but also much of the world’s social, economic, and cultural activities and their concomitant environmental and humanitarian impacts. As Wang and Kintrea (2019) point out, this presents very particular challenges to sustainability in the global south, although these challenges cannot be generalized.

Adult Education in Global Policy: From Education for All to the 2030 Agenda

There have been a number of major global initiatives promulgated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which have contributed to thinking about education and have had major implications for ALE, progressively bringing the field to greater prominence internationally and significantly an increasing recognition of the importance of place.

In May 2000, 165 governments alongside civil society, activists, and a myriad of others gathered in Dakar, Senegal, for the World Education Forum and adopted the Dakar Framework for Action, *Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments*, which committed the world’s community to achieve education for “every citizen in every society.” Specifically, the framework for action specified six goals, of which goals 3 and 4 concerned adult education (Box 1).

Box 1 *Education for All: Goals 3 and 4*

Goal 3: ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

Goal 4: achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

(United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2000)

Not only did the Education for All (EFA) movement stress the right to education for all previously outlined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948), but it also served as a tool for policy and advocacy within all national education systems.

A second key related policy agenda within the realm of international development was that of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to which the EFA movement would be a major contributor. The MDGs were a set of eight goals for international development es-

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established after the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, which, in light of the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, had a wider reach and significance than the EFA goals. However, the MDGs did not include any goals that related to adult education.

A continuous third strand of activity since 1952 has been the work of UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning. In 2009, the sixth meeting of CONFINTEA, UNESCO's international conference on adult learning and education, in Belém, Brazil, which the Institute for Lifelong Learning organized, closed with the commitment to and adoption of a framework for action (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2010). The framework recognized adult education to be "an essential element of the right to education" (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2010, p. 5) and argued for a "new and urgent course of action to enable all young people and adults to exercise this right." The framework provided a focus and guide for a global commitment to adult literacy and adult education through the lens of lifelong learning and argued that "the role of lifelong learning is critical in addressing global educational issues and challenges." Article 17 encouraged countries to commit to accountability and monitoring measures as a way to assess international commitments and progress. This currently takes the form of the regular *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* (GRALE), which is prepared by UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning. The third GRALE report (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016) assessed, inter alia, progress in implementation of the Belém Framework, and the fourth report (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2019) focused on participation in adult learning and education, measurement instruments, and related indicators.

Despite global enthusiasm for and commitment to *Education for All*, neither its six goals (including those pertaining to adult education) nor the two MDGs goals pertaining to primary completion of school and gender parity were met (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015a, 2015b). Among the explanations for the failure of the two *Education for All* goals related to adult education have been that the "reliance on country self-reported information partly undermines the reliability, validity and robustness of the monitoring exercise" (Benavot & Lockhart, 2016, pp. 57–59).

More pertinent, however, perhaps is that our contemporary epoch is one characterized by global financial austerity, and as a result ALE has become a low priority in most parts of the globe and neglected by comparison to formal schooling and youth education. Coupled with this, ALE has been under increasing pressure to "justify itself on the basis of accurate evidence of its accomplishments and its proven impact on the lives of people—not only on their knowledge and skills gained but also on their livelihoods, health and well-being and on their lives as citizens" (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2017a, p. 5).

More positive for ALE in terms of global policy has been a fourth development, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations 2015), which replaced the MDGs with the 17 SDGs and an associated 169 targets. By contrast with the MDGs, ALE received specific attention. SDG 4, "Ensure inclusive and equi-

table quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,” presented a total of 10 targets, five of which relate to youth and adult education (Box 2).

Box 2 Five elements of SDG 4

4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.

(United Nations, 2015)

The SDGs, however, cover much more than education and offer a holistic framework. They are part of a new plan of action for the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social, and environmental. As Wang and Kintrea (2019, p. 146–150) remind us, the SDGs have been promoted by Habitat III within “the New Urban Agenda . . . that promotes a shared vision of cities for all, and have placed the cities at centre stage.”

This has presented new possibilities for advocates of the learning city and for those who have advocated for joined-up policies for adult education that link learning with place, health, and quality of life (see Fitzpatrick & LaGory, 2011; Osborne, 2014).

