**INTRODUCTION**

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A highlight of the 13th PASCAL International Conference to be held at the University of Glasgow on 3-5 June 2016 will be City Showcase presentations for sixteen cities located in Asia, Europe, and Oceania.

Most of these cities have participated in the PASCAL Networks program which was inaugurated in 2014 to build on PASCAL experience with Learning Cities in the PIE program which ran from 2010 to 2014.However, there are also a number of very welcome additions to PIE and Networks participants that bring fresh ideas on Learning City development, in some cases in difficult contexts. These add to the evolving pool of good ideas on approaches to Learning City development in a range of contexts around the world.

The key idea illustrated by the Showcase presentations is the centrality of innovation linked to learning in building sustainable Learning Cities, often involving non-traditional forms of partnership, in responding to the unique situation of each city, including the heritage and culture of the situation, economic context, social composition, and stage of development. There are multiple paths to building inclusive, cohesive and sustainable Learning Cities as these Showcase presentations demonstrate. Much is to be gained from sharing ideas and experience.

**The conference strands**

The experience of the PASCAL Networks and PIE programs led to five strands being selected for the conference, mainly derived from the topics of Networks, with a Conference Challenge Question added that reflected the central issue of progressing beyond silo initiatives to more holistic and integrated development.

The conference strands are:

1. Inclusion: providing lifelong learning opportunities for all.
2. Culture-led development.
3. Connecting to complementary initiatives in holistic urban development.
4. Building enterprising Learning cities.
5. Harnessing technology and big data in building smart learning cities.

**Conference Challenge Question**

The Conference Challenge Question came out of PASCAL work on holistic development since 2012 under the EcCoWell initiative led by the city of Cork. The question was set for the conference in the following terms.

*On a world of ever increasing silo initiatives, in what ways can Learning City initiatives be connected to complementary initiatives such as Healthy Cities and Resilient Cities to facilitate holistic approaches to sustainable urban development and build good cities and communities that are inclusive, healthy, and resilient?*

**The Profiles**

The Profiles for each Showcase presentation that follow have been prepared as short overviews of the presentations rather than as case studies. However, it will be seen that that the Profiles overall illustrate each of the strands of the conference, at times several of the strands rather than a single strand. Several show cities addressing the Conference Challenge Question. In addition, several further important themes for Learning Cities are raised by the Profiles that provide opportunities for further creative development.

Brief comments on the Profiles and strands follow below.

1. **Towards inclusion for all**

Inclusion is central to the concept of a Learning City, and has been a key objective throughout the modern era since 1992. It is not surprising that most presentations show initiatives to address exclusion on a range of grounds. Several show ways in which cultural policies can be used to promote inclusion and a sense of belonging.

Inclusion is the core of the presentation of the Australian Learning Communities Network with case examples provided for a metropolitan community (Hume), rural community (Gwydir), and regional city (Townsville). These examples illustrate how approaches need to be adapted to the context and particular needs of the community. The entrepreneurial action taken in each of these cases to initiate a learning community also illustrates the important relationships between the conference strands.

Bristol provides an example of a Learning city that has sought to address disadvantage, including persistent health and wellbeing inequities, in a coherent manner with a set of Challenge Groups providing leadership. Bristol has designated 2016 the Year of Learning.

One of the main lessons of the PASCAL PIE program was the importance of local action to address exclusion. This led to learning neighbourhood pilot projects in Taipei and Cork while Beijing innovated with four exemplar learning districts. Beijing now has extended this innovation with the development of eight exemplary learning districts built into the new Five Year Plan for the Beijing Learning City.

A number of Showcase Profiles include inclusion initiatives as projects in their overall approach. Beijing illustrates this approach with an initiative for seniors titled *Sunset fulfilment of dream.*

1. **Culture led development**

PASCAL has taken a close interest in the role of cultural policies and institutions in building cohesive and inclusive Learning Cities, and in enhancing quality of life and global consciousness, since the PASCAL International Conference at Östersund in 2010. That conference focussed on Heritage, Regional Development and Social Cohesion and provided a platform for PASCAL interest in this subject in both PIE and Networks with leadership continuing to come from the Swedish city of Östersund.

