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Building Good Sustainable Communities through the Learning City EcCoWell Approach

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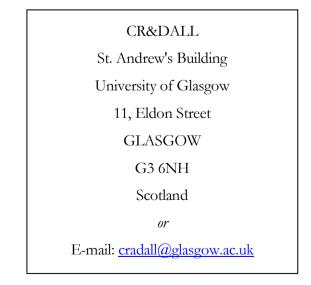
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Abstract   EcCoWell was developed by the PASCAL International Observatory in 2012, based on the experience of Taipei city, as an approach to developing learning cities in a holistic and cohesive manner. The emergence of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, with a similar requirement for holistic development has enhanced the significance of the EcCoWell experience. This paper examines the relevance of EcCoWell to implementing the SDGs in cities and smaller communities, and traces how the EcCoWell concept has evolved in this context of learning city development. The learning city concept is inevitably caught up in the debate about humanistic responses to the challenge of rampart digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, such that sustainability takes on further meaning in this context.

Keywords: learning cities, sustainability, lifelong learning, EcCoWell, SDGs, entrepreneurship
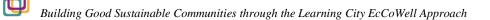
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1. Introduction

The arrival of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with their call for a holistic approach to implementation, has raised the question of how the Goals can be progressed in cities and other communities in such an integrated manner. The PASCAL International Observatory has been addressing the question of holistic development in learning cities since 2012 through a small initiative named EcCoWell. The EcCoWell experience is discussed from the perspective of the originator of the concept, who was concerned to explore the ramifications of the idea in different contexts, rather than that of an independent observer looking to assess the outcomes of this innovation. This perspective brought with it a strong interest in how the concept might be further developed in response to evolving challenges confronting learning cities. This theme is taken up in the paper along with the idea that EcCoWell is an unfinished story. The relevance of EcCoWell, as it has evolved, to the emerging context of the so-called 'fourth industrial revolution' (Schwab: 2016) is discussed. This context has significant implications for the learning city concept; and, for education generally.

While the EcCoWell story is about a concept as a way of integrating the strands of learning city development, it is also about an initiative taken by the city of Cork since 2013 in seeking integrated learning city development through applying the EcCoWell concept. This is an unfinished story, although the success of Cork as a learning city was recognised when Cork was invited by UNESCO to host the 3rd UNESCO International Conference on Learning Cities in 2017.

The EcCoWell story is important in illustrating how a concept of this nature can motivate innovations important in the on-going policy, praxis and research development of learning cities. The EcCoWell core of integrating learning, health and environment was picked up in the UNESCO *Cork Call to Action on Learning Cities* (2017a) which are green, healthy learning cities, and is also reflected in a major international research project led by the University of Glasgow with partner universities in Africa and Asia directed at Sustainable Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods. These initiatives reflected both the health and learning theme of EcCoWell and the learning neighbourhood concept, which emerged from the EcCoWell experience, and which is discussed below. The enhancement of the learning city idea in a context of exponential change needs policy and research interactions,

where the spin off effects reside in the actions taken by others. Much of the value of international collaboration in fields such as lifelong learning and learning cities is of this nature with policy ideas having a key role in stimulating action by others.

This paper illustrates how the EcCoWell concept has evolved through several stages in response to challenges confronting learning cities, building on insights gained from learning city development. These stages have involved the addition of the learning neighbourhood concept in 2014-15, and the subsequent addition of happiness and entrepreneurship to the concept following a Rethinking EcCoWell report to the PASCAL Board in 2017. The paper provides an account that illustrates these stages, demonstrating how international exchanges of experience between learning cities can add value to learning city ideas, and must be seen in terms of the interaction of conceptual and narrative aspects. The role of intermediaries, such as PASCAL and the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, is important in this process.

2. The origins of EcCoWell

The concept of EcCoWell was developed by one of the authors of this paper following participation in an international conference directed at planning for Taipei as a learning city in November 2011. Planning for the Taipei learning city presented at the conference involved a broad approach across seven areas: eco-city, healthy city, cultural city, safe city, waterfront city, welfare city and well-being city (Taipei City Government, 2012).

