

Analysis of Selected Learning Cities Analytical Report Summary (July 2025)



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List of selected cities

Selected Cities for Analysis: (members of GNLC ESD Cluster*)

- Bonn, Germany (GNLC membership since 2020)
- Charleroi, Belgium (GNLC membership since 2020)
- Derry, UK – Northern Ireland (GNLC membership since 2019)*
- Dublin, Ireland (GNLC membership since 2019)*
- Girona, Spain (GNLC membership since 2022)
- Glasgow, UK – Scotland (GNLC membership since 2020)*
- Groningen, The Netherlands (GNLC membership since 2019)
- Liège, Belgium (GNLC membership since 2024)
- Ljubljana, Slovenia (GNLC membership since 2022)*
- Pécs, Hungary (GNLC membership since 2016)
- Trnava, Slovakia (GNLC membership since 2022)*
- Viladecans, Spain (GNLC membership since 2016)*

Foreword to the Executive Summary

Based on the LEAP II reports from selected learning cities prepared by the project partners, the Analytical Report aims at analysing some trends and issues of how learning cities may help in developing the skills and knowledge of citizens in urban communities so as to reach for social cohesion through sharing and transferring knowledge and developing skills through lifelong learning. Special attention is paid to ESD – Education for Sustainable Development.

The decade-long progress of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) has made it possible to generate a platform for cities across the world to collaborate, on the one hand, in urban developments through specific areas and, on the other, to exchange good practices upon engaging citizens and their communities in order to turn cities into places of smart, creative and learning environments with attention to balanced environments of social, environmental and economic for sustainable futures.

While UNESCO's 2021 report on ESD implementation in Learning Cities underlined the roles and responsibilities of urban communities upon how to respond to climate change and environmental problems by raising knowledge and skills and by sharing effective practices in environmentally focused lifelong learning (UIL, 2021), the recent communication of ICLC 2024 from Jubail, Saudi Arabia (Jubail Commitment by UIL, 2024) has strengthened our vision and conviction that lifelong learning can effectively help in promoting climate-focused education for sustainable development through actions based on engagement and inclusion of citizens through community learning programmes to result in equitable and accessible forms of transformation of urban environments into green and therefore liveable forms.

An overall aim of the LEAP II project, including the Analytical Report, is to help smaller cities, towns and other respected urban communities become learning cities and learning communities.

LEAP II partners set up a special template to collect information on thematic areas enabling representatives of selected cities to demonstrate specific actions, forms and living examples of urban partnerships in lifelong learning which may help other cities to relate to, to learn from, to reflect upon and to compare to. Such approach has helped us in this project to further analyse and to respect diversity by recognising reasons of similarities and differences amongst those selected cities we received reasonable answers, reflections and critical remarks to our questions in the LEAP II template.

References:

UIL (2021), *ESD Implementation in Learning Cities* Hamburg: UIL

UIL (2024), *Jubail Commitment: UNESCO learning cities take climate action* Hamburg: UIL

Introduction

Based on the open and collaborative dialogue and exchange of practices upon formulating learning cities and communities, twelve cities were selected for in-depth analysis. Five of them are members of the ESD-cluster of GNLC (*), like Trnava (SK), Glasgow (UK), Dublin (IE), Ljubljana (SI), and Derry (UK), while others like Pécs (HU), Bonn, (DE), Liège (BE), Groningen (NL), Charleroi (BE), Girona (ES), Viladecans (ES) are GNLC members cities not working directly in the ESD-cluster, but have strong focuses on education for sustainable development and clear commitments towards green and environmental driven practices of climate action supported by adult and lifelong learning. All selected cities are from current or former member EU countries. Although, we aimed at selecting cities from each region of Europe, we could not unfortunately receive responses from GNLC members from Scandinavia which may not now necessarily provide a full picture.¹

Structure of the full Analytical Report:

- Strategic orientations of selected learning cities
- Sustainable development goals currently pursued by selected learning cities
- Specific actions selected learning cities are taking to promote and support ESD goals
- Main stakeholders involved in the development of selected learning cities
- Examples of how selected learning cities promote the development of green competences
- Recommendations for training areas to promote green skills and environmental awareness amongst adults in selected learning cities
- Benefits of becoming a learning city – reflections from selected learning cities
- References

Summary of findings

After LEAP-II partners had collected relevant information, a special team was analysing and structured the incoming responses to the 7 questions or categories listed above. This work enabled us to further investigate similarities and differences.

¹ The individual reports from selected GNLC member cities are available at LEAP II platform for project documentation.

