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Learning Cities: The United Kingdom Experience

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Learning City

Cities are not simply places where people live and work: they are also places where people experience leisure, culture, enterprise and education... A Learning City unites all the diverse providers of learning to meet the needs and aspirations of its citizens. Through the range of local resources they bring together, Learning Cities can provide local solutions to local challenges (Kearns, 1999:6).

This paper presents some preliminary findings from work in progress, the Eurolocal project – European activities on the local and regional dimension of Lifelong Learning. Through this work the project aims to help create and reinforce Learning Regions throughout Europe and expand peoples vision to help a Region achieve its potential.

The use of the terms ‘Learning City’, ‘Learning Town’, ‘Learning Region’ and ‘Learning Community’ is rapidly becoming commonplace in the European lifelong learning debate. The European Commission has supported several projects and programmes to create learning regions notably the Socrates R3L programme, the TELS, LILLIPUT, INDICATORS, PALLACE, LILARA and PENR3L projects. Other initiatives also recognise the value of lifelong learning, however little work has been completed to synthesise all this knowledge, nor to disseminate it as a coherent whole to those who would benefit from it. The Eurolocal project seeks to accept that challenge in the following ways;

- a) By gathering all knowledge tools, materials, reports, strategies, recommendations, projects etc on learning regions in Europe,
- b) By creating a sophisticated interactive and dynamic web facility to store the information and to stimulate feedback,
- c) By testing the materials and tools in appropriate organisations,
- d) By marketing the learning region concept and the existence of the facility to all European regions.

Four partners, the University of Glasgow, Learning Regions Deutschland, Universitas Bari and the University of Pecs are involved in the study; each is responsible for gathering information from the states under their name and one or more European organisations. The initial objective for each partner is to gather information on learning regional development that will be useful to other regions and can be uploaded onto the Eurolocal website i.e. a ‘store-house’ that enables participants to enhance their scope and reach. It is intended to disseminate and exploit the data for the benefit of interested parties thus creating ‘added value’ to the materials and information as regions compare and contrast their learning regions and contribute to an ongoing dialogue on the topic.

The two year project began in November 2009. Through access and implementation of various tools, learning materials, and techniques the contributors are sharing findings, commenting on each others experiences and supporting each other to expand their impact on local and regional learning. Eurolocal is a comparative study of practices across Europe. It is based on the understanding that one nation can learn from another. We have decided to focus on the Scottish experience as part of the materials from the UK and as an example of how the concept has fared over the past 15 years and what directions learning cities are now taking. This paper presents preliminary findings on the contribution of learning cities in the

UK to social inclusion through the building of cultural and social capital in their localities/regions.

As Duke et al (2005:3) have observed the concept of a learning city has been interpreted in many ways. The terms learning region and learning city have been used interchangeably although the R3L initiative notion of 'learning region' is useful in that it extends the learning city in scale and scope. Why have cities sought this status? The literature suggests that the rationale for a learning city may be economic, social, and environmental but may contain elements of the other (Longworth and Osborne, 2010). The origins and subsequent immediate development of learning cities have been well documented. In brief, the learning city was defined geographically in the 1970s when the OECD invited 7 cities including Edinburgh in Scotland to become an 'Educating City'. Membership of this exclusive club was offered on the basis that the cities concerned placed education at the heart of their strategies. The popularity of the concept in the 80s and 90s reflected a tendency to emphasise the agency of social and economic actors. In 1992 the Gothenburg conference led to the formation of the International Association of Educating Cities. Some of the values and aspirations which emerged at Gothenburg continue to have currency, not least the ideas that partnerships and collaboration are essential if the lofty ambitions of learning cities are to be realised (OECD/CERI, 1992).

Subsequent developments have meant that lifelong learning now lies firmly at the heart of the learning city concept. A useful description of a learning city claims that it *'goes beyond its statutory duty to provide education and training...and instead creates a vibrant, participative, culturally aware and economically buoyant human environment through the provision, justification and active promotion of learning opportunities to enhance the potential of all of its citizens'* (Commission of the European Union, 2003).

