

XPLOIT CONFERENCE 2013

- *the UNESCO dialogues*

Intro

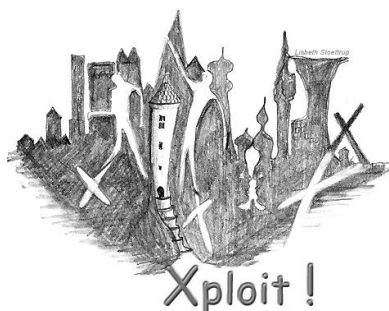
At the Xploit Conference in Salt Catalonia in April 2013 UNESCO presented a new global Learning Cities Network initiative. UNESCO's Peter Roslander presented the initiative and asked for feedback from the participants. This short-paper summarizes this feedback.

You might also wish to read the full conference report, available on www.learningcommunities.eu



Contact

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Local learning centers and partnership are yet to be built into a coherent lifelong learning policy. Despite the numerous partnership and network initiatives of recent years, they remain occasional, interest-driven and short-lived. Policy development and local implementation are still lacking.
The European Association for the Education of Adults, 2006

THE UNESCO LEARNING CITIES NETWORK DIALOGUES

Learn about the UNESCO Learning Cities Network initiative on

<http://uil.unesco.org/home/news-target/preparation-under-way-to-establish-the-unesco-global-learning-cities-network-unesco-glcnc/62e61bd6222f87c0fe83f645aac2a8b3/>



UNESCO is in the process of establishing the first global city learning network, including a system of indicators offering evaluation and benchmarking of the performance of the learning cities.

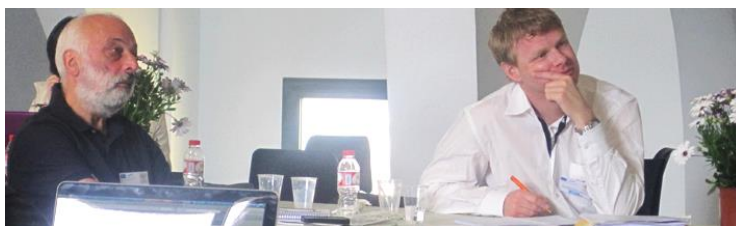
The Network is expected to be launched at a conference in Beijing in autumn 2013.

Along the various consultative processes, the UNESCO Lifelong Learning Unit offered to present the learning cities network plans and perspectives at the Xploit Conference.

The idea is for UNESCO to partner up with major regional and global stakeholders, such as the European Commission, with major global enterprises and with city governments from the UNESCO regions.

Mr. Peter Roslander took part in the entire Xploit conference and offered presentations leading to useful dialogues with the Xploit communities and conference participants.

Some Xploit partners are applying for participation in the pre-piloting of the UNESCO Learning Cities indicator approach, but the main aim of the conference dialogues was to offer UNESCO feedback on their Learning Cities approach, including the proposed indicator system.



It is likely that these dialogues will be continued elsewhere, and reported on the learningcommunities.eu, but let us try to sum up some of the critical feedback elements from the conference participants:



Some participants found the overall UNESCO learning city mission and descriptions rather vague: statements everybody would agree to, but also without directions or strategic power



Participants questioned the usefulness of large macro-level indicator systems, as experience has shown that such systems are likely to be difficult to implement in practice



Participants proposed more simple indicators, linked to the core elements of a learning city, and more readily useful in practice



Participants questioned whether the indicators really described what learning cities are about, and argued that such totalistic systems rather measured the general wealth of a city, or the general educational/learning performance of the city



Some participants also questioned the single quantitative approach, and argued that interviews, descriptions and evaluation might do a better job, as learning city elements are hard to measure numerically



Participants put forth that what is measured might be the amount of education and learning (i.e. enrollment), but not the quality or the outcome of the learning processes



Some participants tried to critically put into question the complicated interaction between the Network macro-level and the learning community micro-level, and argued that some of the important successes at the community micro-level might not even turn up if using the proposed indicator system - the general interaction between macro-level and micro-level was questioned: what are the relations between learning city and learning community?



Some participants advocated a quite different approach to the field, including different evaluation approaches: if a learning city is not about the amount of learning or education, but about how the city or community is learning to work together, then another indicator approach is needed, and most likely not a quantitative one



Some participants proposed to use a UNESCO global approach to provide resources and support to learning cities and communities, such as good practice, guidelines and training material, as an alternative to benchmarking systems; benchmarking system can easily be misused for political and prestige purposes, and have a problematic effect on city governance; these critiques were based on negative experience with such indicator systems, and the wish for a more pragmatic network approach, offering guidance, support and networking



Participants presented a general critique of the paradigm of the indicator system: the system is measuring in absolute values the performance of cities at a certain point, leaving of course less resourceful cities in the darkness, whereas the indicator system and the entire evaluation approach should be focusing on change processes, addressing the individual city at its own level and evaluating the change progress accomplished in a certain time; the, at secondary level, such a change index might be used for inter-city benchmarking; the strengths of this approach are: it measures the city based on the

city's situation and resources, and it measures change structures in time; therefore a small African city might do better than a mega-city in one of the more developed part of the world



More value-based comments addressed the problem of the important criteria of learning cities and communities: are we sure that the proposed platform and indicator system is really addressing what learning cities and communities is all about?



In conclusion, many critical voices were raised, as could be expected when the context is working local communities and not for example national politicians. However many of the critical comments should be taken seriously, as they are based on many years of experience, and because some of them, also from a scientific and epistemological standpoint, were very relevant.

UNESCO's initiative seems to be welcomed by many stakeholders, but the big challenge seems to be the interaction between macro-level and micro-level, which is serious when things like empowerment and capacity building are at stake...

Thanks a lot to UNESCO's Peter Roslander who made the interesting dialogues possible...



You are welcome to request more in-depth elaboration of the feedback. You can do this by contacting Jan Gejel on jan.gejel@skolekom.dk