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GNLC/PASCAL Webinar: The challenge of inclusion in learning cities, building on the work of the Fourth International Conference on Learning Cities

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and PASCAL International Observatory

On Wednesday 17 June 2020, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) together with the PASCAL Observatory hosted Webinar 1 of this series, entitled, *The challenge of inclusion in learning cities, building on the work of the Fourth International Conference on Learning Cities*. An introduction to the topic was provided by **Mr Raúl Valdés Cotera** of UIL, which was followed by an opening address by **Michael Osborne**, Professor of Adult and Lifelong Learning at the University of Glasgow, and PASCAL Director of Europe and then by presentations on city initiatives by representatives of Medellín, Mantes-la-Jolie and Melton.

The Moderator for the Webinar was **Ms Marie Macauley**, Programme Specialist, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, who reported that this Webinar builds upon the Fourth International Conference on Learning Cities which was held in Medellín, Colombia in September 2019. She reminded participants, who number 146 persons, that over the past two months that the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning has been responding to issues related to COVID-19 in a variety of ways (see <https://uil.unesco.org/covid-19-response>) which had included a previous series of webinars. The new series with PASCAL was explicitly focused on issues of research on learning cities and their implications for practice.

Raúl Valdés Cotera's opening remarks reminded participants that there had been two main objectives of the conference in Medellín: firstly, a better understanding of inclusion as part of lifelong learning and sustainable development and secondly the chance for cities to share experiences on the implementation of local actions that support inclusion through lifelong learning and that have an impact on vulnerable groups. He also reported that there have also been intangible outcomes that are clearly reflected in the very consolidated network that UIL already has, and that this is reflected in activities, and continued dialogue on equity and inclusion of different groups during the time of the pandemic. He stressed that in this new series of webinar that the knowledge that PASCAL offers brings to discussions a very interactive dimension, that can open dialogue based on research and also based on practices. Reflecting on the challenges of inclusion, he reflected on the many challenges cities face as they grow, particularly those concerning infrastructure. People come to cities in search of better lives, greater safety, basic services, and decent work. Learning opportunities must be of high quality, inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds and available to all. While cities must concentrate on inclusive physical infrastructure, particularly to include people with disabilities, cities must not forget inclusive learning in all its modalities (formal, informal, and non-formal) and the cultivation of social inclusion across all spheres and spaces (families, communities, workplaces, libraries, museums, digital platforms and beyond).

Michael Osborne reminded participants that the PASCAL International Observatory have been working in the field of learning cities for over 20 years. He commenced by referring to research that he had conducted in collaboration with Professor Norman Longworth, and other colleagues in Europe, which had provided a foundation for much of PASCAL's work, emphasising that concept of the city as a locus of learning is longstanding. PASCAL itself had been operating networks of learning cities for some years. He reported some the key concepts that underpin learning city development that had been developed in an extensive Briefing Paper that he had written for the Medellín conference with

Sergio Hernandez : learning society; formal, non-formal and informal knowledge; indigenous knowledge; equity, collectivism vs individualism; regulatory and policy frameworks; intersectoral collaboration; knowledge co-construction and so forth. He reported that a focus on Indigenous knowledge is often missing in conversations around learning cities and cited the case of Victoria in Canada as an excellent example of an exception to this trend (see <http://www.victoria.ca/reconciliation>). He gave a number of examples of other cities around the world that are focusing on specific disadvantaged groups, and offered examples of initiatives that have focused on migrants, youth people, older adults, prisoners, the disabled and people living in slums and deprived neighbourhoods. He also pointed out the disjunctions between different city initiatives, pointing to the fact that smart city debates often do not mention learning at all. He reflected that older adults, the disabled and prisoners are largely left behind in learning city developments and left the audience with some questions to ponder:

- What levers can cities use to facilitate inclusion in education?
- How are the needs and demands of excluded groups best addressed in cities?
- Are there best practices of 'joined-up' service delivery to promote inclusive learning?
- Is inclusion enough or do we need to change the nature of institutions?
- What can we learn from responses to COVID-19?