As lifelong learning has become a greater priority and a new reality for more and more people, the role of the learning city has also taken on greater significance. This is encapsulated in a recent definition of a learning city which sees the concept to refer to communities of place using *'lifelong learning as an organising principle and social/cultural goal in order to promote collaboration of their civic, economic, public, voluntary and education sectors to enhance social, economic, and environmental conditions on a sustainable, inclusive basis'* (Faris, 2007). Why lifelong learning? Longworth (2001) observes that rapid change e.g. the explosion of information and knowledge, increasing individualisation among other factors, has provoked a significant movement from the paradigm of 'education and training' to one of 'lifelong learning' - from the concept of education for those who need it provided by those who deliver it, to the principle of continuous education for everyone controlled by individuals themselves, and mediated within the group of learners. Therefore cities have looked to achieve learning city status as a vehicle to meet all of the new challenges posed in this rapidly changing world.

The United Kingdom in general can be seen as one of the trailblazers of the learning city concept. Much can be learned from the British experience in terms of how learning cities have evolved, developed, adapted, flagged and changed over the past twenty years or so. A significant staging post was the European year of Lifelong Learning in 1996 which gave birth to the UK Learning Cities Network. It eventually had 50 members and as elsewhere argued for lifelong learning to be a main driver of their efforts. A declaration emphasised the centrality of lifelong learning for these cities by stating *'Using lifelong learning as an organising principle and social goal, Learning Cities promote collaboration of the civic, private, voluntary and education sectors in the process of achieving agreed upon objectives related to the twin goals sustainable economic development and social inclusiveness'* (Learning Cities Network,

1998). Liverpool was first in the UK to declare itself as a learning city, other notables again included Edinburgh. The impetus in Liverpool came from research which showed the huge contribution of education and the training sector to the local economy. The aim was to promote and market Liverpool and its region as a centre of excellence, internationally renowned for its learning related developments. In Liverpool, a city partnership co-ordinated and developed projects as an aid to the regeneration of the region. A major feature was the development concept of a wired or electronic city and associated infrastructure intended to improve education and training products and practices, but also to benefit businesses and the wider community.

The UK Learning Cities Network desired to use learning to promote social cohesion and economic development and sought to develop partnerships to stimulate and respond to demand for learning. How have they fared? There have been success stories along the way. Belfast was one of the first to make its mark. As the city moved towards the peace process in 1997 Belfast seized the opportunities offered by learning city status and established a Learning City Forum to lead a partnership of key stakeholders. The efforts were characterised by intensive marketing to stimulate demand for learning and collaborative interventions by providers. In Southampton partnerships and networks characterised their approach. Hull first held discussions about becoming a learning city as early as 1995 and following a government decision to instigate Local Learning Partnerships, learning became central to the city's regeneration strategy. Carlisle, as part of City Vision initiative launched in 2002, decided to develop itself as a Learning City in 2004. Early activities included the development of an HE student centre, progression routes for work-based learners, projects to enhance environmental learning. The 5 themes celebrated were communities, economic prosperity, health and well-being, infrastructure environment and transport, plus celebrating the city of Carlisle. The initiative included development of the Think@ Carlisle brand, launched to coincide with Adult Learners Week in May 2005, a shrewd move which brought coverage in the press and on television and provides an example of how learning cities tend to benchmark themselves against other cities. Benchmarking seems to highlight their attractiveness as a learning city and is often intended to attract investment for example. Learning cities can also be sold as great places to live; most indicators of the best places to live include the local economy and the cultural life.

Carlisle anticipates that Learning City status and the implications flowing from this will help to celebrate the achievements of the city and provide the means for a coherent, inclusive, learning-led initiative that would support its ambition to become a prosperous and inclusive major regional centre. It is envisaged that the benefits of learning city status will over time be felt by children, adults, employers. In the long-term it is anticipated that Carlisle will benefit from increased social inclusion and regenerated communities, the economy of the city will flourish as the learning and skills base is enhanced and inward investment attracted, the profile and status of Carlisle will in short be enhanced in social, economic and intellectual capital terms.