The Learning City

As Han and Makino (2013) note, the notions of lifelong learning and a learning society came to the fore during the 1970s and 1980s, at a point when learning was considered to be a panacea for the challenges of postindustrial risk societies. The learning society had been a concept first articulated by Hutchins (1970); as Osborne and Hernandez (2020, p. 4) report, this was his “response to the inadequacy of the formal system to respond to the demands of a time of rapid change with opportunity limited to the privileged.” He pro-

posed the need for continuous and inclusive education and was among the first to point toward the city as a locus for learning, citing ancient Athens as an exemplar: “Education was not a segregated activity, conducted for certain hours, in certain places, at a certain time of life. It was the aim of the society. The city educated the man. The Athenian was educated by culture, by *paideia*” (Hutchins 1970, p. 133). There have subsequently been a number of other historical overviews of the role of urban settings as vehicles for learning (see Longworth & Osborne, 2010a, 2010b; Osborne, Houston, & Lido, 2018). Glaeser (2011, p. 24) argues that “From classical Athens to eight-century Baghdad to Nagasaki, cities have always been the most effective way to transfer knowledge between civilisations.”

The idea of a learning society, as is well known, was taken forward in 1972 in UNESCO’s highly influential report *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* (Faure et al., 1972). This report called upon UNESCO member states to restructure their educational systems around two fundamental principles. The first was that all agencies become providers of education, and the second was that all citizens are engaged in learning, taking full advantage of the opportunities provided by the learning society. The city for Faure et al.’s report was a vital component of educational development.

All sectors—public administration, industry, communications, transport—must take part in promoting education. Local and national communities are in themselves eminently educative institutions. As Plutarch said, “the City is the best teacher”. And especially when the city is capable of remaining within human proportions, it does indeed contain 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 et al. 1972, p. 162)

Osborne, Kearns, and Yang (2013, p. 409) have pointed out that “the modern concept of the learning city/region originated from that vision of a ‘learning society,’ which UNESCO brought to the forefront of thinking “amongst education community through the Faure report.” The relationship between lifelong learning and the learning society gained further ground in the subsequent UNESCO report, *Learning: The Treasure Within* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1996), which argued for there to be offered an array of opportunities for learning beyond school that pervade economic, social, and cultural life.

The concept of learning throughout life is the key that gives access to the twenty-first century. It goes beyond the traditional distinction between initial and continuing education. It links up with another concept often put forward, that of the learning society, in which everything affords an opportunity of learning and fulfilling one’s potential. (p. 38)

Here, the notion of a learning city was not made explicit at this point, and rather than UNESCO, it was other international organizations, notably the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union, that were most promi-

ment from the early 1990s in developing the concept, although principally through using terms such as *learning region* and *educating city* (see Commission of the European Union, 2001, 2003; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1993, 2000).

The idea of the learning region can be traced through regional innovation literature and the work of a number of economic geographers, including Storper (1993), Florida (1995), Asheim (1996), and Morgan (1997) as providing the foundations for the concept. The work of Wolfe (2002) argues that a learning region provides an institutional environment where both social learning and private learning are promoted across four levels: individual, company, groups of companies, and government. For Florida (1995), however, the concept of the learning region encompasses knowledge and structures in that learning regions are conceptualized as being both gatherers and sources of knowledge and ideas. This in turn provides the foundations, environment, and infrastructure where the flow of knowledge and ideas are facilitated. Simply put, “the notion of a learning region extends the learning city in scale and scope and is seen generically as referring to a region, city, urban or rural area, regardless of whether its identity is defined in administrative, cultural, geographical, physical or political terms” (Sankey & Osborne 2006, p. 203). However, it has been also argued that there are distinguishing features beyond the geographic and that the learning city concept incorporates the consideration of a wider range of stakeholders, activities, and purposes that extend well beyond those that are economically instrumental (Longworth & Osborne, 2010a, p. 373).

The concept of the “educating city” gained prominence through an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (1993) project in seven cities (Adelaide, Edmonton, Edinburgh, Gothenburg, Kakegawa, Pittsburgh, and Vienna) and further work by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2000) in Andalucia, Oresund, Jena, Thames Gateway, and Vienna. The concept is less distinguishable from that of the learning city in terms of its principles, though it has established itself more strongly in the Spanish-speaking world.

