

**A New Model of Partnership with
Imagination, Empathy and Well-Being**

**Towards EcCoWell 3 as an Innovative Learning EcCosystem
directed at a sustainable world**

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Executive summary

The PASCAL EcCoWell Community Recovery Program was conducted in 2020 with the Wolverhampton, Cork, Limerick, Wyndham, and Cotonou learning cities participating, along with the Harlem New York and Datong Taipei learning neighbourhoods/districts, as well as Glasgow University and the Beijing Academy of Educational Sciences.

The EcCoWell concept of integrated/holistic development in learning cities was developed by PASCAL in 2012 for cities participating in the PASCAL PIE program. The concept has evolved since 2012 with the 2020 program the latest stage of development. All participants produced reports on their community recovery action, with the Wyndham report including the concept of “a new model of partnership with empathy”.

This paper builds on that concept of and expands it as “A new model of partnership with imagination, empathy, and well-being.” Part 2 of the paper explores each of the components in the model, in light of the EcCoWell experience, including the 2020 Community Recovery Report.

A key finding of the EcCoWell Community Recovery Program was the significance of action to support well-being in a period of turbulent change with an increase in mental health disorders, so that supporting mental health and well-being in learning cities and neighbourhoods is a key objective of this paper. This is supported by action in local communities as in the learning neighbourhood examples in the EcCoWell report.

Part 3 of the paper explores how applications of this “new model of partnership” could be made in learning cities and neighbourhoods addressing objectives such as well-being, inclusion, opportunities, and sustainability. The paper draws on examples from the reports of the EcCoWell Community Recovery Program.

The final part of the paper examines how the EcCoWell concept has evolved as a dynamic innovative learning ecosystem. The current stage is designated EcCoWell 3. Local and global challenges are discussed in the context of the need to rethink learning cities and neighbourhoods in the present era of uncertain and disruptive change. This will include rethinking the concept of learning as a key instrument for a sustainable world.

The challenge for EcCoWell 3 development as an innovative learning ecosystem in an uncertain changing world will be to build on the principles and experience that emerged from the 2020 EcCoWell report, in local and global contexts, so as to foster local and global consciousness, and awareness of these vital interdependencies in a deeply connected world confronted by turbulent change.

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PART 1 Introduction

In an era of turbulent change, there is evolving a new model of partnership marked by broader and stronger partnerships, imagination and empathy, and a priority concern, for the well-being of people, in work and their lives generally. This may be seen as a new learning ecosystem that has evolved from PASCAL work on learning cities over some years.

This concept has evolved, in particular, from the PASCAL EcCoWell approach to integration and holistic development, and was given shape in a report prepared by the Wyndham Learning City, as “a new model of partnership with empathy”, for the PASCAL EcCoWell Community Recovery Program (Gomez, 2020).

Learning cities have been challenged by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in a context of multiple challenges posed by ageing populations, the evolving technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the continued impact of urbanisation. This has led to a context of permanent transition in the evolution towards a technology driven longevity society (Kearns & Reghenzani-Kearns, in press).

The PASCAL EcCoWell approach to learning city development was devised as a way of integrating the strands of city development, with an initial focus on learning, health, and environment dimensions. The concept evolved to a second stage, as EcCoWell 2, with a growing interest in well-being and happiness, and entrepreneurship.

The outcomes of the 2020 EcCoWell Community Recovery Program may be seen as a further stage in the development of the EcCoWell concept marked by the dimensions reflected in *The New Model of Partnership with Imagination, Empathy, and Well-being*. This paper explores how this approach might be harnessed to address traditional objectives of learning cities such as inclusion, sustainability, and equal opportunities.

PART 2 A New Model of Partnership with Imagination, Empathy, and Well-being

This EcCoWell3 concept that emerged from the 2020 EcCoWell Community Recovery Program will involve re-imagining the future with a new lens focussed on stronger partnerships, imagination, empathy, and well-being. This approach is defined by the features listed below, and is then applied in Part 3 to addressing well-being, inclusion, sustainability, and opportunity issues.

Features of this approach are:

1. The evolution and strengthening of collaboration.
2. Stronger public and private collaboration.
3. The key roles of imagination and empathy.
4. The priority given to well-being and mental health.
5. A more active role of business and industry.
6. The increasing importance of local neighbourhoods and networks.