The lead author, Kearns, was impressed by the breadth of this approach and the potential synergies of these dimensions of a learning city, particularly health and learning, reflecting a consultancy he had undertaken for the Illawarra healthy city in Australia, showing that learning and healthy cities had much in common.

The development of the EcCoWell idea at this point happened because of the role of the PASCAL International Observatory. PASCAL emerged from the work of OECD on lifelong learning and learning cities and was established as an international network following an OECD conference held in Melbourne in 2002. The OECD officer directing this work became the founding Chair of the PASCAL Board with a website located out of the University of Glasgow: http://pascalobservatory.org/.

The Taipei conference observations led PASCAL colleagues to an exchange of views on how a holistic approach to learning city development across such a spectrum of dimensions could

be achieved. This subsequently led to the suggestion that the term EcCoWell might be used to denote such an integrated approach to building a learning city with EcCoWell signifying **Ecology, Economy, Community, Culture, Wellbeing and Lifelong Learning** in a city.

It should be noted that the lead author of this paper, Kearns was the founder of PASCAL International Exchanges (PIE) in 2010, a program that provided for online exchanges on issues, information, experience and solutions between learning cites around the world, with cities such as Beijing, Vancouver, Cork, Östersund, Townsville and Bielefeld participating, amongst others (http://pie.pascalobservatory.org/).

Given the task to write a paper on the EcCoWell concept for the PASCAL website, Kearns prepared *Living and Learning in Sustainable Opportunity Cities* which was posted on the PIE website in 2012 (Kearns, 2012a). The paper linked opportunity ideas associated with the learning city concept with sustainability deriving from a holistic approach. It examined, in particular, the converging strands between healthy cities, green cities and learning cities. These strands remain the core of the EcCoWell concept, and were examined further in the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (Kearns, 2012b), and then appeared as the central themes of the UNESCO Cork conference in 2017. These dimensions of EcCoWell became the lead theme in the *Cork Call to Action on Learning Cities* as green, healthy, learning cities (UIL, 2017a).

At the heart of the EcCoWell idea were the interactions between learning and health, with environment added to give a trio taken up at the UNESCO Cork conference in 2017. In the case of learning and health, the EcCoWell approach fostered an interest in such common areas as the social determinants of health, where synergies with learning strategies could be achieved, and mental health. This latter subject was taken up by the Cork Learning City under its EcCoWell initiative and provides an example of the collaboration that developed between the Cork Healthy City and Learning City initiatives. The growing interest in mental health in a number of countries points to the potential for the further development of this aspect of an EcCoWell approach.

3. EcCoWell goes international: the Cork initiative

Posting the EcCoWell paper on the PIE website provided an opportunity for these concepts to gain international interest. This happened when Cork invited Kearns to lead a seminar during the 2013 Cork Lifelong Learning Festival. Cork was a declared learning city and a participant

in the PASCAL PIE program. Following the March 2013 seminar, Cork establish a leadership group from the health, environment, education, training and lifelong learning sectors to promote linkages between these areas. Cork then hosted an international conference on the EcCoWell concept in September 2013.

The question of why Cork, out of the range of cities participating in PIE by 2013, should have responded to the EcCoWell idea is of interest and was examined in a paper by Kearns, Neylon, Lane & Osborne (2013). This aspect was attributed to the established presence of Lifelong Learning Festivals in Cork and Limerick. In the case of Cork, the Festival had grown from 2004 with 65 events over two days, to some 500 activities over a week by 2013. This had brought together a leadership group working together from health, education, environment and cultural sectors to share ideas and build partnership. This raised the question of Learning Festivals as a possible pathway to building sustainable learning cities (Ibid, 2013, p. 98). However, it was evident that a distinctive Cork approach to EcCoWell had emerged that reflected the culture and administrative arrangements of Cork.

