

Beijing Declaration on Building Learning Cities

Lifelong Learning for All: Promoting Inclusion, Prosperity and Sustainability in Cities

Adopted at the International Conference on Learning Cities

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Preamble

We, the participants at the International Conference on Learning Cities, co-organised by UNESCO, the Ministry of Education of China and Beijing Municipal Government (Beijing, 21–23 October 2013) declare as follows:

We recognise that we live in a complex, fast-changing world where social, economic and political norms are constantly redefined. Economic growth and employment, urbanization, demographic change, scientific and technological advances, cultural diversity and the need to maintain human security and public safety represent just a few of the challenges to the governance and sustainability of societies.

We affirm that, in order to empower citizens – understood as all residents of cities and communities – we must strive to give them access to and encourage their use of a broad array of learning opportunities throughout their lives.

We believe that learning improves quality of life, equips citizens to anticipate and tackle new challenges, and helps build better and more sustainable societies.

We acknowledge that the concept of learning throughout life is not new; it is an integral feature of human development and is deeply rooted in all cultures and civilisations.

We maintain that lifelong learning confers social, economic and cultural benefits to individual learners and communities and should be a primary focus of cities, regions, nations and the international community.

We acknowledge that the majority of the world's population now resides in cities and urban regions, and that this trend is accelerating. As a result, cities and urban regions play an ever greater role in national and global development.

We recognise that “learning communities”, “learning cities” and “learning regions” are pillars of sustainable development.

We accept that international and regional organisations, as well as national governments, have a vital role to play in developing learning societies. However, **we are aware** that this development must be rooted in sub-national regions, cities and all types of community.

We know that cities play a significant role in promoting social inclusion, economic growth, public safety and environmental protection. Therefore, cities should be both architects and executors of strategies that foster lifelong learning and sustainable development.

We acknowledge that cities differ in their cultural and ethnic composition, heritage and social structures. However, many characteristics of a learning city are common to all. *A learning city mobilises human and other resources to promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education; it revitalises learning in families and communities; it facilitates learning*

for and in the workplace; it extends the use of modern learning technologies; it enhances quality in learning; and it nurtures a culture of learning throughout life.

We envision that a learning city will facilitate individual empowerment, build social cohesion, nurture active citizenship, promote economic and cultural prosperity, and lay the foundation for sustainable development.

Commitments

We commit ourselves to the following actions, which have the power to transform our cities:

1. Empowering individuals and promoting social cohesion

In today's cities, individual empowerment and social cohesion are crucial to the well-being of citizens; fostering participation, trust, connectedness and civic engagement. To equip citizens to anticipate and tackle the challenges of urbanisation, cities should attach great importance to individual empowerment and social cohesion.

In developing learning cities, we support individual empowerment and social cohesion by:

- ensuring that every citizen has the opportunity to become literate and obtain basic skills;
- encouraging and enabling individuals to actively participate in the public life of their city;
- guaranteeing gender equality; and
- creating a safe, harmonious and inclusive community.

2. Enhancing economic development and cultural prosperity

While economic development plays a fundamental role in increasing standards of living and maintaining the economic health of cities, cultural prosperity is a powerful contributor to quality of life. As a repository of knowledge, meaning and values, culture defines the way people live and interact within communities.

In developing learning cities, we will enhance economic development and cultural prosperity by:

- stimulating inclusive and sustainable economic growth;
- reducing the proportion of citizens living in poverty;
- creating employment opportunities for all citizens;
- actively supporting science, technology and innovation;
- ensuring access to diverse cultural activities; and
- encouraging participation in leisure and physical recreation.

3. Promoting sustainable development

To ensure the future viability of communities, natural resources must be used in ways that ensure a good quality of life for future generations. Sustainable development cannot be achieved through technological solutions, political regulations or fiscal incentives alone. It requires fundamental changes in the way people think and act. Lifelong learning is a necessary part of making this change.

In developing learning cities, we will promote sustainable development by:

- reducing the negative impacts of economic and other human activities on the natural environment;
- protecting the natural environment and enhancing the liveability of our cities; and
- promoting sustainable development through active learning in all settings.

4. Promoting inclusive learning in the education system

All citizens, regardless of ability, gender and sexuality, social background, language, ethnicity, religion or culture should have equal access to learning opportunities. If a person is excluded from participating in the education system, their ability to develop as individuals and contribute to their communities may be impaired.

In developing learning cities, we will promote inclusive learning in the education system by:

- expanding access to early childhood care and education;
- expanding access to formal education from primary to tertiary level;
- expanding access to and participation in adult education and technical and vocational education and training;
- improving the flexibility of lifelong learning systems in order to offer diverse learning opportunities and meet a range of proficiencies; and
- providing support for marginalized groups, including migrant families, to ensure access to education.

5. Revitalising learning in families and communities

Lifelong learning is not confined to educational or business settings. It infuses the entire life of a city. In most societies, the family is an especially important setting for learning. Learning in families and local communities builds social capital and improves the quality of life.

In developing learning cities, we will revitalise learning in families and local communities by:

- establishing community-based learning spaces and providing resources for learning in families and communities;

- ensuring, through consultation, that community education and learning programmes respond to the needs of all citizens;
- motivating people to participate in family and community learning, giving special attention to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, such as families in need, migrants, people with disabilities, minorities and third-age learners; and
- recognising community history and culture, and indigenous ways of knowing and learning as unique and precious resources.