Commentary on these features follows:

1. The evolution and strengthening of collaboration

The Sustainability Institute in a 2020 paper on *Leveraging the Power of Collaboration* noted that collaboration was *evolving and changing*. This was seen as driven by factors that included:

- *The increasing urgency of sustainability topics is serving as a stimulant.*
- *The uptake of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is enabling cross-sector and multi-stakeholder partnerships.*
- *Companies are being more proactive and strategic with time and resource investments.* (Sustainability Institute, 2020:3)

These influences also include the broader recognition by industry of stakeholders, which include “local communities and society at large”, in the concept of Stakeholder Capitalism adopted by the World Economic Forum in its 2020 Davos Manifesto (WEF, 2020).

These influences are leading to greater diversity in business models, including in recovery from the COVID 19 pandemic, with more recognition of a wider range of stakeholders. The Sustainability Institute also identified four trends that will shape collaboration over the next 3-5 years:

- Diversity, inclusion and equity topics will be the focus of new collaborations.
- Collaborations will increasingly address intersectoral challenges.
- Broadening collaborations will drive innovations in collaborations.
- Despite technological advances, future collaborations will lean heavily on interpersonal connections.

These trends are relevant to the future development of learning cities and neighbourhoods, and may be observed in the participant reports in the EcCoWell Community Recovery Program where the intersectoral nature of EcCoWell encouraged these trends. We comment further in PART 3 below on inclusion and cross-sectoral trends that may be observed in the participant reports, along with a broadening of partnerships and developments in public and private collaboration.

2. Stronger public and private collaboration

The United Nations through its Habitat agency has advocated strong public and private collaboration in the development of human settlements as one of two key objective in fostering a “recover better” approach from the COVID-19 pandemic. These are:

- New ways of designing the relationship between governments and private actors that puts public interest at the centre;
- A collective lucidity on the depth of global interdependence, and on the fact that the world is only as resilient as the least resilient country and person (Sharif, 2020).

These objectives were affirmed by Maimunah Sharif, Executive-Director of UN Habitat late in 2020 at a ceremony for the signing of a MOU between Habitat and the Government of Singapore for collaboration to improve cities around the world. The Singapore Centre for Liveable Cities will work with UN-Habitat on this program and will draw on Singapore's strength in designing liveable cities. This partnership illustrates innovation in new kinds of public/private collaborations that are emerging.

The Wolverhampton City Learning Region report in the EcCoWell Community Recovery program illustrates public and private collaboration in action. Wolverhampton has addressed mental health and well-being issues with a Mind@Work program developed to address issues identified. This involves collaboration between public and private organisations and agencies with Wolverhampton Learning Communities partners such as the following:

- Workers Education Association who focused on coping/relaxation strategies and other employability skills.
- Wolverhampton Healthy Minds who carried out a Mental Health assessment.
- Department for Work and Pensions who promoted the programme as an opportunity in recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. (Sahota, Lewis & Mahoney, 2020).

Public and private collaboration across the levels of government is a feature of the Wolverhampton experience that should become common in learning city development.

3. The key role of imagination and empathy.

A key aspect of re-imagining the future with a new lens in the search for a sustainable future, is the part played by imagination and empathy. The intimate relationships between imagination and developing empathic consciousness merit exploring in developing sustainable learning cities and neighbourhoods. Rifkin explored the relationships of imagination, empathy, awe, and spirituality with the following conclusions:

- Empathy is impossible without imagination.
- Empathy is the means by which we transcend ourselves, by exploring our relationships and connections with the awe of being.
- It is awe that inspires all human imagination.
- Salvaging a sense of awe as well as faith in the meaning of existence requires a nurturing environment to allow embodied experience to grow and empathic consciousness to expand. (Rifkin, 2009:169-173).

Several participant reports in the PASCAL EcCoWell Community Recovery Program explored these relationships which are fundamental in building inclusive and sustainable communities in a period of turbulent change in the transition to a technology-driven longevity society. Giving

meaning and purpose to lives in this context should be a priority for learning cities. We list some examples from the EcCoWell Community Response Program below.

Makino also explored the power of a life of imagination and empathy.

An imaginative life is a creative life. There will be tolerance and acceptance and an enlarged consciousness that expands local and global dimensions. (Makino, 2020:11)

Imagination and empathy are important in fostering local and global consciousness in communities, and an understanding of global interdependence as a foundation for a sustainable society (Schuller, Osborne & Biao, 2020). Cultural institutions and libraries can have an important role in building a culture with these qualities. The Harlem New York and Datong Taipei reports provided examples, while the report of the PASCAL International Conference held in Östersund in 2011 recognised the increasing significance of cultural and heritage issues in a world of mass migration with growing diversity in communities (Kearns, Kling & Wistman eds, 2011). Imagination and empathy can play an important role in connecting cultural heritage, regional development, and social cohesion in a world of increasing fragmentation. Their role in promoting well-being is discussed in Part 3 of this paper.