The idea of regeneration and urban renewal through cultural activity, of relevance to the theme of this presentation, was pursued at Penzance. The stress was placed on expression of local identity, the enrichment of meaning in everyday lives, recognising in the process that making use of local traditions and resources is part of regeneration. Other similar examples can be found in places such as Bradford which has an impressive track record of using cultural development as part of regeneration. It can be argued that because cities need innovative talent; cities with strong contemporary cultural scenes are more likely to flourish. More recently learning cities in the UK have been able to learn from the example of Creative

Cities, a network launched by UNESCO in 2004. The initiative was designed to promote the social, economic, and cultural development of cities and envisages a significant role for cultural and creative industries in urban development. Creative Cities seek to promote their local creative scene and share a mission towards cultural diversity. The emphasis on culture demonstrates the potential for any community, no matter how small, to become a learning city. According to Creative City International *'the approach puts culture and community at the heart of urban planning, cities must use all resources, economic, political and most of all cultural'* (CCI, 2009). One example in the UK is the Creative Town initiative centred on Huddersfield. Publicity materials for Huddersfield argue that cities can be made more liveable and vital by harnessing people's imagination and talent. The underlying principle is that cities must innovate to survive, replacing lost trades and manufacturing with the idea of urban creativity. The Huddersfield initiative began with Kirklees Media Centre based on an idea of the managed workplace, young companies working in new media areas, their creativity replenished with untapped human capital.

In the UK, cities such as Carlisle, Liverpool, Manchester and Dundee currently brand themselves as learning cities or equivalents. After a promising start however many learning cities in both the UK and Europe generally had fallen short of their original aspirations. To all intents and purposes the UK Learning Cities Network is no longer functioning. The European Lifelong Learning Initiative (ELLI) developed charters for learning regions/cities in which the objectives included a commitment to invest in lifelong learning in a serious way through measures including the development of productive partnerships across all sectors in each of the learning cities, and combating exclusion by creating programmes to involve the excluded. Cities across the globe including some in the UK adopted the charter but an ELLI audit in 2003 revealed a patchy picture in that many cities were unclear as to what was meant by the concept of learning city and that simply branding oneself as such was unlikely to achieve anything without the strategies and resources required for realising the potential for lifelong learning. It is clearly not enough to call yourself a learning city although some seemed proud to say that they enjoyed this status in that it helped to set them apart.

The UK Learning Cities Network however has been superseded in cities such as Sheffield where experience has shown that constant change has to be embedded into the development strategy of the learning city. In Sheffield this has meant absorption into a lifelong learning strategy. More particularly for the focus of this paper, the examples of Glasgow and Dundee in Scotland demonstrate that the aspirations and ideals of the learning city endure in the UK although they have been implemented in different ways, have been given different labels, and found different goals. In Scotland the learning city is attempting to fight back and has found renewed impetus and energy in cities such as Dundee and Glasgow and arguably represent at least the beginnings of a re-emergence of the concept.

Glasgow

As a Learning City, Glasgow remains committed to the development of a culture of lifelong learning so that it can thrive in the complex global environment of the 21st Century. Glasgow launched itself as a learning city in 1999. The initial impetus came in part when Glasgow found that it was in a position to take advantage of initiatives such as the establishment of the first Scottish Parliament which engendered a renewed interest in Scottish culture. Careful planning had preceded the launch with the strategy predicated on research on attitudes to learning in the city. The research revealed that 67% of those surveyed had not been involved in any kind of learning during the previous year, yet there was recogni-

tion among the same respondents that lifelong learning was likely to become an increasingly important aspect of their lives in the future. 92% said that they enjoyed learning new things; 82% claimed that learning was either very or fairly important to them; and 83% believed that learning would become more important in the new century. A not insubstantial budget of around 5 million pounds was set aside by Glasgow to take the learning city initiative forward. The challenge facing the city has to be understood in the context of its socio-economic and historical development. Glasgow currently has a population of around 600,000 and is Scotland's largest city. Large investment was clearly needed in 1999 and even more today in a city with some of the highest rates of deprivation in Europe as evidenced by relatively low life expectancy, poor housing stock and high levels of unemployment concentrated in some parts of the city. In 2000 educational disadvantage was found to be higher where there were multiple factors of deprivation in areas such as North Glasgow that included lower skilled employment, high rates of public housing tenancy, higher rates of illness and death, poorer nutrition and higher levels of drug use and crime (Glasgow Learning Alliance, 2000). It is perhaps a paradox in a city which has traditionally promoted lifelong learning that in 2000 33% of young people left school with no qualifications and many adults had low level literacy and numeracy skills with 60% of the population regarded as non learners (Glasgow Learning Alliance, 2000).

