PASCAL International Observatory

Briefing Paper 25

Faith and Spirituality-based Learning City Development

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Abstract

The Learning Cities Network (LCN) on Faith and Spirituality is a group of researchers, practitioners and policy makers united by the PASCAL Observatory and working jointly on topics related to faith and spirituality in learning city developments. The network was established in 2016, following a symposium on "Faith and Spirituality in Learning Cities" at the 13th International Transformative Learning Conference in New York City.

The Network aims to explore how faith and spirituality can contribute to social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, community cohesion and civic engagement in learning cities relying on faith and spirituality as enablers for the achievement of these goals. Put differently, the LCN addresses the local management in learning cities of topics aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals related to learning (SDG 4), inequality (SDG 10) and peace (SDG 16) through the lens of faith and spirituality as an enabler for the achievement of these goals.

Religious faith has played a significant role in shaping cities throughout history, and it continues to influence urban development today (see for example, Max Weber (1921) *The City* and Adam Smith's (1759) *Theory of Moral Sentiments*). There are numerous channels through which faith can be a vehicle for the development of learning cities including:

Cultural heritage's historical influence:

- *Centrality of Worship*: In the past, cities were often built with places of worship at their centre. These religious buildings served as focal points for community life and architectural landmarks (see for example, Marshall 2013, Stenger 2018).
- *Markers of Faith*: Of course up to the present time, cities worldwide feature religious markers, including churches, cathedrals, mosques, synagogues, and other sacred spaces.
- *Social Cohesion*: Faith-based gatherings bring people together for mourning, celebration, reflection, and community service.

Living culture of shared values and vision:

- *Inclusive Cities*: The United Nations' [New Urban Agenda](#) (NUA) aims for inclusive cities where all residents enjoy equal rights and opportunities.
- *Faith and NUA*: Many faiths share values aligned with the NUA, such as justice, peace, stewardship, and responsibility for future generations.
- *Inspiring Active Citizenship*: Faith communities can inspire active citizenship by promoting unity, inclusion, and well-being within the broader community.

Faith-Based Initiatives include:

- A range of Existing Actions: Faith-based organizations are already contributing to NUA goals in many ways. They engage in community development, social services, and environmental stewardship.
- UN Habitats's [Urban Thinkers' Campus](#): A recent UN event highlighted faith-based initiatives that align with sustainable and inclusive urban development.

In summary, faith can contribute to building better cities by promoting shared values, fostering social cohesion, and inspiring active citizenship. By recognizing the role of faith in urban development, we can create more sustainable, inclusive, and flourishing learning cities.

The PASCAL LCN on Faith & Spirituality has four main types of activities through which it supports learning cities' development:

- Organising regular online meetings to share experiences, challenges and best practices from different faith and spirituality-based learning city initiatives around the world.
- Participating in global learning city events and conferences, such as the International Transformative Learning Conference, to showcase the work of the network and learn from other perspectives.
- Developing research projects and publications on the topics of faith, spirituality and learning cities.
- Collaborating with other PASCAL networks and partners, such as the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, to promote the recognition and integration of faith and spirituality in learning city policies and practices

Current questions that the LCN on Faith and Spirituality work on include:

· **What motivates the need for faith and spirituality in learning cities?** Religiosity (for evolutionary reasons) alleviates feelings of loneliness and improves quality of life experience of your citizens; (Q1)

· **What are the channels of impact from faith and spirituality in learning cities?** Religiosity can facilitate (or hamper) social interaction and increases (or decreases) self-esteem and feelings of competency – depending on how the local environment nurtures the opportunity for local religious clubs to cooperate between each other; (Q2)

· **What benefits for learning cities can be created through faith and spirituality?** Benefits from religiosity in domains such as health, equality, and environment impact on functioning in domains such as family and community; (Q3)

· **How to measure faith and spirituality and their contribution to learning cities?** As better measures of well-being (other than GDP) are becoming available, the policy significance of spirituality and diversity management has increased; spirituality is important part from the Happiness Index for instance; (Q4)

· **How is faith and spirituality related to mental health in learning cities?** There has been a growing concern in some countries at mental health problems and increased feelings of loneliness and feelings of being left behind among sections of the population, including many young people. Religion is a natural

alleviation of these experiences, but has to be used wisely as such to avoid populism and exploitation of those in need and guarantee their equality and dignity according to their human rights. (Q5)

· **Is faith and spirituality in a fruitful and healthy dialogue with AI and modern technologies in learning city environments?** Artificial Intelligence (AI) is penetrating the modes of preaching, spiritual guru and mentorship programs, while human morals remain a black box for both humans and AI machines. These technological challenges add another layer of policy guardianship on the matters of religion and spirituality in a city to breed emotionally intelligent and thriving modern learning communities and successfully avoid potential deteriorations of the spiritual life of cities. (Q6)

