*Lifelong Learning*
*Учене през целия живот*

# WHY LIFELONG LEARNING AND WHY LEARNING CITIES?

**Michael Osborne**
*University of Glasgow*

**Abstract.** This article is based on a key presentation made in May 2014 at the Townsville Learning Cities conference in Australia, one of a series of regional events organized by the Australian Learning Community Network.[1)] The presentation sought to answer a series of specific questions that had been posed by the city of Townsville as follows:

What are the Community benefits of a local government emphasis on lifelong learning?

How do we engage youth in learning?

How do we reengage adults in learning after formal learning?

How do we maintain engagement in learning throughout the life-course?

What examples exist internationally for maintaining community participation in learning?

This is a specific example of one small city in Australia, but the issues raised might pertain to many other cities in the world.

*Keywords:* learning cities, lifelong learning, place, health

## Introduction

Traditionally there have been two dominant themes in the area of lifelong learning (see for example EC 2001). Firstly there has been a focus on the issue of social justice and social inclusion. Particular groups have been systematically excluded from the formal sector by virtue of their social status, race and ethnicity, gender, disability or geographical location. Many are disadvantaged in multiple ways. Widening participation to HE for these under-represented groups as the system has massified is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of policies to rectify inequity. The second theme has focussed on economic benefits. The essential arguments have been that there are financial gains to be made from engagement in learning.

Furthermore neither social benefits nor economic benefits are simply individual ones. Benefits accrue to communities, businesses, the public sector and the providers of learning if more people engage. All of these stakeholders are connected synergistically in a common regional or city space. This leads us to the idea of the

'learning city' or 'learning region', a framework that has been promoted for some time as a focus for lifelong learning (CERI/OECD 1992; OECD 2001a; Eckert *et al*. 2012; Kearns, Osborne and Yang 2013)

In fact the idea that learning is intimately linked to place can be traced back to Ancient Greece and the writings of Plato from 2500 years ago (Longworth and Osborne 2010). I personally am involved in a new project funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh, concerned with Gaza as a Learning City in the 7th century led by one of our Professors of Classics.

The more recent literature defines the learning city/region in various ways, but crudely we can think of a continuum. At one end of this continuum lies an economic focus on creating an infrastructure of educational opportunity that might attract inward investment from business. A possible response is that employers might be attracted by a learning infrastructure that supports the continuing development of their workers at all levels and create a supply of suitably skilled workers. At the other end of the continuum a learning city/region refers to the creation of learning networks that promote and enhance social cohesion and inclusion

**Social Inclusion**

When I became first involved in the field of adult education in the early 1980s, it was in connection with access to higher education initiatives, and this work was very closely connected with providing opportunities to those who had been systemically excluded from learning. Since I was working in London, the main emphasis was race and ethnicity, and I was involved in a number of the early programmes that sought to provide access for Afro-Caribbeans and Bangladeshis to vocational fields, such as teaching and social work. In Scotland where I have worked since the late 1980s the emphasis has been on exclusion by virtue of socio-economic class.

This has been an imperative also throughout the European Union and can be traced back to the *White Paper on Lifelong Learning* (EC 1995) and the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (EC 2001). Further in these documents, the rhetoric is not simply about access to Higher Education and other types of formal education, but all forms of lifelong learning in formal, non-formal and informal sites of learning. We also see manifestations of such imperatives across Europe (see Osborne 2003) and in many other parts of the world. For example, in Australia there were programmes to promote access to Higher Education that concentrated on seven targeted equity groups with a federal initiative, *A Fair Chance for All* (Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) 1990). In the US there have been many efforts over the years. On 16 January 2014, at a White House summit for higher education, President Obama launched an official national campaign to make college education more affordable and more accessible. Here the focus is not only on 'getting in', but 'getting on', referring to the notion that access is no guarantee of successful graduation, and attention has to be given also to retention by providing support within HE.

In the US going to university is consistently marketed as the key to success in life, and a means to achieving social mobility. However here as in other parts of the world the economic and the social are not dichotomous. However as we can see in Europe, lifelong learning and the development of human capital in the face of the forces of competition, globalization and new technologies is a forceful rhetoric. This tends to accentuate the economic benefits of lifelong in policy

**An Economic Agenda**

There are good reasons in the economies of the west for this focus on lifelong learning. Since the mid-1980s a range of macro-economic issues have been to the fore. These include changes in the nature of occupations with the decline of traditional industries and the associated demand for craft training, and the increase in the services sector. In an increasingly globalised marketplace with many barriers to trade being broken down by the removal of tariffs and the use of information technology, economies have striven to become more competitive. These changes in business practices have led to responses from governments to place more emphasis on how the vocational and higher education sectors can contribute to the development of human capital development.

