

Submission to Productivity Commission on Mental Health

Strengthening Learning, Health & Community Relationships Some international experience

Peter Kearns OAM FACE
PASCAL International Observatory Board

This submission is based on international experience in learning city and neighbourhood development that enhances the role of local neighbourhoods and cities in fostering lifelong learning and healthy living, addressing exclusion, and bonding individuals in communities for strategic development.

The approaches discussed show how lifelong learning and health objectives integrated in learning city development can offer a cost-effective approach to addressing isolation and exclusion, building partnership, and overall fostering healthy living and well-being.

The submission covers:

1. The work of UNESCO in building a Global Network of Learning Cities with over 200 members around the world.
2. The work of the PASCAL International Observatory in developing the concept of EcCoWell as integrated development in cities and neighbourhoods with a particular focus on community learning and health with Cork in Ireland given as an example.
3. The UK Centre for Sustainable Healthy Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods, located in Glasgow University with UK Government funding from UK Research and Innovation as part of the Global Challenge Research Fund with 14 cities in Asia and Africa participating, and with 9 partner universities.
4. The PASCAL report on *Towards Good Active Ageing* which reports on learning community initiatives around the world.

Key points

- We support the importance of non-health services and organisations in both preventing mental illness and facilitating a persons' recovery, and wish to point to the value of learning cities and neighbourhoods in initiating and co-ordinating such partnership action.
- The UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities provides examples from over 200 cities around the world with the recent Medellin Manifesto on Learning Cities for Inclusion resulting from the Fourth UNESCO International Conference on Learning Cities illustrating this role.
- The Pascal International Observatory has developed since 2011 the concept of integrated development in learning cities and learning neighbourhoods under an initiative named EcCoWell with the city of Cork in Ireland leading this initiative with a particular focus on learning, health, and community relationships.
- The EcCoWell concept has been furthered by the UK Centre for Sustainable Healthy Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods with funding from the UK Government and with a network of 14 cities in Asia and Africa, and 9 partner universities. Comparative research in a diversity of contexts is bringing fresh insights into key relationships.

- The Learning City and Neighbourhood concepts provides a cost-effective way of harnessing resources already in communities for strategic development directed at lifelong learning, healthy living, community building and inclusion.
- A recent PASCAL report on *Towards Good Active Ageing for All* illustrates how learning community approaches are being implemented in a range of countries including Germany, Japan, Australia, Taiwan, and China. While not specifically focused on mental health, they all support inclusion, well-being and community building and what Makino termed “the decentralised revitalisation of Japanese society.”
- There would be much value in a few government-supported pilot projects testing the learning city/neighbourhood approach in Australian conditions with a focus on strengthening learning, health, and community relationships with mental health benefits for these communities.
- The learning community approach will have most value in the draft report’s Reform Area 1 in building on community resources for prevention, cultural change, support, and early intervention. Cultural change requires such strategic local community action.

Background

The contemporary concept of leaning cities was developed by OECD from its work on lifelong learning. The European Union then supported these developments with the PASCAL International Observatory in 2011 developing an international network of learning cities, known as PIE, that included Beijing, Shanghai, Cork, and Vancouver.

UNESCO then convened in 2013 the First International Conference on Learning Cities in Beijing leading to the establishment of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities with some 200 member cities. The GNLC is administered by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning located in Hamburg (UIL). PASCAL has a MOU with the Institute for collaboration.

PASCAL work on learning cities led to the development of the concept of learning neighbourhoods as the best context for building sustainable partnerships and bonding organisations for shared strategic action. Inclusion and well-being throughout the life course are particular objectives.

PASCAL is discussing with Cork extending EcCoWell ideas further, possibly with some cities involved with the UK Centre for Sustainable Healthy Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods participating. It is expected that this will initially have a learning and health focus with mental health included as one of the areas for development.

References

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2017. Unlocking the potential of urban communities: Case studies of sixteen learning cities. Hamburg:UIL

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2019. Medellin Manifesto: Learning Cities for Inclusion. Hamburg:UIL.

Kearns, P. & Reghenzani, D. 2019. Building good sustainable communities through the learning city EcCoWell approach. Accessed from Glasgow CR&DALL working papers, WP 501/2019. Accessed 2.1.2020: <http://cradall.org/workingpapers/building-good-sustainable-communities-through-learning-city-eccowell-approach>

Kearns,P & Reghenzani, D. (ed), 2019, Towards good active ageing for all. Accessed 2.1.2020: <https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/SIG-LLL-PIMA20ALA.pdf>