As for the reflections of selected cities on their focuses to ESD oriented practices and actions, LEAP-II partners could identify some particular characteristics of those twelve cities in accordance with sustainability concerns and future orientations of urban communities having recognised both challenges and opportunities of enhancing learning city-region and learning community as a key component for collaborating for effective knowledge transfer. The longest part is devoted to the last category – the reflections from examined cities on the benefits of becoming a learning city.

Strategic orientations of selected learning cities

Each and all cities have made remarkable steps in the promotion and development of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in order to reach and move into the direction of sustainable cities and communities. Not only cities belonging to the ESD cluster, but also the other selected GNLC member cities have pursued ESD focuses and climate-actions in urban settings based on stakeholder collaborations so as to establish, formulate own models or, referring to compatible focuses and settings, have borrowed already existing structures or methods to enable partnerships for sustainable futures.

Sustainable development goals currently pursued by selected learning cities

Selected cities have made use of several SDGs in their own cultures and urban structures both in terms of social and of economic to rely on their own potentials and connect them to visions and missions be bridged to realities. Readers of this collection will recognise the importance of how particular SDGs may reflect the wisdom and care of communities in case local/regional collaborations may have been formulated upon good consensus and limitations to avoid unnecessary burdens and challenges. Examples of those selected twelve cities may be used as cases for further comparison and in-depth scrutiny.

Specific actions selected learning cities are taking to promote and support ESD goals

The examples LEAP-II has collected from the twelve selected cities demonstrate how and in what forms cities and their regions face the challenge of ecological sustainability and underline the importance of green and climate-justice actions based on mutual understanding and responsibilities. Actions having been collected from selected cities resonate the impact how small steps may result in effectiveness and in efficiency in the scope of energy, food, water, clothing, construction, or in the dimension of community spaces to change society for sustainable and mutual formations. In this respect, actions explain the benefits of how learning cities may be recognised as light-towers for showing the benefits of learning communities in urban environments.

Main stakeholders involved in the development of selected learning cities

Engagements and interests of stakeholders have shown diversity and colourful needs, positions and approaches upon how learning cities may help formulating mind-set upon the benefits of changing both prejudice and thought to step into realistic, responsible and rational actions for human dignity

and green, sustainable neighbourhoods. In urban environments stakeholders may vary, trust, belongingness, solidarity, care and mutuality have become calling words in getting available stakeholders together to collect and share with citizens of urban cultures.

Examples of how selected learning cities promote the development of green competences

Green competence-developments became flagship initiatives in a number of those selected twelve cities to signal what learning cities may offer through lifelong learning in embracing skills of people and their communities and to step into actions supporting good varieties of competence-development for sustainable cities and communities. Such development programmes have turned traditional organisations of education and training into green organisations from schools, VET to HEIs and beyond. Moreover, non-formal settings have grown and expanded other community formations from industries to culture or from technology to arts to offer lifelong learning for effective knowledge transfers with ESD concerns.

Recommendations for training areas to promote green skills and environmental awareness amongst adults

Several recommendations were formulated by those twelve cities having emphasized the importance of turning the promotion of green skills and environmental awareness towards and members of their communities and to highlight the impact of intergenerational programmes in ESD actions so as to get lifelong learning and skills developments real. Examples of green skills developments also demonstrated to realities of hard work and step-by-step move, yet underlined how influential and motivating such programmes can be in case they are initiated and constructed by respected urban bodies to show commitment and mutual care be combined with partnerships and attention to others for liveable urban environments based on trust and collaboration.

Benefits of becoming a learning city – reflections from selected learning cities in the scope of ESD

The City of Bonn has significantly benefitted from the Learning City initiative, which has enhanced its capacity to address sustainability challenges and foster community engagement. By aligning its educational strategies with the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), **Bonn has cultivated a collaborative environment where diverse stakeholders**, including civil society, educational institutions, and local businesses, work together toward common goals. This effort will not only benefit the local population but **also serve as a model for regional, national, and international initiatives aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. The lessons learned from Bonn's experiences can provide valuable insights for other cities embarking on similar journeys, particularly in fostering collaborative networks and engaging diverse communities in the quest for a sustainable future.

Charleroi sees the benefits of being a learning city through opportunities through increased **funding** and support from **EU programs** and international organizations for sustainability-oriented projects, **cross-city collaborations** to address and tackle common regional issues (i.e., unemployment among adult workforce operating in traditional sectors) and leveraging technological innovations, green and social **business models** to drive future sustainability efforts.



Derry benefited from the Learning City initiative as it has seen significant improvements in social cohesion, economic development, and educational accessibility. Although Derry has made great progress, it is still in the early stages of implementing some initiatives. Collaboration among various stakeholders has been key to the success of the initiatives. **Derry focuses on educational inclusion, sustainability, and economic development and recommends to other cities** to foster collaboration across all sectors, develop inclusive policies, and use local resources innovatively to create a sustainable and accessible learning environment.