City of Medellín, Colombia

Medellín is a member of the UIL GNLC and has recently joined the PASCAL Learning Cities Network (LCN). Ms **Alexandra Agudelo Ruiz**, Secretary of Education for the city began her presentation with an overview of developments. In the 1990's, Colombia suffered from extreme crime, much of which was connected with drugs, and Medellin was considered one of the most dangerous cities in the world. Today, it has improved its health and education services, in line with principles to combat inequity . It has strong education policies that have helped with the social infrastructure of the city, including a high levels of financial investment built upon the core issue of concern with addressing student diversity. She focused on support for individuals with disability from initial to secondary education and minors who are ill and hospitalised. She also reported that some 25,659 children and adolescents are found within the Colombia, who regardless of their nationally and immigration status need international protection: they are offered full education and protection. Finally Ms Agudelo Ruiz described the strong focus on Ser + (to be more) and STEM, with a focus on female students.

City of Mantes-la-Jolie, France UNESCO GNLC,

Ms **Aminata Diawara**, Officer-in-charge Learning City presented on behalf of the UNESCO GNLC city, Mantes-la-Jolie. She reported that the region surrounding the city was highly affected by COVID-19, with lockdown occurring for over 2 months. It is one of the poorest regions of Paris. There is a strong political commitment for developing Mantes-la-Jolie as a learning city, including by the Mayor, and it was the second city in France to adopt this framework. It has regular exchanges with other French learning cities, including Clermont-Ferrand, Evry-Courcouronnes and Montpellier, and is the co-leader of the cluster "inclusion and equity" within GNLC. She reported in the many and various interventions that have been offered during the COVID-19 pandemic, including several new municipal services. Laptops had been supplied to 250 families of primary schoolchildren and there had been organisation of tutoring for families and students by young people. Citizen-based initiatives concerned with the fabrication of masks, and the development of a special platform for those 65+ were reported.

City of Melton, Australia

Ms **Cassandra Connelly**, Lifelong Learning Projects Officer at the City of Melton reported on the work of this GNLC city. She reported that the city is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia. From having been a small town, it is now a bustling suburb of greater Melbourne. Part of this rapid growth has seen the need for additional community hubs and places for community to gather and learn in a social setting. In order to address community needs and interests the city used informal and formal feedback processes and acts on their results modifying programs accordingly. This is done through the program logic and evaluation system, with a focus on being responsive to need and demand. The governance body, the Community Learning Board, includes individuals from across sectors of the Council and external stakeholders, and works on economic, social, personal, and cultural wellbeing for all. The creation of the Melton Learning Directory has been one way to reach the community as has been the annual Learning Festival. The learning team are also seeing an increase in people who are engaging in the virtual space who had never attended in person. The city is now targeting 200 seniors and people from Non-English Speaking (NESP) to have classes around digital literacy through a mobile digital literacy initiative. Finally, Ms Connelly reported the city's strategic goals for learning over the next decade.

Throughout the webinar, participants were able to pose questions, which we then posed to the speakers by Ms Macauley. Themes that emerged included: Inclusion in Education v Inclusive Education; the role of ALE to promote inclusion; Pandemic responses and post-COVID perspectives; Education in prisons; Violence and Lifelong Learning interventions; Measurement and Monitoring approaches. Not all questions could be answered in the time available, though panellists offered both verbal and text responses.

Inclusion in Education v Inclusive Education

Questions posed in this area included the following

- It inclusion enough or is institutional change required?
- How can we leverage existing technologies for inclusion (for people with visual impairment and intellectual disabilities)?
- What strategies might be adopted to include communities who live in rural and remote areas?
- There are many different groups who are socially excluded: how should cities prioritise engagement with all these groups?
- How can we leverage culture to promote the inclusion of youth?

The main responses addressed the rural/urban issues. In Medellín, the programme, *Protective Environments in Medellín*, provides learning activities in deprived communities using printed materials and radio regardless of geographical location. Also, through technology, there are attempts to reach out to rural deprived areas. The focus in Medellín is to reach people with disabilities in rural deprived areas by also providing psychological support. Melton, whilst itself not providing opportunities for rural, deprived learners, reported that in Australia at the national level there has been a focus on the use of greater broadband connectivity to increase participation in learning. Mantes-la-Jolie is basically urban and also has no rural deprived areas. However, attention is given to families that do not possess electronic devices to communicate with a goal is to facilitate adult learning within families. PASCAL emphasised that smaller places are typically 'left behind' in many city-oriented initiatives and reported its focus on developing learning communities in such places, including through its rural and remote network with places in Australia and small towns such as Korma in Belarus.

