

THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

We have been talking about learning cities for over 20 years. Some people link a learning city to things like lifelong learning, health, climate, environment or social innovation - or to democracy and active citizenship...

Much rhetoric can be unfolded in the attempt to define what a learning city is.

We prefer a very pragmatic approach, trying to set up some basic criteria and expectations for a learning city.

At the same time we prefer the word *community*, as it is more flexible and point towards *structures* rather than *content*: learning community structures can be developed and practiced at many different levels, such as a (poor or rich) city, a region, a transnational region, etc. - but also at the level of a part of a city, a partnership or innovative collaboration covering certain themes or challenges.

What's important to us is that a learning community is *a community that learns*.

The learning community is not defined by the amount of lifelong learning activities, but by how the community as a community is learning.

A community with a lot of lifelong learning might be called *a community of learning*, but is not necessarily *a learning community*.

In other words, it is about how a community (a city, a part of a city, a partnership) develops infrastructures of communication and collaboration capacity to *manage needs, change and challenges* important to the community and its organisations and citizens.

This *infrastructural communication and collaboration capacity building* is crucial to the essence of a learning community:

- How are initiatives taken?
- Who is communicating about emerging needs or opportunities?
- To what extent are different sectors collaborating, a college, a bank and a sport club?
- How are groups of citizens involved in finding new ways to solve their problems?
- How are talent and innovation and creativity welcomed and supported?
- What kinds of partnerships are created outside the public authorities?
- To what extent can partnerships and groups of citizens act independently?
- How is policy created?
- How is trust built between the collaborators and between authorities and citizens?
- What organisations and groups of citizens are involved in entrepreneurship?
- How are the community's inclusion principles and infrastructures working in practice?
- How is a community mentality encouraged, developed and sustained?

A learning community is a community that dynamically practices, tests, challenges and critically discusses such infrastructures of communication and collaboration permanently and at a systematic level. This is how the learning community is learning.

A city with a lot of education institutions is not by definition a learning community...

A city with a strong focus on health is not by definition a learning community...

A city actively promoting green innovation is not by definition a learning community...

A city engaging in the rhetoric of learning cities is not by definition a learning community...

A learning community can be expected to address such matters in a serious way, but this is not what *makes it* a learning community.

The Common Criteria tries to unfold expectations linked to this understanding of a learning community - and is prepared to learn from practice and experience.