This economic focus has led to a degree of individualism where learning has been presented by governments as a personal responsibility to ensure personal competitiveness. Skills development becomes a pre-requisite for employability, both initial and continuing. If learning is not directly linked to an economic outcome and is rather for wider personal development in the liberal tradition them even more it is viewed as a personal responsibility. We have seen the state remove its support for adult education in this liberal tradition in many parts of the world, including New Zealand, Australia and the UK.

Learning providers have been challenged as well in recent decades. Historically they have offered a fixed supply of learning opportunity, which potential students take or leave. Now to a certain degree are expected to respond to the needs and demands of diverse student populations in a range of ways, offering courses in various modes, and in places and times that suit students. The very recent manifestation of this focus has been Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

The rhetoric of choice and flexibility at an individual level would also suggest that rather than focusing on front-end provision in the early years, institutions should structure their offer around continuing provision across the life-cycle. At the same time the policies of governments would need to support this through funding approaches. An interesting model that addressed this in 2002 was the Scottish Parliament's proposal of a lifelong learning allowance of 5 years of learning based on spending that credit through the life-course.

Another implication is a move from discipline specific education and training to skills and competencies for Lifelong Learning based on transferable skills and core competence.

In summary, the arguments for lifelong learning from an economic perspective suggestion that competition in a global market is compromised because a skills deficit exist and that more well qualified individuals are needed for the labour market. Further for individuals there is an economic payoff in achieving higher qualifications (see OECD 2001b), and also that in expanding the system of post-compulsory education there will also be widening and an increase in social justice, social inclusion and mobility.

**The Importance of Place**

The preceding sections have focused largely on formal education, and broad social and economic arguments. I now turn to some of the wider benefits of lifelong learning and the role of place, which I argue as being a very important consideration as is early intervention, and family/community based interventions.

The recently published Child Poverty Strategy In Scotland speaks of the 'need to break the cycles of poverty, deprivation, unemployment, health inequalities and poor educational attainment which have become deeply embedded in our society, particularly in our disadvantaged communities' (Scottish Government, 2013:7).

Healthy children are more likely to perform well at school and young people with high levels of educational attainment are more likely to find high quality employment. In turn Good Places (i.e. the social, economic, cultural and physical environment) lead to better health (Scottish Government, 2011). Good places contain healthy people, who are more likely to enter learning, gain qualifications and become employed. Furthermore they will then become more civically-minded engaged citizens.

The first question posed to me from Townsville was: *What are the Community benefits of a local government emphasis on lifelong learning?*

It is clear that a place-based approach is vital, and these approaches have to be developed community by community since each community has its particular challenges. It is clear that communities benefit from a lifelong learning approach, but it must be a customized approach.

However there are a complex set of interactions in place - the links are clear, but they are not uni-directional. Also whilst we can see correlations between variables, it is impossible to say convincingly what causes what. For example, whilst it is clear that healthier children are likely to be more successful learners, the converse may also be the case.

The Marmot Review (2010) in the UK identified education as one of the key social determinants of health. As formal education tends to finish by early adulthood, poor educational outcomes can cast a long shadow over the life course. The Review argues that lifelong learning is one of the key interventions to reduce health inequalities and presents evidence of associations between participation in various types of adult learning and improvements in well-being, health, and health-

related behaviours. Such evidence requires systematic and longitudinal studies, such as the work of Feinstein and Hammond (2004), which used data obtained from the 1958 British Birth Cohort. The Marmot Review provides many examples of the association between learning and health amongst adults[2)], some of which follow:

– Adults who engaged in at least one academic, accredited course increased their levels of exercise

– Those who took at least one vocational, accredited course reduced their alcohol consumption

– Other studies have estimated the effect of education on reducing the risk of depression during adulthood

– Studies of adults in their 30s and 40s have reported a correlating relationship between measures of participation in learning and outcomes such as life satisfaction and/or psychological wellbeing. Amongst these older adults, it was leisure courses, rather than vocational courses, which appeared to have significant effects.

The benefits in this area are not simply social, but also economic and should also concern communities. The economic and social are false dichotomies.

There are clearly positive links between LLL and health. Less people taking part in learning in the third age may increase the escalating health bills of most countries. It is communities and de facto individuals who will pay the price of not investing in learning.

**Youth and Older Adults**

Strategies to engage young people in learning as well to re-engage adults in learning after compulsory schooling are both important issues internationally. There are a number of age-related studies of engagement in learning, and linked gender and race/ethnicity issues. Historically engagement in all forms of learning declines with age irrespective of sex, but older men, especially from minority groups, are less likely to participate than women.