A number of the reports in the PASCAL EcCoWell Community Recovery Program provided good examples of imagination and empathy being harnessed in supporting community recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and taking steps towards a good sustainable future. These included the following:

- The initiative by the Wyndham and Melton learning cities in establishing a Global Learning Festival using technology.
- The development of an Eco-City and Happy Farm by the Datong learning district.
- The Justice Seedbed project by the New York Harlem learning neighbourhood.
- The development of a Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods by Glasgow University that built a consortium with nine research partners in eight countries in Asia and Africa.
- The initiative of the Chaoyang Community College for Seniors in Beijing to develop a cloud-based program with innovations in teaching and evaluation.

(Kearns & Reghenzani-Kearns eds, 2020)

Such imaginative initiatives were perhaps the outstanding feature of the PASCAL EcCoWell Community Recovery Program, illustrating how adversity can breed ingenuity and innovation. Jac Torres-Gomez followed up her work for the Wyndham learning city report for EcCoWell by devising *A Recipe for Empathic Partnerships*. This covers:

- *Assessment and design: initial establishment of partnerships riven by empathy.*
- *Implementation: rolling out shared projects using empathic partnerships.*
- *Evaluating empathic partnerships (Torres-Gomez, 2021).*

This may be seen as an alternative approach to building sustainable empathic partnerships from the approach outlined in this paper which is directed at learning cities and neighbourhoods viewed as learning and innovation ecosystems, although there are points of connection. Overall, the need exists for many innovative projects to test how sustainable learning ecosystems can be developed in different contexts.

4. The priority given to well-being and mental health

The main conclusion of the PASCAL EcCoWell2 Community Recovery Program was the need to support peoples' well-being in adjusting to on-going turbulent change.

This reflects interest in briefing papers prepared for the program, particularly the paper on Mental Health and Well-being (Kearns & Lido, 2020) which drew on findings from positive psychology. It was also recognised that mental health was a productivity issue, as well as a welfare issue.

This recognition was taken up in the UK report on Mental Capital and Wellbeing (UK Government Office for Science, 2008). This report suggests action to be taken throughout life: in childhood and adolescence, and for older adults. The ageing of the population with the emerging longevity society, points to the need to develop policies to support well-being in people as they age, including remaining as active participants in society (Kearns & Reghenzani-Kearns, in press).

The UK report suggests five ways to support mental well-being.

- Connect with others, including in your local community.
- Be active.
- Be curious and take notice.
- Keep learning.
- Give, as volunteers and with relations with other people and the community.

(UK Government Office of Science, 2008:21)

These conclusions have much in common with the 2020 Kearns & Lido Briefing Paper, and the 2018 Report of the PASCAL/PIMA report on active ageing (Kearns & Reghenzani-Kearns eds).

The report of the EcCoWell Community Recovery program confirmed the importance for well-being of continuing to learn through life. The program also confirmed the need to rethink lifelong learning in the changing lifecourse (Schuller, Osborne & Biao, 2020).

The relationships between fostering well-being and the traditional objectives of learning cities- such as inclusion, sustainability, and opportunities are discussed in Part 3 of this paper.

5. A more active role for business and industry

There is a growing evolution in the attitudes of business and industry towards their role and responsibilities in society. This has been fuelled in part by the experience of business in the COVID-19 pandemic, although global issues such as climate change are also contributing to the shift.

This trend was confirmed by the World Economic Forum at its January 2020 meeting when it adopted the *Davos Manifesto on the Universal Purpose of a Company in the Fourth Industrial Revolution*. The “Universal Purpose” involved a shift from “shareholder capitalism” to “stakeholder capitalism”.

The purpose of a company is to engage with all stakeholders in shared and sustained value creation. In creating such value, a company serves not only its shareholders, but all its stakeholders- employees, customers, local communities and society at large.

(World Economic Forum, 2020)

This recognition of “local communities and society at large” provides a basis for a more active role of business and industry in building learning cities that advance shared interest. These common interests include maintaining the skill levels and employability of an ageing work, and contributing to the sustainability of communities, and the nation, through addressing environmental issues such as climate change.

The Davos Manifesto recognises these interests with the company fulfilling “human and societal aspirations as part of the broader social system. Performance must be measured not only on the return to shareholders, but also on how it achieves its environmental, social and good governance objectives (World Economic Forum, 2020:1).