The EcCoWell initiative of Cork has continued to the present date, with Cork gaining a reputation as a leading learning city which was, demonstrated when Cork was invited by UNESCO to host the UNESCO Third International Conference on Learning Cities in 2017, which adopted the *Cork Call to Action on Learning Cities*. Its integration flavour was contributed to by Kearns serving on the drafting group. The continuing close connection between the EcCoWell ideas and Cork's development as a learning city was affirmed in April 2018 when the Lord Mayor of Cork gave a civic reception for Kearns noting his contribution to the development of Cork as a learning city and the success of the UNESCO Cork Conference on Learning Cities.

3.1. Lessons from the PIE experience 2011-2013

While EcCoWell served at the cutting edge of the PASCAL PIE program, the overall lessons from the PIE experience have value in understanding the role of EcCoWell and were summed in 2014. These included (Kearns, 2014):

- *the value of international exchanges of experience as a platform for creative ideas;*
- *the significance of the East Asian impact with learning cities in China, Korea and Taiwan exercising international leadership;*
- *the enrichment process as shown in the EcCoWell experience;*

- *the growing significance as local communities as the battleground for the success of learning city ideas;*
- *the value of diversity in leading to creative ideas and practices.*

EcCoWell was nurtured by PASCAL in this context of international exchanges of information, issues and experience with lessons from the PIE exchanges being incorporated in the subsequent development of EcCoWell. This is discussed below.

The importance of East Asian development was recognised when Beijing hosted the first UNESCO International Conference on Learning Cities in 2013. An article by Han and Makino in a special issue of the *International Review of Education* studied these features in Japan, Korea and China and concluded that learning cities in East Asia were based on a 'community relations model' (Han & Makino, 2013, p. 466). This conclusion pointed to a gulf between East Asia and the West that merits serious examination in building sustainable learning cities, including the influence of culture in such development. PASCAL has now set up a SIG on culture which will examine further cultural aspects of development.

The ending of PIE in 2013, with the transition to the new PASCAL Learning Cities Network program, coincided with the convening of the UNESCO First International Conference on Learning Cities in Beijing that year, with the formulation of learning city ideas in the Beijing Declaration and the companion Key Features of Learning Cites. The Beijing conference led to the establishment of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) administered by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL, 2015a). From this time, the EcCoWell role should be seen in the context of the GNLC and efforts to foster collaboration between PASCAL and UIL in the development of learning cities. These efforts have included the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the UNESCO Institute and PASCAL as a basis for partnership.

4. Enriching EcCoWell

One of the main lessons from EcCoWell and PIE experiences since 2012 lies in the potential for international exchanges between cities to add value to ideas emanating from such interactions. This occurred in the case of EcCoWell, with the addition of the idea of learning neighbourhoods to the concept, becoming the main vehicle for implementing the ideas of EcCoWell in cities at a local level.

The learning neighbourhood concept evolved from the experiences of Beijing and Shanghai as learning cities participating in PIE. While mega-cities with large populations, Kearns, as director of PIE, was impressed by the way learning opportunities could be mobilised and made available in local communities, including in streets, through the strategies being adopted. This led to him formulating the concept of learning neighbourhoods as a key action feature of learning cities, particularly in large cities.

In the case of Beijing and Shanghai, this was achieved through a three-tier model of learning city development with planning at the level of the city, administrative district, and local community. The essence of the Beijing approach was outlined in the showcase profiles: http://conference2016.pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/showcase_presentations_profiles-1004.pdf (p.11). The 16 administrative districts of Beijing were strengthened through exemplars built into the successive plans for the Beijing learning city (Yuan, 2012; Hao, 2016). This tripartite structure echoed the views of urbanist Jacobs, that good urban planning involved development at these three levels (1993).

