



2nd International Conference on Learning Cities

Building Sustainable Learning Cities

28 to 30 September 2015, Mexico City, Mexico

Concept Note

Background

The importance of lifelong learning in the 21st century as a holistic and sector-wide approach to learning is being increasingly recognised. It involves all sub-sectors and levels of education in order to ensure the provision of learning opportunities for all individuals.

It is estimated that by 2050, 70% of the world's population will be living in towns and cities. As cities expand, municipal governments face challenges associated with social and demographic changes, scientific and technological advances, cultural diversity and environmental sustainability. It has become a pressing need to find solutions to these challenges in a fast-changing world.

National governments play a major role in setting the agenda and creating a vision for learning societies; however, it is cities in particular, who have the advantage of proximity and scale, which offer a favourable setting for promoting lifelong learning for the resolution of economic, social, health and environmental problems. A growing number of cities recognise that learning, in its broadest sense, can be a driver for social, cultural, economic and environmental wellbeing. These cities are developing innovative strategies which allow citizens of all ages to strengthen existing attitudes and/or adopt new mindsets, values, skills and knowledge, thereby transforming their cities into learning cities.

Against this background, the 1st International Conference on Learning Cities (ICLC), co-organised by UNESCO, the Ministry of Education of China and Beijing Municipal Government, was held in Beijing in October 2013. The Conference brought together 550 mayors, city education executives and experts from 102 countries, as well as representatives of UN agencies, regional organisations, non-governmental organisations and multinational corporations.

The Conference adopted two key documents. The first one is the *Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities*, which affirms the vital importance of learning for the future of all urban communities. It also urges UNESCO 'to establish a global network of learning cities to support the practice of lifelong learning in the world's communities'. The second outcome document is the set of *Key Features of Learning Cities*, which serves as a comprehensive checklist of action points to help stakeholders build learning cities.

In response to this call, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), as UNESCO's centre of excellence for lifelong learning, took the initiative to prepare the establishment of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC). The UNESCO GNLC aims to become the first-ever global network to mobilise cities to improve their learning facilities and help them use their resources more effectively in every sector. Members of the network share ideas and experience on how to enrich human potential, foster lifelong personal growth, promote equality and social justice, maintain social cohesion, and create sustainable prosperity. Furthermore, the UNESCO GNLC will confer awards on those cities which have achieved outstanding success in implementing the *Key Features of Learning Cities*.

Since the 1st ICLC, the practice of building learning cities has further accelerated and expanded in international communities. Many cities have started to adopt the learning city approach to tackle specific challenges and put the outcome documents of the first Conference into action. Moreover, UIL is taking on a leading role in providing capacity building activities, technical support and multiple communication channels for cities to exchange ideas and experiences of developing learning cities. In particular, UIL has compiled a series of case studies of learning cities to showcase successful practices and demonstrate different contexts for building learning cities.

To take stock of the achievements and lessons learnt in building learning cities communities worldwide and the progress in expanding the GNLC, UNESCO has decided to organise the **2nd International Conference on Learning Cities** together with the Government of Mexico City from 28 to 30 September 2015. Entitled 'Building Sustainable Learning Cities', the conference will focus in particular on the stability and vitality of the learning cities approach, but also on environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability.

1. Place and date of the Conference

The Conference will be held in Mexico City, Mexico, from **28 to 30 September 2015**, with 27 September as the date for arrival and registration, and 1 October for departure.

The venue of the Conference will be Palacio de Minería, and accommodation will be provided at the Hilton Reforma Hotel and Fiesta Americana Reforma Hotel, as selected by Mexico City Government in agreement with UNESCO.

2. Organisers and hosting organisations

(a) Organisers:

- UNESCO
- Mexico City Government

(b) Hosting organisations:

- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)
- Secretariat of Education of the Mexico City Government
- Mexican Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO
- UNESCO Office in Mexico

3. Aim and objectives

The aim of the Conference is to take stock of progress and to continue expanding facilities for building sustainable learning cities around the world, thus contributing to individual empowerment, social cohesion, economic development, cultural prosperity and environmental sustainability.

The Conference will provide an opportunity for cities worldwide to communicate their expertise in building learning cities, learn from others' experiences, forge partnerships and create synergies. The Conference will also reflect on how the building of learning cities is advancing in communities worldwide and how the UNESCO GNLC has been growing and progressing since the 1st ICLC in Beijing.