The recognition that the potential exists for a stronger role for business and industry in learning cities and neighbourhoods raises the question of how this is best achieved. The argument of this paper for a *New Model of Partnership with Imagination, Empathy, and Well-being* is an argument for an expanded and deeper concept of partnership with more stakeholders engaged as partners. This suggests a process of co-creation of partnership arrangements, including learning city arrangements, with a clear strategy to build, evaluate, expand and deepen partnerships.

In discussing future working arrangements, Gratton and Scott note the growing interest in “flexible, smart cities” such as San Francisco, Seattle, and Boston with cluster development a common feature. These examples also show the role of strong universities such as Stanford and MIT. This is important in strengthening the role of business and industry in the “new model of partnership” discussed in this paper. Where these universities have research centres focused on emerging socio-economic issues, such as the Stanford Longevity Center researching responses to ageing populations, the potential exists to progress the “new model of

partnership” and build models that can be widely replicated throughout society in building smart flexible cities that are inclusive and sustainable.

6. The increasing importance of local neighbourhoods and networks

A key feature in the development of the EcCoWell approach to learning cities and neighbourhoods since 2017 has been the growing interest in learning neighbourhoods as the arena where central objectives of learning cities, such as inclusion and social coherence, need to be fought and progressed. The findings of the EcCoWell Community Recovery Program with the strong interest in psycho-social issues, such as mental health, empathy, and well-being, has enhanced this interest so that the role of inclusive learning neighbourhoods should be central to any further development of the EcCoWell concept to a new stage.

Both the Cork and Limerick learning cities have conducted pilot projects on learning neighbourhoods and held a joint collaborative webinar in September 2020 titled *Learning Neighbourhood Reflections: Positive Local Actions During Challenging Times* to consider the insights gained from the pilot project (Lane, 2020:18). While Cork had a longer history in developing learning neighbourhoods, and brought visits to neighbourhoods into the UNESCO Third International Conference on Learning Cities in 2017 (which Cork hosted), the establishment of the Limerick Learning Neighbourhoods in 2019 added to the experienced gained in building inclusive learning neighbourhoods. Both cities recognised the important role of their annual Learning Festival in extending participation in lifelong learning.

Cork showed the value of learning neighbourhood development during the COVID-19 pandemic when the city implemented Action 4 of the National Action Plan to “mobilise community co-ordination to collaborate in meeting the social care and other needs of “at risk” and vulnerable groups”. The experience gained through the Cork learning city was a valuable resource for the new community Forum with the co-ordinator of the Cork learning city identified as the appropriate person to co-ordinate the new Forum (Barrett & McAuliffe, 2020).

The main findings of the EcCoWell Community Recovery Program with the emphasis on mental health and well-being at a time of turbulent change, has enhanced further the significance of the role of local learning neighbourhoods as the arena where a sustainable learning culture needs to be built, facilitated by the New Model of Partnership with Imagination, Empathy and Well-being.

While the Cork and Limerick learning neighbourhoods were developed as an aspect of learning city development, the experience of the Harlem New York and Datong Taipei initiatives showed that learning neighbourhoods and districts could be developed independent of a learning city initiative.

The key factor in each of these initiatives, which were both innovative, was the leadership role of a community college or centre, or similar cultural institution. This role was undertaken by the Wells-Ortiz Gallery and Centre (acting for the City Seminary of New York) in the case of the

Harlem initiative, and the Datong Community College as the driver of the Datong initiative. The 2018 PASCAL/PIMA SIG report had shown how community learning centres, such as *kominkan* in Japan, and *volkshochschulen* in Germany could undertake a similar community learning role (Kearns & Reghenzani-Kearns eds, 2018).

Both the Datong and Harlem institutions had previously participated in PASCAL EcCoWell development so that each brought a mature understanding of how EcCoWell ideas could be applied to foster innovation in fostering inclusion and well-being objectives.

A significant implication of this experience is that learning city ideas can be applied in districts or neighbourhoods without necessarily being a component of a learning city initiative. This insight points to ways of building learning city ideas in big cities such as London, Paris, New York, Chicago where learning city ideas have made little progress, but where progress could be made at a local or district level if a local institution had the will and experience to provide leadership in the community.

A further insight of these projects points to the need to foster a coherent approach at each of the levels of development (city, district, suburb, neighbourhood) so that roles and responsibilities are clearly known. The Beijing learning city proves a good example with roles at these levels well defined. A feature of the Beijing approach is the leadership provided by universities, such as the Beijing Normal University and the Beijing Academy of the Educational Sciences in some cases supporting action by community colleges at a local level, as in the Beijing Academy of Educational Sciences report (Min Gui, 2020).