In relation to learning cities, in seeking to provide a comprehensive overview of the concept, Biao, Esaete, and Oonyu (2013) note that between 1992 and 2012 four main components of the learning city emerged from the literature. The first feature, they argue, is that which enables cities’ authorities to provide a range of learning opportunities to residents around history, culture, environment, and health. Second, a learning city provides learning opportunities to all across the life course. Here, Biao et al. (2013) cite the work of Norman Longworth when he defines a learning city to be a town or region [that] recognizes and understands the key role of learning in the development of basic prosperity, social stability and personal fulfilment, and mobilizes all its human, physical, and financial resources creatively and sensitively to develop the full human potential of all its citizens. (Longworth, 1999, p. 4)

Biao et al. (2013) identify the third feature to be that which envisages learning to be a means by which a city and can enhance its economic and social development globally. Finally, the fourth feature relates to that of sustainability, with learning cities functioning in

a way that ensures that key areas such as health, education, well-being, and culture are sustained.

The authors go on to make the point that while the concept of the “learning city” is a wide-reaching one, it has nonetheless “been carried out within the contextual environment of an industrial/knowledge economy. Within this contextual environment, a number of mental orientations and psychological dispositions are taken for granted which are not necessarily in tune with African realities” (Biao et al., 2013, p. 475). The argument had some validity since the notion of the learning city had, despite UNESCO’s seminal role, largely derived from the perspective of countries in the global north, with the OECD and European Commission taking pivotal roles, alongside a range of national initiatives in countries such as Germany (Thinesse-Demel, 2010), the United Kingdom (Hamilton & Jordan, 2011), Canada (Faris 2005), and Australia (Kearns, 2011). However, currently many developments can be found in the global south and have been reported in various parts of Africa (Biao, 2019; Biao et al., 2013; Walters, 2009) and Asia (Han & Makino, 2013; Ju, 2011; Lee, 2013; Li 2011; Osborne & Borkowska, 2017). Further examples of learning cities across all continents have gained significant attention through the work of the PASCAL Observatory and that of UNESCO (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2017a, 2017b; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning & National Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2015), with its refocused attention to learning cities within the framework of their Global Learning Cities Network and the related Learning City Awards. The idea of a learning city is now a widely used conceptual tool and one that has been increasing in significance within developing countries, including within the Centre for Sustainable, Healthy, Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods (SHLC), of which the authors are part. As Osborne and Hernandez (2020, p. 1) argue, “learning cities (and regions) have emerged as a vehicle to drive place-based lifelong learning across the lifespan through formal, non-formal and informal means.”

The Features of Learning Cities and Their Measurement

There exists no hard and fast rule as to what precisely constitutes a learning city, and there exists no absolute blueprint, though a number of researchers around the world have come up with what might be described as desired features and tools of measurement. As Osborne, Kearns, and Yang argue, “developing a learning city is a continuous process, and there is no magic line over which a city/region will pass in order to become known as a learning city/region” (2013, p. 417). Cities are not homogenous in their ethnic or cultural configuration, and they may have different social structures, histories, and heritages, which necessitate different priorities and foci for lifelong learning in different jurisdictions. There are, however, a number of facets that are common to many learning cities: They are underpinned by a broad conceptualization of lifelong learning, a commitment to learning society, a collectivist philosophy, and some potential common elements that are potentially measureable.

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UNESCO has sought to classify these common characteristics in the publication *Key Features of Learning Cities* (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2013), which describes a learning city as follows:

A learning city is one that promotes lifelong learning for all. It effectively mobilizes its resources in every sector to promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education; revitalizes learning in families and communities; facilitates learning for and in the workplace; extends the use of modern learning technologies; enhances quality and excellence in learning; and fosters a culture of learning throughout life. In doing so, the city enhances individual empowerment and social inclusion, economic development and cultural prosperity, and sustainable development. (p. 2)

And in doing it has argued that a learning city will “create and reinforce individual empowerment and social cohesion, economic and cultural prosperity, and sustainable development” (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2013, p. 3). A learning city/learning region is the means by which the universal right to education can be achieved given that at the heart of the learning city is the intentional aim of facilitating lifelong learning. It is in this vein that there are “attributes by which a learning city can be recognized, mainly in terms of what it does rather than what it is” (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2013, p. 4). It has visualized this statement in a diagram, as shown in Figure 1.