The City of Dublin has benefitted from having joined the Learning City initiative to discover, build on and develop community-based learning on exchange and collaboration amongst stakeholders so as to reach for social cohesion, inclusion and attention to social, economic and environmental challenges with care, respect and dignity. Dublin recommends other cities to get acquainted with the story of Dublin Learning City and to take good messages upon the benefits of becoming an **UNESCO member Learning City** which claims good goals and the partnerships from local to global. **This is a convincing form of getting municipal leaders and elected members of city councils to introduce learning city-focused planning and developments be based on realities and public needs.**

Girona has benefited from becoming a Learning City in terms of achieving local cohesion within local institutions and authorities. With the creation of the Mesa Técnica in the Ajuntament de Girona, **being a Learning City has promoted cohesion and a sense of unity in the local institutions.** Apart from that, society from Girona has benefited since there are a wide variety of services publicly available and accessible for members of community to make the city develop on sustained focuses of smart, creative and inclusive futures.

Glasgow has made impressive strides toward becoming a learning city where sustainability, social equity, and lifelong learning intersect. The Learning City framework has enabled Glasgow to involve citizens in shaping the city's future, from energy solutions to sustainable transport. Initiatives like the GALLANT project and the Active Travel Strategy exemplify how education can be a powerful driver for environmental change. **The city's focus should remain on fostering partnerships between local institutions and its citizens to further drive sustainable economic growth and urban regeneration. Other cities can learn from Glasgow's holistic approach by promoting collaboration, community involvement, and innovation** in both education and sustainability.

Groningen seems to have the two essential elements at their disposal: The City's strategy to become a knowledge centre in the Netherlands (and Europe) which means that learning in all forms is omnipresent **and to support sustainability issues and integrate them into policies.** The city already supports and finances a number of activities and initiatives that provide practical help or practical training to citizens in areas related to sustainability.

Liège received the member status of Learning City way more recently (2020 vs 2024). Hence, new know-how and expertise by Liège is still in the making. **Liège has a more established focus on integrating sustainability into existing cultural and educational institutions and its initiatives often emphasize enhancing green spaces and technological innovation.**

The City of Ljubljana has so far benefited from the Learning City initiative by becoming stronger and more capable of continuing several SDGs focused actions and programmes with concerns of raising participation in LLL based on stakeholder collaboration to balance in



between social and economic challenges with **great concern on green dimensions of change for smart, creative and learning communities** of Ljubljana. the City of Ljubljana, it has **integrated a number of target groups of lifelong learning with strong attention to adult learners** and, therefore, consultations and partnership with Slovenian Institute for AdultEd. (ACS/SIAE) and with the University of the Third Age provide a learner centred focus on how to improve ESD-based activities for adults and their communities with intergenerational approach.

The City's educational landscape benefits greatly from the active commitment and participation of the University of Pécs both in lifelong learning initiatives and community actions through promote effective knowledge transfer and skills development. Another **important factor of the development of the learning city concept is the civic society represented and coordinated by the House of Civic Communities. The City of Pécs and the civic society lead a structured dialogue which makes it possible to work closely with the citizens through community activities by NGOs, including green topics.** The involvement of Pécs into the 100 Net Zero Cities initiative and trying to be a Green City provides favourable conditions for green and sustainability initiatives. However, the **social issues, including the social inclusion and well-being are very important topics for the Learning City of Pécs.**

Trnava has made significant strides in aligning its educational policies with the goals of sustainable development. Through programs focused on inclusion, digital literacy, and green skills, the city has fostered a learning environment that equips its citizens for modern challenges. **Collaboration between public, private, and nonprofit sectors has been key to promoting lifelong learning.** A prime example of this is **Učiča sa Trnava**, where the nonprofit organization **Lifestarter** united various education actors to create a Learning City model. This model can be proven *effective* even during political leadership changes, as the civil sector ensures continuity.

There is an **interesting governance mechanism established in Viladecans** for strategic planning that involved the citizens and their inputs and then they were taken up by the Steering group. **Involving the citizens through participatory processes has substantial educational potential.** The town also **stresses well-being and joy of their citizens.** The Jury deciding on the Green Leaf Award commended the city's approach of infusing positivity and joy into their efforts. By fostering an atmosphere of enthusiasm, the city aims to engage and inspire others to join the green transformation.

Let us finally recommend our readers to discover our full Analytical Report (<https://leap2local.eu/>, ISBN 978-80-99976-14-7) and make use of it in building and promoting learning cities, regions and sustainable communities.

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