PART 3 – Some Applications

Part 3 of this paper examines how the lens of a *New Model of Partnership with Imagination, Empathy, and Well-being* could be applied in addressing traditional objectives of learning cities: wellbeing, inclusion, sustainability, and equal opportunities.

This approach is seen as taking the PASCAL EcCoWell model of integration in learning city development to a new stage of development as EcCoWell3.

7. Well-being

Well-being is discussed in Part 2 of this paper as a core objective of the New Model of Partnership. While these comments point to the growing significance of mental health and well-being in a period of turbulent change, and carry over to consideration of policies and strategies to enhance well-being, there are two further points to add to the analysis of this paper.

1. All applications discussed in this paper- inclusion, sustainability, opportunities have consequences for the well-being of people, so that connections need to be made between these applications and well-being objective.

2. The growing significance of mental health on well-being brings the need to connect the “outer world and the inner world of lived experience”.

The conclusion of the EcCoWell 2020 report on the significance of psycho-social aspects of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in addressing mental health and well-being objectives, brings the challenge of connecting the inner and outer worlds of people in recovery from the pandemic. We comment on this challenge in Part 4 below as a key aspect of developing EcCoWell 3 as a dynamic innovative learning ecosystem.

This need to connect the outer and inner aspects of the experience of people, and to build local and global consciousness in fostering well-being, inclusion, and sustainability, brings greater complexity to policy development, but also a stronger foundation for building an inclusive and sustainable world. We are calling this EcCoWell3 as marking a further stage in EcCoWell development.

The imperative of connecting between humans and the larger planetary world has been taken up in a paper titled *Learning to become with the world: Education for future survival prepared for the UNESCO International Commission on Education Futures* (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2020).

This requires a complete paradigm shift from learning about the world in order to act upon it, to learning to become with the world around us (ibid:1).

Such a paradigm shift brings the need to view well-being and sustainability in stark long term survival terms, as well as taking steps now to enhance the well-being of people in learning cities.

8. Inclusion

The PASCAL EcCoWell Community Recovery Program illustrated several important aspects of inclusion. These included:

- the importance of fostering inclusion in local neighbourhoods such as learning neighbourhoods, with strengthened partnerships that connect civil society and government action;
- the need to address mental health and well-being;
- linking inclusion objectives to action to build social cohesion and resilience in communities;
- attending to overcoming social isolation of the citizenry;
- the need to adapt inclusion objectives and strategies to the changing life course in the emerging longevity society;
- the importance of digital literacy for all.

In building a culture that fosters inclusion, the important roles of imagination and empathy should be brought into policy with empathy building understanding of the needs of others.

These insights should be brought together in strategic action to build a culture in communities that fosters inclusion and sustainability. Co-ordinating the roles of civil society and government action should be a core objective. Examples of action to promote inclusion were provided by several of the participant reports.

The Datong approach

The report of the Datong district in Taipei was focussed on using an Eco-City and Happy Farm initiative to promote inclusion, well-being, and environment objectives. Linking environment and happiness objectives in this way provided a powerful level for community action to build inclusion and social cohesion. This initiative built on the action of Datong Community College since its establishment in 2001 in promoting the Datong district as a cultural, ecological, cohesive co-operative district (Chang, 2020). A range of programs have been implemented during these years that has included participation in PASCAL EcCoWell development. These have included digital learning for all, the Happy Farm as a collective community initiative, and self-health management. The Datong experience shows the important role of local institutions such as community colleges and centres, and libraries and cultural institutions in fostering inclusion and well-being.

Kearns & Reghenzani-Kearns (2018) gave a range of examples from around the world of local community centres that promoted inclusion, learning, and well-being. These included institutions such as *kominkan* in Japan, *volkshochschulen* in Germany, community learning centres in SE Asia and neighbourhood houses in Australia, as well as the role of U3A developments in different forms.

The Harlem New York approach

The Harlem New York approach to inclusion and well-being is similar in a number of respects to the Datong approach, although it adds some further objectives related to spirituality and transformative learning. Like Datong, these developments were initiated by a local institution, the Wallis-Ortiz Gallery and Center established by the City Seminary of New York. The inclusion and well-being objectives of the Gallery were advanced in an integrated cross-sectoral approach that explored linkages between faith, spirituality, the arts, environment, transformative learning and community resilience (Wong & van den Berg, 2020). These relationships were explored in a Justice Seedbed project implemented from 2019 through initiatives such as Planting for Peace. As in Datong, addressing environment issues through community action was a key strategy for well-being, inclusion, and extending community learning interactions (Wong & van dem Berg, 2020:44).