The decision by Glasgow to become a learning city was seen as a logical response to a city finally having to face up to for example the realities of the loss of traditional industries and which wanted to compete in the knowledge based economy of the new millennium. Glasgow chose not to join the Learning City Network, an indication that the city retained the self-belief and confidence that it had the knowledge and expertise to find its own solutions to the challenges and problems facing the city. The central place given to lifelong learning was also in the spirit of the traditions of a city whose oldest university for example for much of its history had built on the traditions of the Scottish enlightenment to bring opportunities for learning to the broader community. A final factor was the decision to consult with local people on the strategies which evolved under the banner of learning city. When discussing partnerships and their role in learning cities, it should not be forgotten that the people are the resource in any city. Even positive marketing of the learning city tends to be the kind which celebrates the involvement of citizens at the local level. It can be argued that regeneration depends upon learning to reconstruct communities through partnerships and public participation while reflecting back on what has been achieved. Learning cities can only fulfil their potential if their citizens are involved in determining future policies for the development and direction of the city.

Glasgow has aspired to develop the kind of learning city where all of its people and organisations flourish through lifelong learning. The intention was to encourage individuals, employers and organizations to see themselves as lifelong learners, and help the city learn how to promote social and economic regeneration. An overall objective was to understand how different parts of city life could connect together i.e. social, cultural, political and economic. In this context what initial steps were taken by Glasgow? A Learning Inquiry was undertaken which was a strategic collaboration between the private and public sector and sought to involve both in a problem solving and decision making process. Research has suggested that it is crucial for learning cities to foster partnerships between the public and private sector in order to contribute to the European knowledge-based economy and stimulate knowledge creation and diffusion (Longworth and Osborne, 2010). The key in Glasgow was to understand the reasons why so few citizens participated in learning and why so few of the population achieved education and training qualifications. The Inquiry led to the

creation of a Learning Network and Lifelong Learning Information Service. The Glasgow Development Agency (GDA) had a key role to bring together sectors and institutions which encouraged lifelong learning and through the resulting emerging partnerships engaged with citizens on the way forward for their communities in the area of lifelong learning. The partnerships which developed have in several instances taken over from the GDA and this can be seen as a mark of success.

The first years of the strategy in Glasgow saw a number of key steps including a series of workshops to involve stake holders across the city, intensive marketing of the learning city concept, the Learning Inquiry which audited lifelong learning provision, and pilot initiatives. The survey on attitudes to learning previously referred to had revealed that 79% of respondents believed computers would make learning easier. This finding set the scene for a preliminary flagship initiative, REAL, which turned out to be a great success. REAL was the name given to a city-wide network of learning centres designed to drive up participation rates. The REAL partnership was established in 1999 to include representatives from Further and Higher Education, the City Council and Scottish Enterprise Glasgow with the aim 'to provide Glasgow's citizens with the highest quality learning possible at all levels and in accessible ways' (Clark, 2001:13). REAL was conceived as a physical and virtual network involving education, business, libraries and community groups.

It was viewed as a means to improve IT literacy, raise the skills of the workforce and draw more people into learning. The emphasis on the branding of REAL was a considered strategy for developing awareness of learning opportunities and ensuring access by the people who were most difficult to reach. Focused as an ICT based learning strategy, REAL became available to the general public in schools and libraries throughout Glasgow. The initiative provided access to online and virtual learning that included computer hardware and software, internet access and training. Membership based, by 2002 REAL had 10,000 individual and business members. Business membership grew at 100% per quarter. Within a year there were REAL Learning Centres in libraries, small businesses and universities. It can be regarded as a genuine network of learning centers (Yarnit, 2000). A highly innovative partnership model was in evidence with the establishment of a REAL Learning Centre in a district of high unemployment, co-located with the library and the local indoor swimming centre. Overlooking the pool, the computer training rooms enabled families to participate in enjoyable learning activities together. The Swimming Pool recorded a 40% increase in membership after the establishment of Real and provided evidence of the correlation between learning and improved community health.