6. Facilitating learning for and in the workplace

Due to globalization, technological advancement and the growth of knowledge-based economies, most adults need to regularly enhance their knowledge and skills. In turn, private and public organizations need to embrace a culture of learning.

In developing learning cities, we will facilitate learning for and in the workplace by:

- helping public and private organisations to become learning organisations;
- ensuring that all members of the workforce, including migrant workers, have access to a broad array of learning opportunities;
- encouraging employers and trade unions to support workplace learning; and
- providing appropriate learning opportunities for unemployed youth and adults.

7. Extending the use of modern learning technologies

Information and communication technologies (ICT) – particularly the Internet – have opened up new possibilities for learning and education. Modern cities must enable all citizens to use these technologies for learning and self-empowerment.

In developing learning cities, we will extend the use of modern learning technologies by:

- developing policy environments favourable to the use of ICT in learning;
- training administrators, teachers and educators to use technologies that enhance learning;
- expanding citizens' access to ICT tools and learning programmes; and
- developing quality e-learning resources.

8. Enhancing quality in learning

It is not sufficient for lifelong learning policies and practices to focus on increasing numbers of participants. In many cities, there is a disparity between the numbers of people participating in education and learning and those who succeed in mastering relevant, portable skills and competences. Quality is, therefore, of utmost importance. In particular, there is an acute need to foster skills, values and attitudes that will enable people to

overcome religious, linguistic and cultural differences, to coexist peacefully, and to discover shared human, moral and ethical principles.

In developing learning cities, we attach great importance to enhancing quality in learning by:

- promoting a paradigm shift from teaching to learning, and from the mere acquisition of information to the development of creativity and learning skills;
- raising awareness of shared moral, ethical and cultural values, and promoting tolerance of differences;
- employing appropriately trained administrators, teachers and educators;
- fostering a learner-friendly environment in which learners have, as far as practicable, ownership of their own learning; and
- providing support to learners with special needs, in particular those with learning difficulties.

9. Fostering a culture of learning throughout life

Most people today experience a variety of learning environments. When the outcomes of all learning are valued, rewarded and celebrated by a city, this strengthens the position of learners in society and motivates them to learn further. This motivation should be supported by the provision of comprehensive information and advice to help people make informed learning choices.

In developing learning cities, we will foster a vibrant culture of learning throughout life by:

- recognising the role of communications media, libraries, museums, religious settings, sports and cultural centres, community centres, parks and similar places as learning spaces;
- organising and supporting public events that encourage and celebrate learning;
- providing adequate information, guidance and support to all citizens, and stimulating them to learn through diverse pathways; and
- acknowledging the importance of learning in informal and non-formal settings and developing systems that recognize and reward all forms of learning.

10. Strengthening political will and commitment

It takes strong political will and commitment to successfully build a learning city. Politicians and administrators have primary responsibility for committing political resources to realising the vision of a learning city.

In developing learning cities, we will strengthen political will and commitment by:

- demonstrating strong political leadership and making a steadfast commitment to turning our cities into learning cities;
- developing and implementing well grounded and participatory strategies for promoting lifelong learning for all; and
- consistently monitoring progress towards becoming a learning city.

11. Improving governance and participation of all stakeholders

All sectors of society have a key role to play in learning and education and should participate in building learning cities. However, stakeholders and citizens are more likely to contribute to building learning cities if decisions are made in a participatory way.

In developing learning cities, we will improve governance and participation of all stakeholders by:

- establishing inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms to involve governmental and non-governmental organisations and the private sector in building learning cities;
- developing bilateral or multilateral partnerships between sectors in order to share resources and increase the availability of learning opportunities; and
- encouraging all stakeholders to provide quality learning opportunities and to make their own unique contribution to building a learning city;

12. Boosting resource mobilisation and utilisation

Cities and communities that embrace lifelong learning for all have seen significant improvements in terms of public health, economic growth, reduced criminality and increased democratic participation. These wider benefits of lifelong learning present strong arguments for increased investment in the building of learning cities.

In developing learning cities, we will boost resource mobilisation and utilisation by:

- encouraging greater financial investment in lifelong learning by government, civil society, private sector organisations and individuals;
- making effective use of the learning resources of all stakeholders and developing innovative funding mechanisms to support lifelong learning for all;
- removing structural barriers to learning, adopting pro-poor funding policies and providing various types of support to disadvantaged groups;
- encouraging citizens to contribute their talents, skills, knowledge and experience on a voluntary basis; and
- encouraging the exchange of ideas, experiences and best practice between organisations in different cities.

Call to Action

Numerous places already define themselves as learning cities or regions. They are keen to benefit from international policy dialogue, action research, capacity building and peer learning, and to apply successful approaches to promoting lifelong learning. Therefore,

1. We call upon UNESCO to establish a global network of learning cities to support and accelerate the practice of lifelong learning in the world's communities. This network should promote policy dialogue and peer learning among member cities, forge links, foster partnerships, provide capacity development, and develop instruments to encourage and recognise progress.
2. We call upon cities and regions in every part of the world to join this network, to develop and implement lifelong learning strategies in their cities.
3. We call upon international and regional organizations to become active partners in this network.
4. We call upon national authorities to encourage local jurisdictions to build learning cities, regions and communities, and to participate in international peer learning activities.
5. We call upon foundations, private corporations and civil society organisations to become active partners of the global network of learning cities – drawing on experience gained in private-sector initiatives.

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