Widening partnership was also a key feature with a wide range of community organisations such as the public library, local police precinct, community gardens, environment advocacy groups, and welfare organisations brought into the Justice Seedbed project.

By linking environment with spirituality, the arts, transformative learning, and social cohesion in communities, the Harlem experience showed an approach to inclusion and well-being that has considerable merit, and which should be explored further at both neighbourhood and district levels.

Learning Limerick

The Learning Limerick report shows a third approach to inclusion and well-being that also explores the potential of collective action in local communities in fostering inclusion and well-being (Lane, 2020).

This report is directed at *strengthening community bonds and citizenship in learning neighbourhoods and addressing exclusion, including ways of keeping people engaged* (Lane, 2020:15). Like Cork, Wyndham, and other learning cities, the Limerick Learning Festival is a key, unifying strategy for addressing exclusion, and opening pathways for participation and civic development.

Both Cork and Limerick have experimented with learning neighbourhoods, and held a joint virtual discussion during 2020 to compare insights and experience. A key recommendation was expressed in the following terms.

Learning neighbourhoods should review their work/efforts annually to re-imagine what their neighbourhood might look like for the following year, and bring people along with that vision (Lane, 2020:18).

This concept of collaborative learning neighbourhoods with a commitment to annual review and continuous improvement could be a powerful tool for inclusion, well-being and building community.

Overview

These three examples of good inclusion/well-being strategies taken from participant reports in the PASCAL EcCoWell Community Recovery Program point to the value of local community initiatives, in addressing exclusion, and fostering local community consciousness and resilience, that contribute to the well-being of people.

They also show the value of cross-sectoral approaches, as in the Harlem and Datong cases, which include environment and cultural objectives. The PASCAL EcCoWell concept fosters an integrated and holistic approach which is illustrated in the three examples.

There would be value in more sharing of ideas and experience at the neighbourhood level, such as happens with GNLC members at the city level, as neighbourhoods expose the causes and

effects of exclusion while providing ideas for ways of enhancing inclusion, well-being, and community.

9. *Sustainability*

The arrival of the UN Sustainable Goals in 2015 has focussed attention on sustainability as a goal of policy. The cross-sectoral nature of the SDGs has posed a major issue in implementation. Sachs, in *The Age of Sustainable Development* described the challenge in the following terms:

The first part of sustainable development - the analytical part - is to understand the interlinkages of the economy, society, environment, and politics. The second part of sustainable development - the normative part - is to something about the dangers we face, to implement the SDGs, and to achieve them. (Sachs 2015:42)

This has proved difficult with a natural tendency of organisations to focus on the areas they know best. For example, the paper by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning on the SDGs which is largely focussed on SDG 4 (education).

However, the trail of interlinkages must be pursued if socio-economic development at all levels is to make a real contribution to sustainability.

The PASCAL EcCoWell concept has been directed at integrated and holistic development from its foundation in 2012. The initial phase of development had a focus on learning, health, and environment relationships that were reflected in the UNESCO 2017 *Cork Call to Action for Learning Cities*.

However, the EcCoWell concept has evolved since 2017 with happiness and entrepreneurship added in 2017 while the 2020 EcCoWell Community Recovery Program points to a further stage of development in a context of increasing complexity and turbulence directed at supporting inclusion and sustainability.

Reports from participants in the 2020 program showed an increased interest in cross-sectoral relationships. An example is provided by the Harlem New York report which ranged across cultural, environmental, spiritual, and learning development in fostering inclusion and well-being.

The cross-sectoral nature of the SDGs means that broader partnerships need to be formed at all levels, so that dialogue between the partners can find ways of building interlinkages between sectors, a key requirement for sustainability

This theme has been taken up by the Sustainability Institute in a report on leveraging the power of collaboration. This report notes the evolution and strengthening of collaborative partnerships. These developments include more public and private collaboration as reported, for example, in the Wolverhampton City Learning Region report.

The growing interest of business in social and community issues, such as global warming, is reflected in the 2000 *Davos Declaration* of the World Economic Forum. This interest opens the way for a stronger business and industry involvement in learning city and neighbourhood initiatives. These developments show the growing importance of sustainability issues for all stakeholders, including business. Progressing the UN SDGs has given a stimulus to cross-sectoral relationships and interlinkages.

This mix of developments is bringing sustainability issues centre stage. For learning cities, the implications point to broader with stronger cross-sectoral linkages, and more attention to building local and global consciousness and awareness that should be addressed in planning and evaluating learning cities and neighbourhoods. The EcCoWell reports illustrate good practice in directions that need to be taken further.