4. Theme and main contents

The theme of the 2nd International Conference on Learning Cities, **Building Sustainable Learning Cities**, includes the following sub-themes, which will be addressed in plenary sessions: (1) Developing sustainable learning cities around the world; (2) Strengthening partnerships/networks for developing sustainable learning cities; (3) Working strategies for a sustainable learning city and (4) Implementing the *Key Features* for sustainable learning cities.

Sub-theme 1: *Developing sustainable learning cities around the world*

It is at municipal level that the greatest capacity exists for innovation and implementation of policies which respond to social, economic and political changes. This is why the potential of cities and urban regions to play a greater role in promoting social inclusion, economic growth, public safety and environmental protection is especially high. Many cities have benefited from participating in international policy dialogue, action research, capacity building and peer learning, and use learning city approaches to offer lifelong learning opportunities to their citizens. Others have applied learning city approaches to tackle specific challenges and put the outcome documents of the 1st Conference into action.

Deepening the analysis along these lines, Sub-theme 1 will make a sound case for progress in developing sustainable learning cities, incentivising mayors, city education executives and experts to embrace the learning city concept to enhance integrated social, economic and environmental sustainability in their cities and to create a better future – for themselves, for their citizens, and for the planet.

Sub-theme 2: *Strengthening partnerships/networks for developing sustainable learning cities*

Building a learning city depends on innovations which only take place if there are forward-looking institutions to take the lead in facilitating dialogue and cooperation between all stakeholders, both internally within the city and in learning partnerships with stakeholders in other learning cities. All sectors have a key role to play in learning and education. It is crucial to improve governance and participation of stakeholders by encouraging all partners to provide quality learning opportunities and to make their own unique contribution to a sustainable learning city.

As all organisations and all people are stakeholders in a learning city, the discussion on Sub-theme 2 will provide the necessary elements to city governments and other stakeholders for building a learning city structure and will introduce them to working mechanisms which involve all stakeholders in a dialogue and consensus which has the potential of leading to sustainable learning cities.

Sub-theme 3: *Working strategies for a sustainable learning city*

Learning cities at all stages of development can benefit greatly from sharing ideas with other cities, since solutions for issues arising as one learning city develops may already exist in other cities. To facilitate this sharing of ideas and to offer many other forms of support for the development of learning cities around the world, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) conceived the Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) in 2012. The work of this network has been progressing apace, taking on a leading role in providing capacity building activities, technical support and multiple communication channels for cities to exchange ideas on and experiences of developing learning cities.

In order to further promote lifelong learning for all and to encourage good practice in building learning cities, Sub-theme 3 will discuss the expansion of the network in terms of the following three main topics: i) the *Guidelines for Building Learning Cities*, which aim to provide cities with strategic approaches for building dynamic and sustainable learning cities; ii) membership of cities in the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC); and iii) the launch the UNESCO Learning City Award. The Award will be conferred on cities which have achieved outstanding progress in building learning cities by implementing the *Key Features of Learning Cities*.

Sub-theme 4: *Implementing the Key Features for sustainable learning cities*

Building a sustainable learning city entails an operational and pragmatic approach to the implementation of the discourse of lifelong learning for all. Monitoring the progress of building a learning city is necessary to transform political and theoretical discourses into concrete strategies and approaches and to evaluate the benefits of the strategies put in place. Budding learning cities will need a set of indicators to monitor their progress. Such as set of indicators is provided, for example, in the *Key Features of Learning Cities* adopted in Beijing; they offer a normative instrument for measuring progress with a focus on fundamental conditions, major building blocks and wider benefits of learning cities.

By focusing on the major strategies for monitoring learning cities' progress, and through exchanges of successful practices, the discussion on Sub-theme 4 will provide mayors, city education executives and experts with a set of concrete strategies and approaches which could be adopted by city governments and other stakeholders to make efforts to measure progress and evaluate progress in learning cities.

Besides the four plenary sessions, delegates will also expand their knowledge and understanding of developing sustainable learning cities, strengthening partnerships/networks for learning cities, and in implementing the *Key Features* for sustainable learning cities through parallel thematic and regional forums and the mayors' forum.

5. Participants

UNESCO is inviting each of its Member States to form a delegation selected from among its mayors, national and city education executives and experts dedicated to the promotion of lifelong learning for all to participate in the Conference.

In addition, UNESCO is also inviting representatives of international organisations, non-governmental organisations and private sector partners, as well as experts in the field of education and lifelong learning, to participate in the Conference.

6. Working languages

The Conference's three working languages are English, French and Spanish (simultaneous interpretation will be provided).

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