However that may be changing, though not for the better. We are also seeing a decline in participation amongst some young people. The economic crisis has led to the creation of what many refer to as a lost generation of young that either have not had opportunity to learn beyond compulsory schooling, who find that their post-compulsory qualifications carry no currency or who are in precarious employment.

There are have been high levels of youth unemployment for two decades in Europe, and this recently has been exacerbated by the financial crisis since 2008 especially in countries such as Greece and Spain[3)] (Mourshed, Patel and Sudar, 2014). And, whilst we all now that it is women who have historically faced discrimination in education opportunity, this emerging group of young unemployed people is disproportionately male.

Again the consequences of not addressing these issues have both social and economic consequences for individuals and communities. For example if there is a link between lack of education and crime, and most crimes are carried out by men, the consequences are obvious.

At the same time, a new older generation is emerging without the safety net of the past. Even those of us with pensions are worrying whether we will actually get them and whether we can trust the banks with our money. The next generation is worrying whether they will have pensions and how long (if they have a job) they will have to work.

Traditionally we have not favoured the groups that who have been most disadvantaged. Rather it is those who already have advantages who gain more with investment in post-compulsory learning having been heavily weighted towards higher education among young adults. The situation in this area is not changing with higher education becoming more expensive in many countries, including Australia and most of the UK; as a result there are disproportionate benefits to young people with parents from higher socio-economic groups who can afford to subsidise their children. There is an analogous situation in the vocational area with the highest quality training programmes tending to be available most readily to those already in work. This increases inequalities between the unemployed and the employed, many of whom do not have any formal qualifications.

These to a degree are policy choices. With restricted public expenditure, the argument that tends to have greatest resonance is one that suggests that early intervention has the greatest long-term economic and social benefit. There is a substantial literature, including from the OECD on the economic of lifelong learning, which presents arguments of this type, and this is restricting interventions that are being made beyond compulsory schooling.

However the world is a very different one from that of even a decade ago. The financial premium over a lifetime that that young people might have expected from a degree may no longer exist as costs to achieve that degree increase and graduate level jobs decline. Currently in Australia, it seems that premiums are being sustained as graduate jobs increase, and perhaps at the expense of the salaries of those without degrees (Coelli and Wilkins, 2009). However, economists produce very good predictions of the past. They may not so good in relation to the future. And it may be that simply putting our eggs in one basket – investing in the young and in HE is going to be sufficient for the future.

Returning to the question however how we engage young people and older adults, the simple answer is that we have to provide them with hope that they and their communities can achieve better lives through engagement in learning. There are some examples of possible approaches. One strategy that seems to have an effect is inter-generational learning. The National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE 2010) in the UK reports on how younger Bengali women from

an East London literacy project assisted older Bengali women in learning English, through sharing experiences of literacy learning and emotional and physical support. This led to increased self-confidence (especially in relation to employment) and volunteering among the younger women, and reduced feelings of isolation among the older women.

Another example is the Men's Shed movement, which emanates from Australia, and this provides examples of inter-generational support and informal skills exchanges between older and younger men (Golding *et al.,* 2007).

Ultimately for younger people the ultimate goal has to be qualifications and work, but even informal and non-formal learning as in these examples may provide a pathway. I have been something of a skeptic about the feasibility to operationalize systems of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning 4), which have been prioritized in lifelong policies in Europe, but these examples I have given show the richness of the learning that can occur in these environments. There are dangers in formalizing this learning through creating a system of recognition and validation and linking this to a qualifications structure, but potential merits too.

**Maintaining engagement in learning throughout life**

There are many studies of why adults participate in learning. Overwhelming these studies bring two factors to the fore: employment and employability; and cognitive interest. If learning leads to work, maintains a current position or improves the prospect of employment, and is interesting then it will engage people. However, we can look at engagement from other perspective since and highlight additional case studies that demonstrate strategies that have worked or are working in different ways. Earlier in this account some examples were cited relating health and learning. In Nottinghamshire in the UK, healthcare staff have refer individuals to a Learning Adviser. This has included patients with mild to moderate depression; people who are socially isolated and vulnerable; and people who want something to do, or want to make more of their lives but may be anxious, fearful or unaware of how to do that. That evaluation also reported improvements in patients' wellbeing, physical symptoms, health-related behaviours and sleep problems, following participation in courses leading to formal qualifications, practical skills and leisure opportunities.