Culture led development may be observed in the Erbil, Pecs, Karlstad, and Dohuk Profiles. It is particularly interesting that the Kurdish city of Erbil in northern Iraq has found ways to harness development of the UNESCO Heritage listed Erbil Citadel into an open air museum and learning environment. In Duhok, another Kurdish city in northern Iraq, cultural policies are given a strong moral purpose as a key component in a peace building process through universities linked to a range of cultural institutions.

Municipal and university collaboration may be observed in the Swedish city of Karlstad in harnessing culture and cultural activities to enhance work environments and the wellbeing of employees, students, and city residents.

The Duhok presentation shows how an alliance of universities connected to cultural institutions can address multi-cultural issues in a city suffering from conflict but driven by aspirations towards cultural democracy and human rights. This presentation shows cultural policies as an agent for social change with cultural institutions having a key role in the development of lifelong learning for all.

The Hungarian city of Pécs presentation will also show culture led development in a city with weakening economic strength. A Green City dimension has been added with substantial community involvement in planning future development

In addition to these cities with culture led strategies, other cities have reported strengthening their cultural assets as a significant aspect of their Learning City development. These include Limerick which was Ireland’s 2014 National City of Culture, Cork which was the European Capital of Culture in 2005, Glasgow the European City of Culture in 1988, and Taipei with its Cultural City as one of six strands in their Learning City development. Glasgow illustrates how strong development of cultural policies can support a broad cross-sectoral and all ages approach to development as a Learning City. Overall, there are clear connections across a number of the Showcase cities between strengthening the cultural assets of the city and developing as a cohesive and sustainable Learning City.

In a world of mass migration and large numbers of refugees, cultural policies will be increasingly important in building tolerant, cohesive multicultural communities in this context which Rifkin has recently called an “empathic civilisation”. Museums, libraries, and education institutions can play an important role within Learning City frameworks as can Learning Festivals. There is considerable experience in cities linked to PASCAL that can be built on in enhancing the Learning City contribution in this area.

1. **Towards holistic urban development**

This has been a central concern of PASCAL since 2012 under our EcCoW.ell initiative led by the city of Cork. While PASCAL ideas on holistic development have been largely derived from the experiences of Taipei and Cork, the Showcase presentations show that other cities are starting to explore how complementary agendas in cities can be connected so as to build synergies and value added outcomes. This is an area requiring continued attention by Learning Cities.

PASCAL work on our EcCoWell initiative was derived from the broad cross-sectoral approach adopted by Taipei in building a Learning City. This involved a vision of the Taipei Learning City involving six strands linked to the unifying vision of the Taipei Learning City: Cultural City, Eco City, Waterfront City, Healthy City, Safe City, Welfare and Wellbeing City. The Showcase presentation will report of progress in these areas. Taipei is also notable for pilot projects undertaken in local areas, in some cases villages, that have contributed to PASCAL interest in the Learning Neighbourhood idea. The threat of climate change is a particular issue for Taipei that will be taken up in the presentation.

Cork has adopted a leadership position in the development of the EcCoWell ideas derived by PASCA from the experience of Taipei. The Cork presentation overall is a reflection of Cork’s Learning City journey since 2002 with milestones, challenges, hurdles, and crossroads shown This includes the very important role of the successful annual Lifelong Learning Festival, the EcCoWell initiative, Learning Neighbourhood pilot projects, and Cork’s achievement of an UNESCO Learning City award as one of the UNESCO case studies for the 2015 UNESCO International Conference on Learning Cities. The Cork approach to EcCoWell has connected to the city’s thinking about the Economy, Ecology, Community and Culture, Health and Wellbeing, and the role of lifelong learning in this context.