10. Equal opportunities

While PASCAL has throughout its establishment from the work of OECD on lifelong learning had an interest in fostering equal opportunities through the role of learning throughout the lifecycle, a particular focus in the last two years has been on creating opportunities and well-being for older people in the context of ageing societies, and the transition to a longevity society.

This work has involved the 2018 report of the PASCAL/PIMA SIG on active ageing (Kearns & Reghenzani-Kearns eds), and a paper for the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning on *The Longevity Dimension in Inclusion for Ageing Populations* (Kearns and Reghenzani-Kearns, in press).

These papers emphasised the need for cross-sectoral collaboration in fostering active ageing that opened opportunities to maintain quality of life as they aged, including maintaining employability. There is much evidence that a culture of ageism is still active.

With ageing populations and the transition to a longevity society, the need exists to re-imagine the interests and opportunities for people in all stages of the longevity lifecycle. A particular need exists in the case of youth in a world changing rapidly, and with the growing influence of artificial intelligence and automation of many industry functions, young people face the prospect of a world with fewer jobs. This is a priority question that needs urgent examination.

If youth and older people are seen as immediate priorities in rethinking opportunities in the emerging longevity society, this raises the question of fostering relations between generations in a rapidly changing world with shifting attitudes and values. Fostering social coherence between generations is relevant to rethinking learning and building community in the transition to the emerging longevity society. More research and experimentation are needed in this area.

PART 4: EcCoWell as a dynamic innovative learning ecosystem

Examining the evolution of the EcCoWell concept back to its origins in 2012 reveals a succession of stages of development as the concept has matured in responding to challenges and shifts in the environment of cities and communities in a rapidly changing world.

The EcCoWell Community Recovery Program conducted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 marked a further evolution in the EcCoWell concept that we have termed EcCoWell3. These shifts were directed, in particular, at supporting mental health and well-being in a turbulent context, harnessing the potential of local communities in supporting their members and addressing disadvantage and exclusion, and extending the cross-sectoral nature of EcCoWell directed at a broader and deeper concept of holistic development.

Projects in the EcCoWell Community recovery program built on past EcCoWell experience but then extended this in the directions noted above. Projects discussed in this paper from Harlem New York, Datong Taipei, Limerick, Cork, and Wyndham illustrate these features, while the Glasgow University and Beijing Academy of Educational Science reports show how institutions such as these can reach down to neighbourhoods in creative ways in supporting inclusion and well-being, at times partnered with another institution such as a community college and other universities.

These developments show learning ecosystems in action. While EcCoWell was always directed at partnership and holistic development, the developments discussed in this paper illustrate ways in which partnerships can be extended and deepened at various levels in a city, although there has been some focus on local neighbourhoods.

In a world of “increasing complexity, uncertainty, and precarity” (UNESCO, 2020), systems thinking helps us to see the connections between things so that “new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured” (Senge, 1990). The evolution of EcCoWell as a learning ecosystem has been in such directions with the report of the 2020 EcCoWell program reflecting this in the title *Connecting up in a world of turbulent change* (op cit).

As a learning and innovation ecosystem, EcCoWell will continue to evolve with the 2020 report setting some directions for EcCoWell 3 development. In this paper, this is seen through the lens of a new model of partnership with imagination, empathy, and well-being. These are all attributes necessary in rethinking learning, education, and community in the turbulent context noted by UNESCO.

The EcCoWell Community Recovery Program showed the enhanced significance of local neighbourhoods in fostering inclusion, mental health, well-being, and sustainability objectives in recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and charting a course for a sustainable future. The

experience of the program in participating communities pointed to an expanded concept of integration with horizontal, vertical, and inner-outer axes.

- The horizontal axis to integrate the dimensions of development across areas such as health, learning, and environment.
- The vertical axis to integrate in an organic way policy and practice at the levels of city development such as neighbourhood, suburb, district, city.
- The inner/outer axis to connect the “outer world” and the “inner world” of lived experience.

While this brings increased complexity to policy development, the enhanced significance of mental health and well-being in recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and in preparing for the transition to a technology-driven longevity society, makes such an approach necessary. The EcCoWell Community Recovery program showed that imaginative ideas can achieve much.

The pertinent concept of an inner/outer dimension was well expressed by Senge et al:

Connectedness is the defining feature of the new world view, connectedness between the “outer world” of manifest phenomenon and the inner world of “lived experience”, and ultimately, connectedness among peoples and between peoples and the larger world. (Senge, Sharrow, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004:188)

This focus on connectedness speaks to a systems approach to policy in learning cities and neighbourhoods with the EcCoWell 3 concept as an innovative learning system vehicle in open and evolving communities. It brings the critical importance of relationships as noted by Senge and his associates.