The learning neighbourhood idea was promoted through the PIE website leading to pilot projects being conducted in Cork and Taipei, the two cities that had most influenced and origins and development of the EcCoWell concept. These pilot projects were undertaken when PIE had been replaced following the PASCAL 2013 Hong Kong conference with a new program of Learning Cities Networks (LCNs). Kearns continued as director of Networks until June 2016.

The Cork pilot projects were implemented initially in two low-income neighbourhoods – Ballyphehane and Knocknaheeny, both with active education and community networks and with the projects coordinated by University College, Cork (O'Tuama, 2017). Cork subsequently introduced two further neighbourhoods, Mayfield and Togher, with all neighbourhoods included in visits during the UNESCO Third International Conference on Learning Cities which Cork hosted in September 2017. The pilot projects were community-led, and reflected community needs and resources for learning and development, rather than a given template. All projects engendered enthusiastic support which was demonstrated through the field visits undertaken during the UNESCO Cork conference.

The learning neighbourhood pilot projects were implemented in a different way in Taipei, reflecting the key role of community colleges in promoting lifelong learning and citizenship in that city. Community colleges were established in each of the twelve administrative

districts of Taipei with a mandate to foster lifelong learning and citizenship as a main aspect of the democratic evolution of Taiwan from autocratic origins.

These learning neighbourhood pilot projects undertaken by Taipei demonstrated the prime role of community colleges in leading the project in six of the districts and displaying a diversity of approaches that reflected the interests and resources of these places. The projects involved collective community learning and action. Further information is available at: http://conference2016.pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/post-conference_meeting_report.pdf that elaborates on the summary below (Reghenzani-Kearns, 2016, pp.1-3).

- *Bihu Weaving House (Nehu District) - applying the traditional craft of bamboo construction for a public space;*

- *Happy Farm (Songshan District) – fostering community wellbeing and happiness through a communal farm;*

- *Community Wetland Restoration (Shilin District) – understanding and conserving surrounding wetland;*

- *Beautiful Shih Fen Stream (Nangang District) – redressing waste water effects on the environment;*

- *Safety/Welfare/Ecology (Wenshan District) – developing cooperative efforts on these three priorities;*

- *Empowering Community (Datong District) – building community and neighbourhood learning, and beautifying alleyways.*

Cork and Taipei exchanged experiences at a joint meeting following the PASCAL International Conference at Glasgow University in 2016.

Overall, the key feature of EcCoWell since 2012 is the potential of international exchanges between cities to enrich concepts such as EcCoWell through the incorporation of further ideas and projects that extend and add value. The EcCoWell idea facilitated local cross-sectoral exchanges so that the concept served to bring together, for discussions of common interests and possible collaboration, groups interested in such policy and practice areas as health, welfare, culture, environment and education. In this way, the concept served as a framework and driver for cross-sectoral partnership, dialogue and action.

EcCoWell has been enhanced through two stages:

1. The introduction of the learning neighbourhood idea in 2014- 2015;
2. The addition of happiness and entrepreneurship in 2017, following the *Rethinking EcCoWell* review.

5. Rethinking EcCoWell

The arrival of the UN SDGs in 2015 brought with it the question of whether the EcCoWell mission of promoting integration and cohesion in learning cities had been overtaken by the SDGs with a mandate to follow the same development objective in a larger global context. This question led the PASCAL Board to invite Kearns to undertake a review of the EcCoWell experience in 2017. A second, although implicit, question was whether EcCoWell might provide a way to progress the SDGs in learning cities. This initiative of the Board led to a report titled "Rethinking EcCoWell" which became the basis for the further development of the EcCoWell concept.

Kearns put a notice on the PASCAL website and in the PASCAL Digest online, inviting comments, and held discussions with key people in EcCoWell projects. A session on EcCoWell was undertaken in the UNESCO Third International Conference on Learning Cities in Cork, 2017. These discussions suggested that EcCoWell was regarded as a useful approach to achieve holistic development in building sustainable learning cities. This argued for continuing EcCoWell in this era of sustainable development. Whether EcCoWell was a good way to implement and realise the SDGs was a more complex question that is discussed below.