The Beijing presentation is interesting in showing a Learning City that has developed over fifteen years continuing to innovate in a broad way in the new Action Plan for 2016-2020 involving eight projects directed across a range of key areas. The Beijing experience shows the natural tendency of Learning City initiatives in later stages of development to broaden the lens of development as further connections are made. The new Action Plan for 2016-2020 includes projects directed at digital learning, an academic credit bank, learning organisations, workers, professional farmers, and the elderly. These are questions to be addressed in considering the sustainability of Learning City initiatives over time as a learning culture is built up in a city as a platform for more holistic development. This development is likely to go along with a strengthening of citizenship, at times through explicit policies as in the case of Taipei where community colleges have been established in each administrative district of the city with a mandate to promote learning and citizenship.

The citizenship theme is also taken up in the presentation of the Israeli Center for Learning Cities in Modi’in where the philosophy of the Center perceives the citizen as an active citizen who contributes something to the city. This is a feature that is likely to become more common in the future.

Glasgow is another city that will present a broad cross-sectoral approach to developing as a learning city over a number of years. This development goes back to 1999 as was linked to the aim of the city to make the transition from a traditional industrial city to a 21st Century Knowledge based economy.

The showcase will span initiatives in education, community development, cultural development, and the city’s Resilience strategy. These will cover special events such as serving as the European City of Culture in 1988, hosting the Commonwealth Games in 2014, and recent cultural initiatives with the Kelvin Hall development which brings a unique partnership between civic, university and national institutions. All together, the Glasgow showcase adds much to the evolving PASCAL perspectives on ways to foster holistic development in Learning Cities.

1. **Building enterprising Learning Cities**

The city of Swansea put the question of building entrepreneurial learning cities on the agenda for learning city development with its initiative in convening a conference on this subject in 2014 with a book on this subject derived from the conference currently in preparation.

This initiative has shown that a range of policies over time can contribute to building an entrepreneurial culture in a city. Management guru Peter Drucker in his book on *Innovation and Entrepreneurship* has recognised that these attributes are needed as much in society as in the economy. There is a case that all Learning Cities should aim to develop as entrepreneurial cities so that enterprise and innovation are defining features of Learning Cities that are sustainable for the long haul in a context of rapidly changing conditions.

These questions are addressed in the Swansea Showcase which is able to build on the international conference held in Swansea. The Swansea Showcase places the Learning City development in the context of regional structures being developed by the Welsh Government and the Government’s Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy. The presentation will define key characteristics of an entrepreneurial Learning City and illustrate the implications for both economic development and addressing disadvantage and exclusion.

The Profile of the Australian learning City Network (ALCN) gives case examples in three cities where the learning community initiative resulted from entrepreneurial action by individuals or a small group of people. The Australian experience of ALCN suggests that this is a common approach in a country such as Australia where many isolated communities separated by vast distances exist.

The Beijing Profile provides an example of a project to foster entrepreneurship in a key group being built into strategic planning for the Learning City. This takes the form of a project in the new 2016-2020 Action Plan on *Enhancing the innovative worker’s quality* directed at promoting public innovation and entrepreneurship.

1. **Harnessing technology and big data**

While the role of technology was explored to some extent in PIE, this important theme was not included in the Networks program groups so that there are gaps in the showcase presentations in addressing this important subject. While one of the eight projects in the Beijing Action Plan for 2016-2020 is focussed on “Construction of a digital platform for lifelong learning”, no other Showcase presentation has a focus on harnessing technology and big data. We must, instead, look to conference papers and the work of the Glasgow University Big Data Centre for insights into ways in which technology and big data are likely to impact on future directions for learning cities.

Nevertheless, some cities participating in Networks have started to consider the value of harnessing big data to add value to their Learning City development. Bristol is one of these with the Bristol Profile noting this in the following terms.