A completely different approach is for formal institutions to co-design learning with and for communities in response to needs, including to solve problems that communities have identified. This is an area that has been the subject of the most recent publication of the Global Universities Network on Innovation (GUNI), Higher Education in the World V (Hall and Tandon 2013). In India where the book was launch in early March 2014, Tandon, who is a joint UNESCO Chair in Community-engaged research and President of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) spoke of aims that include 'to promote community-

university research partnerships to develop knowledge relevant to improve the lives of people' (Tandon, 2014). Here he is concerned with generating new knowledge in partnership with community based organisations such as women's groups, NGOs, and municipalities will be entertained based on the expression of needs and problems identified by these organisations. He also speaks of the need to 'promote practical learning and problem-solving competencies amongst students by directly engaging with the community'. Here he refers to the notion that practicums by students in partnership with community-based organisations and NGOs should be part of the course curriculum and be given credit. Ultimately this implies a third aim 'to design curriculum and pedagogy relevant to respond to learning needs of the community'. In so doing close interactions with communities for identifying their learning needs can be developed. Community knowledge can be integrated into courses and practitioners from communities can integrated into such courses as teachers.

This of course challenges those of us who work in universities, but perhaps this offers stakeholders in communities something to utilize to challenge providers of formal learning. This dimension of activity perhaps also offers Townsville further ideas in relation to the its 3rd Priority Area in Lifelong Learning. Here the commitment is to supporting networks and partnership. The important dimension of such networks is their reciprocity and being based on demand rather than supply, and this is echoed in another of Townsville's strategies, which speak of providing opportunities based on need.

**Learning Cities 2020**

Networks are also key at an international level, and one which has particular resonance for developing place-based learning is the Learning Cities 2020 programme of the PASCAL International Observatory (Osborne and Kearns, 2014) and the initiative of UNESCO (2013a and b) to create the International Platform of Learning Cities. The LC2020 programme seeks to identify future directions for learning cities up to 2020 and is facilitating a dialogue is being facilitated with cities within one of its strands of activity, the Learning City Networks (LCN). These networks will maintain and enhance previous work within an early set of exchanges entitled PASCAL International Exchanges (PIE) through creating policy-focused online discussions. Networks will seek to link with city, regional and national governments, business and labour organisations and universities. Currently five networks have been constructed around the following themes:

– EcCoWell [5)]
– Connecting urban & rural learning initiatives
– Harnessing cultural policies
– Learning cities and regions for inclusion
– Entrepreneurial Learning Cities.

We can over the next few years expect a resurgence of the city as the focus for lifelong learning, and the rationale for this focus is clear. UNESCO in their press release for the 2013 International Conference on Learning Cities in Beijing summarised why cities are so important:

*The influence of cities in national and world affairs has increased considerably in recent years. This is partly due to the growth in the number of city dwellers. Since 2008, the majority of the world's population lives in cities. By 2030, the proportion is likely to exceed 60 per cent. As cities expand in size and population density, local governments are facing challenges associated with social inclusion, new technologies, the knowledge economy, cultural diversity and environmental sustainability. In response, a growing number of cities are developing innovative strategies that allow their citizens – young and old – to learn new skills and competencies throughout life, thereby transforming their cities into 'learning cities'* (UNESCO 2013c).

In order that such aspirations are achieved, it is cities themselves who should take the lead, and exchange their practices, working alongside their stakeholders and academics in the spirit of co-construction of knowledge as advocated by Hall and Tandon (2013).

**NOTES**

1. Townsville is a city of approximately 190,000 adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef in tropical central Queensland, Australia. The Australian Learning Community Network exists to promote the inclusive concept of learning as the key element in the development of a range of sustainable communities across Australia, through cross sectorial partnerships.
2. Chandola and Jenkins (2014) neatly summarise a range of literature in this domain. Field (2009) extends the territory by considering wider notions of well-being and happiness.
3. These authors report that 'in Greece, the youth unemployment rate increased by 68 percent in the two years from 2010 to 2012. In Spain, the proportion of youth not in education, employment, or training (NEE T) rose 27 percent from 2008 to 2009 and has been creeping up steadily ever since'.
4. The European Observatory on validation of informal and non-formal learning provides a good starting point for those wishing to explore this area. See http://www.observal-net.eu.
5. EcCoWell promotes integrating strategies to maximise the positive impacts on the health and educational opportunities of all citizens as well as developing the environmental and economic sustainability of the city, resulting in greater equality, social inclusion and ultimately quality of life. It was developed as a concept within the PIE programme and has been taken on most fully by the City of Cork in Ireland. See http://eccowellcork.com

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✉ **Prof. Michael Osborne**
Co-leader of Social Justice, Place and Lifelong Education Research Cluster
Director of CRADALL and Co-director of PASCAL
School of Education
University of Glasgow
St Andrew's Building
11, Eldon Street
Glasgow G3 6NH
E-mail: Michael.Osborne@glasgow.ac.uk