Overall, Kearns recommended that EcCoWell should continue with the addition of happiness and entrepreneurship.   The PASCAL Board accepted these recommendations and arrangements are being made to implement some projects, mainly in learning neighbourhoods. The addition of happiness to EcCoWell was a result of the increased interest in happiness and well-being stimulated by the emergence of the UN SDGs with World Happiness Reports prepared every year since 2012 (Helliwell, J. et al, 2017). Progress in the field of positive psychology brought a number of practical ways in which 'authentic happiness' could be enhanced in learning cities (Seligman, 2003).

The enhanced interest in entrepreneurship, which was also brought into the UNESCO *Cork Call to Action*, owed much to a publication on *Entrepreneurial Learning City Regions* which included a wide range of examples, including PIE as an example of enterprising learning cities (James, Preece, & Valdes-Cotera, Eds. 2017). This growing interest in skills, attributes and behaviours that supported entrepreneurial action, whether in business or society, linked to OECD work on education and training for the future in its *Education 2030* initiative, which included ideas for developing transformative competencies (OECD, 2018). This also drew from earlier work on partnerships and the principles for learning processes in learning cities and regions (OECD, 2001 & 1999). Kearns wrote Policy Review briefing papers for PASCAL on both these subjects to provide overviews of recent developments in these areas (Kearns 2018a & 2018b). These papers may be read on the PASCAL website: http://pascalobservatory.org/.

5.1.   EcCoWell and PASCAL

While the development of PASCAL ideas in the fields of place, social capital and learning regions occurred in cities such as Cork and Taipei, the PASCAL Board kept a watching brief on PASCAL development as an instrument for the further growth of learning city ideas. Following the release of the UNESCO "Rethinking Education" report in 2015 with its plea for rethinking education policies and practices, it was evident that the implications of this report extended to learning cities as well. This need was touched on in the PASCAL 14th International Conference held in Pretoria in October 2017, then in 2018 the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning suggested that PASCAL and the Institute collaborate in a publication rethinking the concept and role of learning cities. This matter is still under consideration.

5.2.   An EcCoWell role in implementing the UN SDGs

There is a dilemma to be addressed in implementing the UN SDGs in cities and smaller communities. While the Goals are stated to be 'integrated and indivisible' so that a holistic approach is required, the 17 Goals represent a diverse set of objectives without obvious features that connect the Goals to the things that matter for people in cities and smaller communities. This led Sustania to conclude that the Goals were 'not a people's agenda' and that the need existed to develop a suitable narrative that could link the Goals to issues of concern for people (Sustainia, 2017, p. 96-99). A key issue is, therefore, how the Goals can be connected to things that matter for people around the world in a range of contexts so that they

are understood for their relevance and motivate people to take action on the Goals. The arrival of the SDGs has brought the question of sustainability to centre stage in thinking about learning cities.

This impact is summed up by Sachs (2015, p. 1) in the following terms:

> *Sustainable development is a central concept for our age, it is both a way for understanding the world and a method for solving global problems.*

The dual perspectives of understanding the world and building global consciousness and addressing global problems, such as climate change, is providing an additional agenda for learning cities in this turbulent era of dramatic change in the search for sustainable development that is moral and ethical.

Moreover, research on implementing the SDGs has demonstrated the complexity of the relationships between individual Goals in the UN agenda. Research undertaken by a consortium involving two NGOs and Newcastle University identified linkages between the Goals which were classified as *Supporting, Enabling, Relying* (Stakeholder Forum, Bioregional & Newcastle University, 2015, p.6), but without clarifying any obvious way to implement the SDGs in a community such as a city.

A study by the International Council for Science in 2015 examined the relationships between four SDGs: 2, 3, 7, and 14 and identified a significant number of linkages and interactions between these goals and the other SDGs: 2-7; 3-5; 7-6; 14-6. The study identified 316 target interactions overall with 238 of these positive, 66 negative and 12 neutral. This research has highlighted the need for a compelling narrative that could engender wide public support while also addressing the complexity of relationships between individual Goals. A particular need is for an entry point that would draw support from within communities and provide a platform to build interactions and linkages with other goals over time on such an evolutionary basis.