In short, the fundamental insight of twentieth-century physics has yet to penetrate the social world : relationships are more fundamental than things. (Senge et al, 193).

The reference by Senge et al to “connectedness among people and between people and between humans and the larger world” brings in an important theme in developing sustainable learning ecosystems, a theme taken up by the Common World Research Collective in a paper prepared for the UNESCO International Commission on Education Futures titled *Learning to become with the world*. The seven Visionary Declarations for education by 2050 include the following:

- Humans are embedded within ecosystems that are ecological, not just social, and all curricula and pedagogies are now firmly grounded in an ecological consciousness.
- Instead of championing individualism, we now foster collective dispositions, reparative and more than human relations. (Common World Research Collective:3-5).

These extensions of the concept of a learning ecosystem in a global world under threat, add complexity but are essential in a turbulent world with much planetary damage. Some of the reports in the EcCoWell program addressed this issue, particularly the Datong Taipei report on

Taipei City as an Eco-City and Happy Farm. While the EcCoWell concept has evolved considerably since 2012, with the global challenge confronting mankind, there is much still to do if learning cities are to be actors, with many partners, in the pursuit of a just, sustainable world.

The challenge posed by these developments will require a new concept of learning for learning cities. While learning cities developed from a perceived need to harness all the relevant resources of cities to extend learning opportunities to all residents of the city, the critical challenge confronting humankind brings an imperative to foster ecological consciousness and collective dispositions that will require a deeper concept of learning relevant to this challenge.

Makino addresses this challenge, in a Japanese context, in a paper on *Inventing a new concept of "learning" for the era of the 100 year life in Japan*. Makino sees "learning" as *re-inventing oneself for a life of meaning and purpose* (Makino, 2020:15).

Senge had anticipated this concept back in 1990 in his seminal book on learning organisations which adopts a systems approach.

Real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human. Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we never were able to do. Through learning we perceive the world and our relationship to it. Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life.

(Senge, 1990:14)

While Senge's vision of a learning organisation shows a learning ecosystem in operation within an organisation, the task is now to adapt this concept of a learning ecosystem to learning cities, districts, and neighbourhoods. Building a sustainable world requires this.

The challenge for future EcCoWell 3 development, as an innovative learning ecosystem in an uncertain rapidly changing world, will be to build on the principles and experience that emerged from the 2020 EcCoWell program, so as to foster local and global consciousness, and awareness of these vital interdependencies in an interconnected world in turbulent change.

Can learning cities truly learn?

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Appendix 1

The EcCoWell Story

The EcCoWell approach to integration and holistic development in learning cities was founded by Peter Kearns in 2012 as a model for learning cities participating in the PASCAL International Exchanges (PIE) program for learning cities. Peter was the founder of PIE in 2011 influenced by the broad approach being taken in the development of the Taipei learning city.

In the initial phase of EcCoWell development up to 2017, the focus was usually on integrating the learning, health, and environment strands of learning city development. The Cork learning city became the international leader in EcCoWell development which was given prominence when Cork hosted the UNESCO Third International Conference on Learning Cities in 2017. The *Cork Call to Action on Learning Cities* resulting from the conference reflected EcCoWell ideas, calling for learning cities “that are green, healthy equitable, inclusive, entrepreneurial and capable of offering their citizens decent work opportunities” (UIL, 2017).

Peter Kearns reviewed the development of EcCoWell in 2017 for the PASCAL Board. He recommended the addition of happiness and entrepreneurship to the objectives of EcCoWell. These additions brought well-being objectives to the fore in the EcCoWell framework which were taken up and developed further in the 2020 PASCAL EcCoWell Community Recovery Program.

This program was organised by PASCAL in 2020 in the context of discussion of pathways from recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Wolverhampton, Limerick, Cork, Wyndham, and Cotonou learning cities participated in the program, along with the Datong Taipei learning district, Harlem learning neighbourhood, Glasgow university, and the Beijing Academy of Educational Science.

The report of the program (Kearns & Reghenzani-Kearns er,2020) included reports from each of the participants, along with an overview that pointed to the further development of EcCoWell as EcCoWell 3. The Wyndham report included the concept of a New Model of Partnership with Empathy (Torres-Gomez,2020) which has been expanded in this paper as A New Model of Partnership with Imagination, Empathy, and Well-being. This is termed EcCoWell 3 in its applications for progressing well-being, inclusion, opportunities, and sustainability.

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