*We aim to learn through all aspects of our work and we are establishing a new approach to*

evaluating the city that incorporates big data and citizen engagement.

Big Data refers to the vast amounts of information created and stored by organisations and can include traditional databases, private databases and technologically diverse sources of data such as social media, geographical mapping data, satellite and GPS.

PASCAL Learning City development is well placed to harness Big Data through the work of the New Urban Big Data Centre (UBDC) at the University of Glasgow, led by Dr Catherine Lido, which seeks to gather and ease access to data in urban areas of interest, such as sustainability, social mobility, communications, sense of place, and links with a variety of education-related variables and outcomes. The Centre is presently developing novel approaches to questions of access and success with various types of formal and non-formal learning, as well as attitudes, behaviours, skills and literacy linked with place and geographic variables.

The PASCAL Conference will introduce the work of UBDC, including its first Big Data outcome – the integrated Multi-Media City Data Product (MCD). The Conference will introduce and explore approaches to improving urban environments and achieving learning city success. It is hoped that the next cycle of PASCAL Learning City innovation networks, after this Glasgow International Conference, will draw on Big Data sources to stimulate and support new directions in learning city development.

**From city to region**

Several presentations illustrate how Learning Cities as they develop may cast an eye beyond the city to explore how extending the Learning City initiative into the surrounding region might bring advantages. On the other hand, there are examples reported in the Showcases where regional development strategies have then impacted on the city development.

The Limerick Showcase presentation provides an example of this following a government decision to amalgamate Limerick City and County.The Limerick experience since 2013 gives a model of an approach to extending a successful Learning City initiative to the surrounding region. This has included establishing an enlarged co-ordinating group, now named Learning Limerick, to promote learning throughout the year across the county rather than only at the time of the annual Lifelong Learning Festival, an active online presence, and harnessing media to promote learning. These developments are reflected in the 2016 Limerick Lifelong Learning Festival which has been titled “*Learning for each other in a changed Limerick”.*

Several Showcase presentations, such as Swansea, provide examples where regional development has encouraged development of a city within the region. The Kyber Pakhtunkhwa region in Pakistan offers a further example where regional development could stimulate development of a city in the region. In some cases, projects within a Learning City extend out to adjacent cities. Beijing provides an example with several projects in the new 2016-2020 Action Plan for the Learning City extending into the region to include nearby cities of Tianjin and Hebei.

This is an important theme for Learning cities in the digital era with technologies eroding borders and connecting people as never before, and with rampant urbanisation continuing to impact on rural and regional areas. PASCAL attempted to address this question in the Networks program with a Network titled *Connecting urban and rural learning initiatives.* However, this network failed to gain sufficient support, despite some interesting initiatives in Africa, and was not carried forward as a strand for the Glasgow conference. This is an area for further development that I hope will be taken up in a future Networks development.

If this happens, some of the African initiatives on subjects such as Rural Learning Ecologies should be brought into Learning City development. Learning Cities have failed to be sustained in Africa despite PASCAL interest over the past six years so that the search for a Learning City approach relevant to African conditions continues. It may be that a City/Region model, linked to digital technologies, could give the necessary boost to Learning Cities in Africa that has been missing up to now.

If the extension of Learning Cities to their surrounding region becomes a common practice, this may perhaps be a step towards the vision of the 1972 UNESCO Faure Report for a universal learning society. The Learning City idea has brought significant benefits to a large number of people in cities, it is perhaps now time to build on this experience to ensure that these benefits are also brought to the residents of rural and regional areas as well.

**Innovation through a new lens**

While most of the Showcase presentations related to important themes for Learning City development designated by the conference themes, several showed approaches outside these areas that brought fresh ideas to thinking on approaches to building Learning Cities. These presentations on the Sino-German initiative, Arbroath, and Acireale defy easy classification but show how the Learning City model can be linked to innovations in key aspects of urban development in ways that add value to the concept of a Learning City.