The role of ALE to promote inclusion

The focus in many learning initiatives continues to be children and youths, and though a number of cities have considered the involvement of parents and grandparents in family-based learning, the link made to adult learning is often missing. While there have been numerous observations about the digital and internet inequities, there has been less said about the valuable contribution of adult literacy to intergenerational learning. A key issue is how we can more effectively use the concept of learning cities to help highlight and sustain the awareness of the value of adult learning. ALE has been reinforced as alternative to promote other forms of learning within the family and community sectors but more resources and promotion are needed at a global scale. However, In Melton, a variety of activities have been offered to seniors during the pandemic, for example local performances for adults living in isolation. Online dancing, yoga and technology classes have promoted the engagement of seniors and it has also been important to teach offer training in the use of platforms such as Zoom to facilitate contact with family and friends. The promotion of social life for seniors in Mantes-la-Jolie has also been of importance for the city where there has been acknowledgement of the importance of digital tools. In Medellín, the Secretariat of Social Inclusion and Family has designed a programme for elderly people that looks at the development of families as well as the provision of food and a safe environment.

Pandemic responses and post-COVID perspective

In general terms, the COVID pandemic has made inequalities more visible. It has however, helped to highlight the value of intergenerational learning. Some of the best responses to tackle exclusion have been multi-platform radio, TV as well as digital approaches. There are, for example, many new forms of engagement through Youtube channel and other sources.

Michael Osborne reported that there have been many very good examples of community development and engagement with older generations and excluded people in Glasgow during the pandemic, and also of adult learning provision though online means. It was suggested that the way in which the education services are provided by cities should be ever more interrelated with other services. In short learning perhaps should sit at the heart of all services. The crisis has provided a concrete opportunity to discuss and evaluate the important inter-relationship between health and education, and in general dialogues between different sectors is crucial to develop better responses to crises.

In some cities, non-formal education and family learning has been promoted during the pandemic as a new modality. However there is a paradox that adult learning has been almost invisible as part of responses. Whilst the formal sector of schools and universities has been in crisis and received considerable attention, adult education has received little coverage, making the role of UIL to raise awareness and to advocate for the sector vital.

However, of course, many examples were cited of exceptions. In Melton, many teachers have been involved in promoting home activities that have a benefit for all generations, such as cooking gardening. In Medellín, non-formal education is very important, because it reaches over 1.5 million citizens. The provision of training and technical education has been a determinant for the development of Medellín. Mantes-la-Jolie has launched the educative summer as a strategy with volunteers and different partnerships, with the goal to provide activities both in the formal and non-formal sector. The vision is to offer a mixed perspective of learning opportunities.

Education in prisons; Violence and Lifelong Learning interventions; Measurement and Monitoring approaches.

These topics all received questions from participants though without the possibility to respond at the time. Questions and comments included:

- Is there evidence of impact of prison-related initiatives?
- The reason why learning city activities rarely include prisoners in developing countries is that facilitators may interact with persons that leaders may wish to hide away in prisons
- Can we use learning cities approach to help reduce Gender-Based violence increase in cities and at home due to COVID 19?
- Is there any specific inclusion initiative in Medellin with a focus on peacebuilding in deprived neighbourhoods?
- What indicators have been used to keep track between lifelong learning/education programs and the social improvements.
- How effective are learning cities at improving their collection of data and information people from different groups including those from marginalised groups as well as their formal and non-formal learning?

As Michael Osborne responded, these and other questions raised suggest that participants had identified a very significant and full research agenda for the future. The next webinar on 8 July will focus on the issue of measurement and evaluation. The session concluded with closing remarks from Mr Raúl Valdés Cotera, who expressed his thanks to all involved.

This summary was prepared by Michael Osborne, University of Glasgow/PASCAL Observatory with support from Sergio Hernandez, University of Glasgow, Jac Torres Gomez, City of Wyndham and Leone Wheeler, Australian Community Learning Network/Pascal Observatory