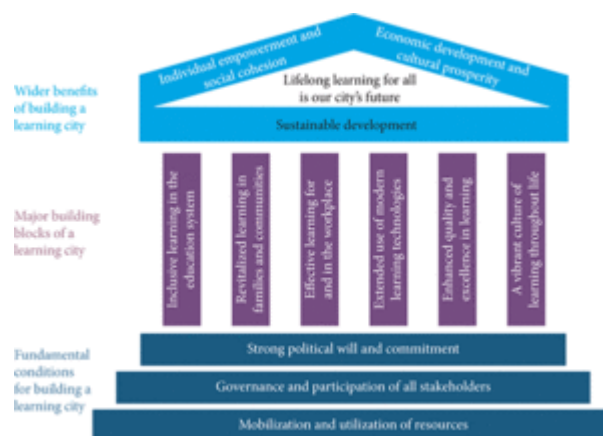


Figure 1. Key Features of Learning Cities (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2015). Republished under CC BY-SA 3.0 IGO License.

Put discursively, the three foundational steps “reflect the fundamental conditions for building a learning city” (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2013, p. 11). These are strong political will and commitment, governance and participation of all stakeholders, and mobilization and utilization of resources. The six columns, the major building blocks, represented specific actions that cities can take in advancing the advancing learning. The pediment reflects the three key wider benefits of building a learning city that these actions will accrue. Underlying the key features are a set of some 42 indicators, some that can potentially be quantified through secondary analysis of administrative data or

through survey and some with qualitative bases based on expert views. UNESCO itself has not operationalized these indicators, though others have sought to do so, for example, through development of questionnaire items for surveys in cities based on elements of preexisting well-validated tools. This includes work in the city of Glasgow in the United Kingdom (see Lido, Osborne, Livingston, Thakuriah, & Sila-Nowicka, 2016; Lido, Reid, & Osborne, 2019).

A range of other tools have been developed over the years, the commonalities of which have been described in four categories by Tibbitt (2018, p. 2) as follows:

- Indexes and rankings based on secondary analysis of existing data—typically used to provide some idea of current performance and comparison with other cities;
- New data collection and surveys—typically used to explore present performance or establish new knowledge and attributes of cities and populations;
- Evaluation approaches—typically used to ascertain the efficiency and/or effectiveness of present or new initiatives, and
- Qualitative instruments for benchmarking and auditing—typically used to assess strengths and weaknesses in present performance or processes.

Also, there are audit tools for learning cities that assess the contribution of particular stakeholders (Longworth & Osborne, 2010b) and the strength of partnerships (Wheeler & Wong, 2015).

It is important to note that when thinking about what makes a learning city, the objective is not to make divisions and distinctions between cities, countries, and continents but rather to recognize that each city will be unique. Progress then, must only be measured by taking into account the context in which each city operates. That is, measurements must acknowledge and take into account each city's cultural, economic, and social history and traditions. This, for example, has been recognized in Beijing, where the Municipal Commission of Education has developed the Beijing Evaluation Index to monitor the city's performance, based on the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning's key features, but attuned its methodology to local urban circumstances (Wu et al., 2015).

Cases of Learning Cities

There is now a burgeoning development of formally designated learning cities that carry UNESCO's Learning City Award, which was conferred in 2015, 2017, and 2019 on a total of 38 cities. Many more cities have joined its Global Network of Learning Cities (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2015, 2017b), and they have been brought together at four biennial conferences since 2013, in Beijing, Mexico City, Cork, and most recently Medellin. In 2015, criteria for learning city awards focused on incorporating social cohesion, individual empowerment, cultural prosperity, economic development, and sustainable development (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning & National Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2015). The formalization is a global context of learning cities continued in

2017 and 2019, though with a recognition that cities with the award are at different stages of development. Furthermore, it should be recognized that many cities around the world have self-declared as learning cities well before the UNESCO initiative and promoted developments of considerable breadth in the domain without having sought recognition on the global stage. These include cities such as Victoria in Canada and Glasgow in the United Kingdom, both of which have designated themselves as learning cities since 1999.

