

Irish Network of Learning Cities Partnership

- ***Tell us a little about your project, and the partners involved***

The Irish Network of Learning Cities was formed in November 2018, following its first meeting in Cork, as part of Cork hosting their 'Learning Cities Conversations' event. The network includes Cork, Limerick, Belfast, Derry-Strabane and Dublin Learning Cities. Since 2019 all five cities are members of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities, (GNLC).

In keeping with the mission of the UNESCO GNLC the network members share learning and best practice and offer support to each other on issues of common interest to their learning cities.

As a network we want to work together to celebrate learning, highlight what's on offer across the cities and city regions and we want to celebrate the achievements of learners.

As part of the support that the network members give each other, they often attend and present at each other's events hosted by each of the member learning cities and contribute to each other's research etc. For example, contributing to Belfast Learning City's 'Learn Well, Live Well' Research Report; and the member Learning Cities sharing some examples of their own initiatives at the recent Cork Celebrates Lifelong Learning Awards Launch Webinar series.

- ***What were the elements that made that partnership transformational, and in what way was empathy a driver in the partnership?***

Peer support and empathy are key drivers of our partnership. In 2019, the Lord Mayors of Cork, Dublin and Belfast and the Mayors of Limerick and Derry City and Strabane Region formally signed an **agreement to commit each city to work together and provide mutual support to help deliver on the vision of a Learning City for all citizens.**

The Memorandum of Understanding between Cork City, Dublin City, Limerick City and County, Belfast City and Derry City and Region highlighted "**a shared dedication to strengthening friendly relations and enhancing cooperation between the peoples of the cities and city regions...** to carry out Learning City exchanges focused on the principles of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities.

At the heart of a vision of a learning city is the commitment to using learning to improve the lives of all citizens, regardless of age or background. **Learning can be used to create a more equitable and inclusive society**, a more sustainable and healthy society and create inclusive opportunities for decent work and entrepreneurship.

The network held its first innovative "Irish Learning Cities Day" on September 30th 2020. The five learning cities and regions worked together to show how the Network benefits all five cities and adds value to the efforts of individual cities. Limerick and Cork also co-hosted a Learning Neighbourhoods webinar event on this day. This Irish Learning Cities Day will now become an annual event and is set for Sept 30th 2021.

Festival Coordinators from Cork, Limerick, Belfast, Derry and Dublin also hosted a joint webinar on our Learning Festivals as part of the first 'Global Learning Festival' in September 2020.

- ***How do you/did you measure if the partnership was/is successful?***

This is an ongoing task for our partnership and the network is relatively new. While we have not as yet formally conducted a review of the partnership's success; (e.g. by holding collective review sessions); we review our progress as individual learning cities and jointly when we meet as Network quarterly. Each of the five learning cities also document and articulate the many benefits of being in this network and what it means for their city.

The network meetings, which involve the five Learning City Steering Group Chairs and Co-ordinators, are a space where problems and challenges can be shared, support and assistance offered from partners; and partners to collaborate with on joint mutually beneficial initiatives. Whenever one of the learning cities achieves success, this is also a celebration for the Irish Network as a whole. Through the sharing of experience and advice, assisting each other with challenges that we experience from time to time; means that the partnership is having an impact in making each individual learning city member more effective/successful.

The Festival Coordinators meet bi-weekly; and these meetings include a general sharing of updates and relevant information and then brainstorming and planning our collaborative projects.

The wider INLC Network meet quarterly, and each of the Learning Cities take turns to host a meeting during the year. Thus, there is shared ownership of the network which contributes to its overall success. All five learning cities drive the strategy and the focus for the Network's agenda for the meetings each city hosts etc.

- ***How was imagination used to create and drive the partnership?***

The Irish Network of Learning Cities was created by ourselves in our various roles, as we all share a common mission and face similar challenges.

The Network was formed as an all-island network of cities, for support, **inspiration**, know-how and sharing good practice. It was formed as a means of supporting each others efforts to deliver on the vision of a Learning City in the different contexts we all work in.

The Network is inspired by the vision and mission of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, and is committed to the implementation of UNESCO Learning City policies, in particular:

- The Beijing Declaration on Learning Cities, and the Mexico Statement on Building Sustainable Learning Cities;
- The Key Features of Learning Cities –

To effectively mobilize resources in every sector to promote:

- Inclusive learning from basic to higher education;
- Revitalize learning in families and communities;
- Facilitate learning for and in the workplace;
- Extend the use of modern learning technologies;
- Enhance quality and excellence in learning, and
- Foster a culture of learning throughout life.

- The Cork Call to Action on Learning Cities –

To implement lifelong learning strategies pertaining to the social, environmental and economic dimensions of the SDGs that promote:

- Equitable and inclusive learning and living environments;
- Green and Healthy learning and living environments;
- Opportunities for decent work and entrepreneurship.