Other developments in Glasgow included a community project with an online component and arose out of the expressed interests of community users of Real facilities. 'Local Investigations' became accredited and included programmes such as Family History, History of Football Teams and Local History and continued to be developed as people used REAL for personal investigative work. REAL clearly required ongoing development to maintain the momentum and this has been evidenced in a number of ways.

More recent initiatives have included a drive to tackle literacy issues among the population of the city. This has seen for example the training of literacy tutors of adults. A package of measures was introduced to encourage different target groups to see themselves as lifelong learners' e.g. to encourage more positive attitudes to education among young people and men. Priorities were based on research undertaken by Learning City. Other strategies to increase visitor numbers to galleries and museums have enhanced the reputation of the city for excellence in arts and culture.

So how far has Glasgow come since the early days of the Learning City launch and to what extent has it fulfilled the initial aspirations detailed below?

- To mobilise all its resources, especially its human resources, talents, skills, and knowledge for the use of all
- To stimulate its citizens to contribute positively to the community in which they live and to the learning development of others
- To use modern communications technology to link people within the city and with the wider world
- To energise its citizens to use the tools and techniques of lifelong learning to develop their knowledge, their skills and their understanding of the changing world
- To learn is an enjoyable and rewarding habit for all from which no-one is excluded
- To mobilise citizens to monitor, preserve and improve, their own environment
- The maintenance of employability and the creation of wealth is the result of cradle to grave, failure-free learning policies emphasising the development of every citizen's potential
- To celebrate learning frequently and encourages whole families to participate

Longworth (1999).

Glasgow has taken seriously the link between learning cities and social capital, and active citizenship. The city demonstrated from the outset that social capital is an indicator of success for learning cities. Cara et al (2002) argue for the importance of embedding a culture of learning into 'the genetic code' of the city. They maintain that any city can be a learning city, it should also be more than an educated city, the idea of learning is central to the development of the city (Cara et al, 2002). Although some momentum was lost along the way Glasgow has continued to invest in the concept of a learning city with lifelong learning driving the strategy. Recent examples include a ten year development plan launched in 2006, A Step for Glasgow, which placed education at the heart of economic development in the city. There are also plans in 2010 to establish a super college, New Glasgow Campus, which would serve to create a learning district in the city. The continuing measures taken by Glasgow as a learning city would seem to meet the benchmarks cited in the following quotation by Osborne et al (2006) who write that local and regional authorities should ensure that *'learning activities attract additional resources and that learning should become an integral component of regeneration projects and initiatives which seek to address other areas of regional development, e.g. health, economic development, planning and leisure. On-going co-operation with local authorities and other stakeholders is itself the essence of what the learning region is about'*. The evidence would suggest that Glasgow is undoubtedly seeking to create a knowledge based society in line with the best principles of a learning city.

Dundee

Dundee is Scotland's fourth largest city. It has sought to position itself as a learning city of significant standing. Dundee was named in 2007 as one of the seven named cities short-listed by the Intelligent Community Forum (ICF), for the title of 'intelligent community of the year'. The ICF states that being an intelligent community requires a combination of deployment of broadband communications to business and government, effective education, training and workforce development, programmes which promote digital inclusion

to ensure that all can benefit from the broadband revolution and to ensure citizen participation in government decision-making, and other factors (ICF, 2007:2). Recent initiatives in Dundee include Discover Learning, an online information service for adults who want to find out more about the range of learning opportunities available across the city. The city also publishes a newsletter providing details of opportunities for those interested in community based adult learning. Also worthy of note is the Learning Journey series of tours. There are a number of different strands to this, one of which is concerned with school pupils and is organised and operated by a local college in partnership with the City Council. The scheme is targeted at pupils who are just starting to make the subject choices which will have a large impact on their future educational trajectories. The project involves pupils who are issued with a Learning Journey Map and taken around the city by bus to visit various points of cultural interest, employment options, and educational opportunities. Another form of journey is open to adults with the intention that they will go back to their communities with new ideas and enthusiasm about how they can make a difference.