Cases of learning cities collectively demonstrate multiple engagements with citizens that seek to promote social and economic inclusion. Each learning city focuses on a number of dimensions of activity, with different emphases found from one city to another. The work promoted by UNESCO and the PASCAL Observatory provides many profiles of learning cities and illustrations of engagements within this umbrella. In their briefing paper for the fourth UNESCO International Conference on Learning Cities in Medellin, Osborne and Hernandez (2020) have assessed a range of activities that focus on social inclusion, drawing on cases that demonstrate work with a range of excluded groups in cities across the world. The cases that they highlight include cities that focus on migrants (Hangzhou, People's Republic of China), vulnerable youth (Contagem, Brazil), the digitally excluded (Glasgow, UK), people in slums and deprived neighborhoods (Giza, Egypt), the disabled (Duhok, Iraq), and indigenous peoples (Victoria, Canada). They also illustrate through other cases the potential importance of having a national policy system and legislation, as is the case with the Republic of Korea (Han & Makino, 2013); of the benefits of inter-sectoral collaboration, citing Pecs in Hungary; and of city-level planning that embeds lifelong learning across portfolios of local governance and planning, as demonstrated by Cork in Ireland.

They remind us of five specific considerations when assessing the progress of the learning city concept: supply and demand, the heterogeneity of social exclusion, multi-sector interventions, the exclusion of the disabled, and the problems of policy borrowing.

Firstly, models of learning cities are not in all cases based on citizen demand or need but, rather, are top-down implementations, albeit often with good intentions, by civic leaders. Truly inclusive models engage citizens as active participants in developments as co-constructors. The case of the city of Victoria, with its long-standing commitment to being a learning city (Faris, 2004, 2005), illustrates through its work with youth and with indigenous peoples, as part of community-wide reconciliation efforts, an example of dialogue with citizens and an effort to rethink fundamental governance issues. This is perhaps in contrast with many cities that have embraced "smart city" developments, which, as Borkowska and Osborne (2018) report, tend to be driven in a top-down fashion by technology companies and those who govern, rather than the needs of residents.

Secondly, social inclusion tends to be paramount in learning city development; but socially excluded groups are not homogeneous, and many individuals experience multiple forms of exclusion that cross our siloed categorizations of disadvantage (Tefera, Powers, & Fischman, 2018). For example, *ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, and disabled people* are

often labels used to characterize groups; but in reality, each of these labels is a simplification and can lead to a lack of nuanced interventions.

Thirdly interventions that are not multi-sectoral in urban settings may be doomed to failure; educational interventions may, for example, need to be accompanied by consideration of factors such as health, transport, and housing infrastructure. The interrelationship between such factors and the need to ensure that all potential players in learning have been fundamental in much of the foundational literature of learning cities. Longworth and Osborne (2010b, p. 370) report that the “central theme of stakeholders working together has remained as a major tenet of the learning region lexicon until this day.” In effect, this means not only joined-up governance and planning for learning across local government departments but also engagement of the private sector, quasi-governmental agencies and nongovernmental organizations. It involves a recognition of the roles of cultural (museums, galleries, and libraries) and natural (local and national parks) assets in learning. It also may involve an understanding of the interconnectedness of public services: a public transport system that links people and educational opportunity, learning opportunities within easy reach of everyone in a city, a recognition of the mutually beneficial association between health and education interventions. These issues have been fundamental in the work of the PASCAL Observatory and are best expressed in the EcCoWell model (Kearns, 2018), which promotes integrating strategies to maximize the positive impacts on the health and educational opportunities of all citizens as well as developing the environmental and economic sustainability of the city, resulting in greater equality, social inclusion, and ultimately quality of life. It was developed as a concept within the PASCAL International Exchanges program and has been taken on most fully by the city of Cork in Ireland.

Fourthly as with many educational initiatives around the world, relatively little attention has been given to the disabled in learning city developments and the heterogeneity of disability. Despite the fact that the disabled are disproportionately disadvantaged and marginalized, there is relatively little evidence, in learning city developments, of their being a focus of attention. The case of Duhok provided by Osborne and Hernandez (2020), however, represents a particularly compelling example of an intervention for physically and mentally disabled refugees in a major conflict zone in Iraq.

Finally, while it is important to create networks and to share initiatives, learning city initiatives often have a local and place-specific context; and there are dangers in uncritically transferring policies and practices from one city to another, referred to as “policy borrowing” by Phillips and Ochs (2003).

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Notes:

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