The Sino-German initiative is linked to the cities of Essen and Changzhou in its initial phase. This initiative is innovative in using this comparative framework to involve students in both countries, working with mentors, to gain a better understanding of urban planning challenges confronting each city. The interdisciplinary studio model brought into this initiative merits further testing as an approach to deepening the role and impact of Learning City development. As in Chinese Learning City initiatives such as Beijing and Shanghai, an adjacent university plays a key role.

The Abroath presentation titled *Placemaking as learning* introduces the important theme of learning strategies in what I have termed complementary agendas such as place making, Healthy Cities, Resilient Cities, and Green Cities.All these initiatives depend on learning in some way so that an explicit recognition as in the Arbroath presentation has much value. The exploration of place making as learning in this presentation focuses on the Town Centre Action Plan and the Joint Housing Policy and Delivery Group. This project shows how small towns provide a suitable environment to bring people together to find ways to enhance services, and the quality of life in general. The idea of placemaking as learning provides a bridge for dialogue with placemaking organisations and leaders.

There is some similarity in the planning/learning issues raised in the Sicilian city of Acireale which is attempting to revitalise the “Urban Centre” as both a physical and virtual space under an Integrated Plan for Ecological/Urban Reorganisation and Socio-Economic Revitalisation. This approach has led to the Urban Centre project being defined as the Acireale Learning City. The project is innovative in attempting to harness culture as well as individual and collective learning mechanisms to increase social and human capital and create new opportunities for economic development. As in a number of showcase presentations, partnership with the University of Catania is important.

**Innovation as a learning process**

Overall, innovation and learning is the theme that connects all the City Showcase presentations with a range of approaches evident in the Showcase Profiles. While this is implicit in some presentations, there is also in some, as for example in the Swansea Profile, a more explicit commitment to the need for innovation in building innovation linked to learning into the DNA of Learning Cities. Bristol provides such an example which is articulated in the Bristol Profile in the following terms:

*Innovation is a key priority for our work, to enable us to develop new ways of working and deliver a greater impact in the city.*

The search for new ways of learning, thinking, and working is a necessary attribute of Learning Cities in a world of constant change. Sharing ideas and experience in international networks of Learning Cities should continue as a key stimulus to this process.

**Beyond Glasgow**

The PASCAL Glasgow Conference may be seen as the culmination of the PASCAL Networks program which had its roots in the PIE experience from 2010 to 2013. The rich suite of City Showcase presentations brought to the Glasgow conference holds a fertile array of ideas for future Learning City development under the PASCAL Networks 2 program. While much has been learned from PIE and Networks, it is time to move on and build for the future. The Showcase presentations overall demonstrate a new maturity and depth in Learning City ideas.

While I have discussed the Profiles in this Introduction mainly in terms of the strands of the conference, connections between the strands are evident throughout the Profiles suggesting signs of an organic growth towards the objectives of the Conference Challenge Question set for the conference. Perhaps we are on the threshold of a new Stage in Learning City development with a new generation of Learning Cities that is responsive to the big issues confronting Planet Earth and which are able to harness the power and reach of learning to contribute to the common good.

The new PASCAL Networks 2 program of Innovation Networks will provide a two year development period up to the 15th PASCAL International Conference in 2018 for this collaborative program of sharing and testing ideas. I hope that cities that have been leaders in developing Learning City ideas over the past six years will continue to contribute in this way together with the new cities that have brought much to this conference adding diversity and richness to a process that is potentially creative. PASCAL looks forward to co-operating with the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning during this period so that good ideas are shared and developed.

While Learning Cities bring a range of practical benefits to their citizens, Learning Cities should also be seen as fundamentally a moral force that can contribute much to global consciousness and citizenship in a world much in need of these attributes.

[](http://pie.pascalobservatory.org/) [](http://lcn.pascalobservatory.org/)

2010-2013 2014-2016

[](http://conference2016.pascalobservatory.org/)