Selection of Recent Events

External Events and Webinars

Webinar: *Empathy & Sympathy of Human vs AI Moral Advisers in Cities* **(Addressing Q6)**

The PASCAL Learning Cities Network (LCN), [Faith and Spirituality- based Learning City Development](), and the [International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies]() (ISQOLS), in partnership with Swansea University and Glasgow University arranged an open access [webinar]() on the challenges and opportunities for using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in spiritual instruction. Can AI ensure moral flourishing, learning and wellbeing in our cities?

The round table of the WEBINAR offered three expert interventions followed by a Q&A session as follows

• **Haoran Huang (AI expert, Accenture, London, UK)** – *how does AI learn to decide and advise morally?*

• **Revd Terry Hemming (Retired Priest, Church of England, Andover, UK)** – *how do people learn to advise morally?*

• **Brandon Vaidyanathan (Catholic University, Washington, USA)** – *how religion matters for a learning city*

Our speakers represented three stakeholders of faith and spirituality in learning cities: the AI experts that can develop the Artificial Intelligence (AI) moral adviser, the actual human spiritual advisers and community leaders, and the academics who sees the synthesis of the channels through which the substitution of the human with AI advisership will affect the fabric of faith and spirituality that supports city learning and city development today. Examples from what AI and humans can do and how it will affect cities learning was the focus of the debate.

Lecture - Swansea University and PASCAL collaborate to host Leverhulme Lecture on Islamic Pedagogical Capabilities for Learning Cities. *19 October 2023*

Swansea University hosted a Leverhulme Lecture titled "Pedagogical Capabilities in Islam to Create, Maintain and Develop Justice-oriented Learning Cities". The lecture was presented by Nematollah Azizi, a Leverhulme Professor at the University of Glasgow and a faculty member at the University of Kurdistan in Iran. This visit was organized by Swansea University, along the International PASCAL Observatory collaboration, where Swansea Learning City and Swansea University are active members and were happy to host Professor Azizi as their guest from their partner University of Glasgow. The lecture by Professor Azizi aimed to explore the role of Islamic pedagogical capabilities in creating and maintaining justice-oriented learning cities. **(Addressing Q1, Q2 & Q3**

Selection of Internal Workshops upcoming for 2024

- **26th March** – Orna Mager – Topic: 'Learning Cities Role in Community Social Resilience Practices in Times of Uncertainty' **(Addressing Q3)**

- **18th April** – Susannah Healy – Topic: 'Mental Health and Spirituality in Learning Cities' *(Addressing Q5)*
- **28th May** – Helen Kettleborough– Topic: 'Growing Earth as Sacred Community - a creative journey of exploration *(Addressing Q3 & Q5)*
- **26th June** – Nematollah Azizi & Orna Mager – Topic: 'Single Parenthood and City faith and Spirituality Support Channels – Challenges & Lessons Learned' *(Addressing Q 2 & Q3)*
- **26th July** - Nematollah Azizi – Topic: 'Lessons Learned on Learning Cities and Managing Unresolves Social Tensions through Faith and Spirituality Interventions – Leverhulme Grant Summary Report' *(Addressing Q1 & Q2)*

Selections of Past Workshops

'Spirituality at Work – The Next Frontier of Workplace Well-being' - February 2022

Susannah Healy, member of the LCN on faith and Spirituality, presented on the topic of spirituality and work. Depending on where you are in the world as you read this, the invitation to consider spirituality in the workplace may seem either foolhardy or prosaic. Some readers may already enjoy places of prayer and meditation in their place of work while for others the topic may seem fraught with human and indeed potentially legal problems.

'Everyone Matters – Toowoomba, A Model City of Peace and Harmony' – Multifaith Multicultural Centre – May 2020

The group conducted engagement with the 'Voices of Faith' radio program sharing on the matters of city peace and harmony as a function of equitable attention to all members of society. The case study for Toowoomba city was discussed.

Research

Conference presentations, publications, and other resources related to faith / spirituality and learning cities shared by our group members deepen our understanding of the mechanisms through which faith and spirituality can facilitate the learning city mission. Among the numerous research areas with which the LCN network has produced research include:

- Art, Spirituality, and Community Engagement (Dr**. Maria Liu Wong**),
- Engaging a 'Dream Deferred': Arts, Spirituality and Transformative Learning in an EcCoWell2 Learning Neighbourhood Approach (**Dr. Maria Liu Wong** / **Dr. Connie Watson**),
- Integrating Faith and Spirituality into Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development in Cities (**Dr. Maria Liu Wong**),
- Learning Cities and Transformative Learning on the Street (**Dr. Maria Liu Wong** / **Dr. Connie Watson)**
- On Becoming Wise Together: Learning and Leading in the City (**Dr. Maria Liu Wong**).