We propose that EcCoWell could serve as an appropriate entry point for implementing the SDGs on such an evolutionary spiral over time (Kearns, 2017, p. 3). The UNESCO *Cork Call to Action on Learning Cities* which emerged from the UNESCO 3rd International Conference in September 2017, could serve a similar purpose, arguing for partnership between PASCAL

and UNESCO in finding new ways to build sustainable learning cities. The Cork Call for Action is built around three themes:

1. Green, healthy learning
2. Inclusion and equity
3. Decent work and entrepreneurship.

The first of these themes reflected the integrated core of EcCoWell and could serve in a similar way as a launching pad in implementing the UN SDGs, supported by action to progress the other two themes which would enhance the sustainability of the action taken.

In this way, such an entry point focussed around the *Cork Call* objectives and EcCoWell could be a means of addressing aspects of SDGs 3, 4, 5, and 11 and for opening up potential pathways from these Goals to a number of other Goals, depending on local resources, priorities and needs. Such progression would be driven by an evolving narrative that related these objectives to the needs and interests of the community in a process of deepening education and learning involving cycles of action and reflection for the community, as happened with the Taipei pilot projects.

6. Adapting EcCoWell to the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution

While the *Rethinking EcCoWell* exercise has shown that the EcCoWell concept could be adapted to the era of sustainable development and could serve as a useful entry point for implementing the SDGs in cities and smaller communities, the sustainable development objective brought with it the further challenge of adapting to a context of rapid technological change typified by the impact of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics, which are 'exponential, digital, and combinatorial' (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014, p. 251).

The emerging era has been called variously the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' (Schwab, 2016), and 'Second Machine Age' (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). While this era is likely to bring a range of benefits, it also imposes challenges which were seen by Brynjolfsson & McAfee as 'economic, infrastructural, biological, societal and existential' (*Ibid*, p. 256).

> *In the second machine age, we need to think much more deeply about what we really want and what we value, both as individuals and as a society.* (*Ibid*, p. 257)

Education is inevitably caught centrally in this debate about the challenges thrown up by the transition by a new era. Brynjolfsson & McAfee (*Ibid*, p. 209) also observe:
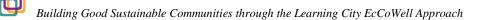
> *When technology advances too quickly for education to keep up, inequality generally rises*.

This call to build a mindful learning society in an emerging machine age is supported by Schwab in his discussion of the fourth industrial revolution. He argues for development from sectors to networks with human capability in the machine age enhanced by four different types of intelligence (Schwab, 2016, p.106):

- *Contextual – the mind;*
- *Emotional – the heart;*
- *Inspired – the soul;*
- *Physical – the body.*

While much of this will be familiar to educators, Schwab's inclusion of 'inspired intelligence' amongst the required capabilities for this emerging era, with a continuous search for meaning and purpose, echoes the conclusions of Fogel and Smith (Fogel, 2000; Smith, 2017), and is a theme taken up by OECD in its *Education 2030 – The future of education and skills* (OECD, 2018). OECD asserts the need for broader education goals in the search for individual and collective wellbeing. The OECD Learning Framework 2030 links knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in new ways with 'transformative competencies' addressing the need for young people to be 'innovative, responsible and aware' (OECD, 2018, p. 4). These views have serious implications for building sustainable learning cities in the emerging era, and were reflected in the *Rethinking EcCoWell* report in the call for building mindful learning cultures.