As a learning city Dundee wishes to make the city more attractive to potential inward investors. Longer term objectives were and continue to be to see an increased population in Dundee through jobs and new businesses, a successful renewable energy sector, Dundee to become a more attractive visitor destination, and to achieve improvements in the health of citizens. Dundee has taken an active part in attempting to turn the economy around and a major impetus to achieving this aim was the formation of the Dundee Partnership, a joint venture that pools together the strengths of key City agencies including the City Council, Scottish Enterprise, the Police and the National Health Service along with other local partners and representatives of the business, voluntary and community sectors, providing a vehicle for coordinated inter agency working (Dundee Partnership, 2010). As in Glasgow, it has become apparent that a range of strategies are required to address the issues facing Dundee at the turn of the 21st Century. An analysis undertaken of behalf of the city suggested that the university sector was driving much of the job creation not only in established sectors such as publishing and scientific research, but also through the development of new sectors such as software development and production, animation, computer games development, films and television. These resulted in a range of new initiatives designed to feed off the developments in new sectors through new start-ups and spin offs developed on the basis of academic research in conjunction with the university sector.

The development of new sectors in the economy is reflected in the vision of a digital Dundee that is promoted at all levels. The City Council began offering online payment facilities to the public in 2002. It now has more than 62 online application processes and procedures and in 2006 alone it processed more than 60,000 transactions and collected over £8m. It also created a Citizen Account database which, with their permission, captured data from citizens. The Citizen Account is a single secure database record that can be used to pre-fill forms for both local and national government services. Another major influence was the introduction of the Dundee Discovery Card, which replaced 10 separate card services in the city from bus tickets to parking to social services. This was also the first example of a local university and a council sharing a single card for different purposes. One significant advantage of the card is that it removes some of the stigma experienced by low income residents when accessing services. It is now so popular that it is used by 87% of 12-18 year olds for school meals and bus travel and by 85% of those over 65 for leisure access and free bus travel, and it was chosen to pilot a national scheme for multi-application cards.

In relation to the provision of broadband services, Dundee has achieved 100% coverage of households, businesses and institutions through commercial provision, with 48%

of households and 90% of businesses currently connected. There have also been a number of wireless pilot projects. The city also operates 300 PCs for public access at sites around the city and local communities, including 12 Learning Centres. Even the buses are digital, with real-time traffic information provided by a network of 350 bus stop digital signs and information kiosks. In addition, at least one free access terminal is located within two miles of any household in the city. Moreover, new initiatives continue. A professor at a local University has founded ADD Knowledge in partnership with government agencies to deliver Scotland's first home-study program for over 400,000 primary school children using next-generation video game consoles.

In essence the city of Dundee works in partnership with multiple agencies and is concerned not only with the economy and its regeneration but also with its citizens. The commitment of Dundee to the principles of lifelong learning was reflected most recently in a high-profile Learning City Event held in November 2009. It played out well in the press, with coverage highlighting the fact that Dundee aims to be the best small city in the UK by 2017. A related event, Dundee Wave of Change, '*re-imagines how the city sees itself*'. Dundee has sought to create inclusive lifelong learning opportunities, which seems to be indivisible from its desire to create a confident city. The overall goal is to talk up Dundee and take the city forward in concrete ways, many of which have lifelong learning at their core.

Conclusion

The high tide of the learning city in the UK may on the surface appear to have passed. However new models are emerging under the banner of lifelong learning. The UK experience demonstrates that progress can be made but only if lifelong learning is central to local government strategy. In Scotland, some of the best principles of the learning city now take other shapes and forms, e.g. in Glasgow and Dundee where agencies work in partnership and where attempts have been made to ensure that communities have an effective voice. As Ron Faris (2008) argues, learning communities represent a commitment to set learning at the heart of the city/region development through partnerships. This is carried out through a development strategy encompassing the whole range of learning, creating globally competitive knowledge-intensive production and service activities, social cohesion and environmental issues as an integrated part of the city's development.

All of this leaves us with some very pertinent questions to investigate. For example, has the learning city taken different directions in the UK from other countries in Europe? Can the shape and nature of learning cities in contemporary Britain offer models of good practice? Finally, how much remains to be achieved in terms of adding value to the application of the concept and implementation of good practice? There are still many people interested in pursuing the answers to these questions from practitioners to policy makers and researchers throughout Europe. We are still as interested as ever to uncover the answers in our continuing research.

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