A more comprehensive glimpse of our research output is accessible in the papers showcased below:

Tubadji, A. (2023). You'll never walk alone: Loneliness, religion, and politico-economic transformation. *Politics & Policy*, 51(4), 661-695.

The rise of subversive religious beliefs has been recently documented as related to the politico-economic radicalization of places that feel left behind. When is the traditional local religious institution so socio-economically inefficient in providing hope for "not walking alone" to become substituted by subversive religious beliefs on the market for hope? This article suggests a detailed methodology, linking micro and macro levels, that starts from the quantification of the individual gain from religion as a source for well-being by providing the feeling of "not walking alone." This micro gain is next used: (i) to evaluate a

religious institution in terms of the social welfare that it generates, and (ii) to monitor this religious institution for losing its market to subversive religious beliefs, related to radical politico-economic transformations. To illustrate this methodology, I analyse the socio-economic efficiency of the Church of England as a predictive tool for the Brexit vote. *(Addressing Q1 & Q4)*

Meneely, C. (2015). Transformative Learning and Christian Spirituality: Towards a Model for Pedagogical and Theological Clarity? *Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*, 88–101.

Ever since Jack Mezirow introduced the incipient, and then more developed idea, of transformative learning to the discussion on adult education more than thirty years ago, the parameters of its theory and practice have been pushed out further and further. The introduction of spirituality and learning to this discussion is not a new one, but this paper explores further the possibilities of the inter-connectedness and inter-dependency of pedagogy and theology, when part of the pedagogical approach of transformative learning is viewed alongside the theology of Christian spirituality in a church based adult learning programme. The quest for pedagogical (and theological) clarity is pursued through attempts to forge learning in both the cognitive and affective domain, through clear and accessible biblical teaching in the local church. *(Addressing Q2 & Q3)*

TEDx Talk by **Susannah Healey**: *In her TEDx talk titled "Spirituality: The Next Frontier of Workplace Wellbeing,"*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MosvBKul270

Over recent years there has been a surge of academic interest in spirituality. This research has tended to separate the concept of "spirituality" from "religiosity", taking the former to mean how an individual experiences their place in the world and where they find meaning, purpose and for some, a sense of the sacred. "Religiosity", on the other hand, is understood as the teachings and dogma of the various world faiths. For the religious, spirituality is part of how they live and experience their faith, while for the "Spiritual but Not Religious" individual (SBNR), spirituality involves a more personally arrived at world view. "Spirituality", therefore, is the common link between people within and outside of the various faith traditions. Recognizing this spiritual need for all at the work place can be a main enabler in job satisfaction and job productivity in learning cities enhancing sharing and learning between its members. *(Addressing Q5)*

Raymer, A. L. (2021). Andragogy of Hope and Learning Cities. American Association for Adult and Continuing Education.

Addressing the worldwide challenges threatening humanity today, such as the global pandemic and climate change, requires learning and action at scales including and extending far beyond personal development. The concept of andragogy popularized by Malcolm Knowles focuses on the individual and does not attend to wider social contexts and collective learning. Achieving the necessary transformations to avert cascading collapses—and keeping up courage for the endeavour—necessitates a new conceptualization, an andragogy of hope. The Global Network of Learning Cities may be one of the best examples where key features of an andragogy of hope are already emerging. *(Addressing Q2 & Q3)*

Practical Resources

As a way to put theory into practice and learn together, we led and shared various activities to help us process our experiences of faith, spirituality, learning, and place together. An example of a practical activity that we encourage others to try is the: Loss, Grief, and Mourning support group activity described on our Archival blog.

The network welcomes new members who share its vision and values. If you are interested in joining the network, you can contact the network coordinator, Annie Tubadji, at a.k.tubadji@swansea.ac.uk .

You can read more about the network and its work here:

Official website:

[Faith and Spirituality-based Learning City Development | Learning Cities Networks](#)

Archive material blog:

[Faith / Spirituality Learning Cities Network (arcgis.com)](#)

References

Marshall, K. (2013) *Global Institutions of Religion: Ancient Movers, Modern Shakers.* London: Routledge,

Stenger, J. R. (ed.) *Learning Cities in Late Antiquity: the Local Dimension of Education.* Routledge: London ; New York, pp. 24-46. ISBN 9781138299870