This concept has much in common with Schwab's call for four kinds of intelligence in enhancing human capacity in this era of the fourth industrial revolution. Common interests include the capacity of people to give meaning and purpose to their lives and to enhance consciousness of the world about them (Kearns, 2017, p. 11-12), including global consciousness as well as local perspectives. This was brought into the UNESCO *Cork Call to Action on Learning Cities* (UIL, 2017, p. 1):

> *We aspire to build mindful learning cultures in our cities that foster*
> *global consciousness and citizenship through local action to*
> *implement the SDGs.*

These ideas were reflected with the addition of happiness and entrepreneurship to the EcCoWell concept as EcCoWell2. While both additions are discussed in the *Rethinking EcCoWell* report, they have been given policy shape by PASCAL in papers written by Kearns (Kearns, 2018 a & b). The addition of these dimensions of the EcCoWell concept has added richness and value to enhancing human wellbeing in learning communities in this emerging era. This is linked to broader transformative changes in adapting to the challenges of this turbulent era in human history. Such an idea was expressed by Wong & Watson (2018) in the following terms:

> *In times of increasing changes and disruption, the intersections of*
> *experiential learning, spirituality and consciousness raising in local*
> *neighbourhood contexts can foster transformative learning and*
> *improve individual and community quality of life.*

The comment by Wong & Watson points to the way in which breakthrough insights can occur at the intersections of ideas, concepts and cultures; an idea explored by Johansson and named 'The Medici Effect' (Johansson, 2014, pp.10-20). The experience of EcoCoWell since 2012 shows the significance of such cross-connections and suggest the potential for further innovations through collaboration between PASCAL and UIL in building on the experience of cities participating in the UNESCO GNLC and PASCAL LCNs, including EcCoWell2.

Jointly developing such interests to invigorate the creation of productive and sustainable learning city environments are taking partnerships to develop learning cities to a new level. But, as Reghenzani (2003, p. 77) noted, positive engagement and intersections also acknowledge:

> *Learning partnerships are heavily relational, dynamic and need to*
> *recognise the investment of all partners. The learning opportunities*
> *can be multi-layered, integrated and bring together discordant or*
> *problematic issues and people for mutual benefit.*

These crucial intersections will be explored in EcCoWell 2 projects, including one set in the Harlem district in New York that Wong is leading.

The way in which Wong & Watson list 'experiential learning, spirituality and consciousness raising' points to important needs to be addressed in future learning city development, in this era of the fourth industrial revolution. Fogel takes up the question of spirituality in his book

on *The Fourth Great Awakening* in which he argues for a new approach to egalitarianism in a 'post-modern egalitarian agenda' (Fogel, 2000, pp. 176-181). He defines spiritual resources as including:

> *a sense of purpose, a sense of responsibility, a sense of community, a strong family ethic, a strong work ethic, and high self esteem*

as well as religious objectives (*Ibid*, p. 178) in the emerging era of dominant digital technologies.
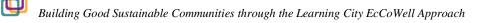
The struggle for self-realisation in finding a deeper meaning and purpose in life assumes great significance, particularly with demographic change and ageing societies with large numbers of people facing these questions of identity and purpose in the so-called third or fourth ages. Overall, these views suggest that moral and ethical issues will become increasingly important for learning city development.

While different terms are used, it is evident that we are in a transition phase towards a new era in the human story (Schwab 2016, OECD 2016, Ford 2015, Brynjolfsson & McAfee 2014, Schmidt & Cohen 2013, Attali 2009, Rifkin 2009). Various indications to date point to an enhanced role for education, learning throughout life, and community building in many contexts, if disaster is to be avoided in the 'second machine age'. Schwab (2016, p. 204) concluded that one of the solutions will be lifelong education focussed to provide a better understanding of ourselves and our world.

> *Entirely new educational forms are needed that aim at satisfying, not only curiosity, but also a longing for spiritual insights that enhance the meaning of life, that combine entertainment with edification and sociality.*

UNESCO has joined this discourse arguing for new ideas in an era of societal transformation with its 2015 report "Rethinking Education" encompassing a humanistic vision of education as an essential common good, and a plea to *chart a new direction forward* (p. 4). This is said to be *an integrated approach based on sound ethical and moral foundations* (*Ibid*, p. 37).

All this suggests the need for a new generation of learning cities and communities, connected to many partners and with strong links to all sectors of education and training. Strong partnerships will be vital. PASCAL has responded to the call to foster spiritual aspects of learning by establishing a Faith-based network focussed on spirituality, empathy, meaning, values and life experience under its Networks program (http://lcn.pascalobservatory.org/).

7. Significance of the EcCoWell experience

The EcCoWell story over the past seven years illustrates the value of international collaboration in the development and refinement of policy ideas on lifelong learning and learning cities, and provides insights into some of the processes involved. The EcCoWell concept emerged from the broad approach taken by the city of Taipei to its development as learning city and was given shape by the PASCAL International Observatory in its role of administering a program of international collaboration on learning cities (PIE).

The EcCoWell concept then motivated the city of Cork to adopt EcCoWell as an approach to learning city development, particularly in integrating learning, health, and environment thrusts. These ideas were then given an international forum when Cork hosted the 3rd UNESCO International Conference on Learning Cities in 2017. While EcCoWell has been a small initiative by PASCAL, it has explored, as the concept has evolved, large questions on the human condition, such as happiness and wellbeing, that assume increased significant in the turbulent times of the 21st Century.

 Sachs (2012, p.5) has put this challenge in the following terms:

> *We need to reconceive the idea of a good society in the early twenty-first century and find creative paths to it.*

The EcCoWell concept has evolved in ways that suggest that the learning city concept can have value in this search for a good, sustainable society. EcCoWell began as an approach to holistic development in cities with a focus on opportunity and sustainability. The history of EcCoWell since 2012 demonstrates how colour to local conditions can be taken and enriched in the give and take of international exchanges which are now facilitated by the internet. This suggests that good exchanges and between countries on learning city ideas involved a complex process with three stages:

- Information – knowing the ideas;
- Adaptation – adapting to local conditions as happened in Cork and Taipei;
- Enrichment – adding value from the deeper understanding of the process and contexts.

The role that PASCAL played in this process also points to the value played by intermediaries such as PASCAL and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in facilitating this process of innovation and transformative change. The enriching of the EcCoWell idea through the addition of happiness and entrepreneurship illustrates this process of adding value to concepts such as EcCoWell in the context of international exchanges. This process can be taken further, for example, in finding ways in which learning cities can build empathy and global consciousness in communities as a path towards what Rifken (2009) has termed an *Empathic Civilization*.

While EcCoWell has been a useful experiment, the need exists for many more innovations, built and refined in collaborative ways, to be shared on the path to building a sustainable universal learning society, a vision articulated by the UNESCO Faure Commission in 1972, and then thought Utopian, but now much more achievable.

This paper has explored the development of the EcCoWell concept and its implementation since 2011 in the context of the evolving policy literature on learning cities, and contextual impacts during this period. While the learning city idea began as a way to harness the resource of cities to foster lifelong learning, the growing complexity of influences in policy statements during this period, such as the 2013 Beijing Declaration and the 2017 *Cork Call to Action* (UIL, 2015a; 2017a), point to directions the learning city concept is taking. With these pressures for integrated, sustainable development, learning city policy discussion now inhabits a hybrid field that draws upon insights from sectors such as health, environment, welfare, economic development, education and initiatives such as place-making and resilient cities.

The EcCoWell story illustrates how the flow of ideas between countries can serve to generate responses, at times with the potential to be creative, in the path towards the aspiration for a sustainable learning society. Much of human history has been driven by ideas, so that a great need exists to invest general ideas such as learning cities with an underpinning ethical and moral framework into a narrative which can inspire and drive collaborative action, at all levels. EcCoWell grew out of the PASCAL experience with learning cities. The opportunity now exists to take the EcCoWell ideas further, in a range of contexts, in progressing towards a new generation of learning cities needed in a world of constant change, continuing inequality, and dislocation

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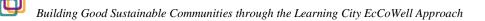
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