

CASE STUDIES

UNESCO Learning Cities

Activities in the Area
of Green Competencies
and Sustainability

2025

BONN GERMANY • **CHARLEROI** BELGIUM

DERRY UNITED KINGDOM – NORTHERN IRELAND

DUBLIN IRELAND • **GIRONA** SPAIN

GLASGOW UNITED KINGDOM – SCOTLAND

GRONINGEN NETHERLANDS • **LIÉGE** BELGIUM

LJUBLJANA SLOVENIA • **PÉCS** HUNGARY

TRNAVA SLOVAKIA • **VILADECANS** SPAIN



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BONN

Bonn (Germany), a city of approximately 330,000 residents, is located in western Germany along the Rhine River, 30 kilometres south of Cologne, in North Rhine–Westphalia. Bonn has a multicultural community, a significant proportion of young people, and a diverse expatriate population, thanks to the presence of numerous international organizations, including UN agencies, and educational institutions such as the University of Bonn.

The city's economy is diverse, with key sectors including education, research, technology, and services. Bonn boasts a rich cultural heritage, with historical sites, museums, and theatres. It hosts various festivals and events that celebrate its cultural diversity and history.

The city is recognized for its commitment to sustainability and environmental initiatives, aligning with its goals for climate neutrality and sustainable urban development. It joined the UNESCO GNLC and the ESD cluster in 2020.

Is there a specific Lifelong Learning Strategy?

The **Learning City Bonn** follows the municipal sustainability strategy, adopted in February 2019 which is based on the 2030 Agenda and addresses the SDGs, translating them into all municipal fields of action.

Activities on Green Competences & Sustainability

Field ambassadors - course for planting the “Garden of Education”: In 2022, there started planting the Garden of Education as a hands-on learning project. This initiative, led by experienced master gardeners, offered a field ambassador course where participants actively created a participatory kitchen garden. The course covered essential aspects of ecological gardening, including soil cultivation, crop rotation, pest control, and harvesting.

Now that the garden of education has been created, it will be used as a practical learning space with further open garden meetings and numerous offers, also in cooperation with the local community.

House of Nature is a certified ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) competence centre, that offers immersive experiences in forests and ecosystems. The focus is on learning through play. Temporary exhibitions, often in collaboration with partners like Oro Verde, cover topics such as healthy eating, waste reduction, and natural spaces. These exhibitions are enhanced by educational programs and workshops for educational institutions in Bonn.

abenteuer lernen is another key player. It is a regional agency of ESD. Funded by the Youth Department of the City of Bonn, it delivers inclusive workshops for children and youngsters. These include the art project “Sustainable Bonn.” abenteuer lernen focuses on providing ESD opportunities to children of all backgrounds, including those with disabilities, high potential, social difficulties, and disadvantaged life situations. The organization also conducts educational programs for refugees and actively participates in the annual Bonn SDG Days. In 2023, abenteuer lernen received the national ESD prize.

Concluding Remarks

Bonn has significantly benefited from the Learning City initiative, enhancing its sustainability efforts and community engagement. By aligning educational strategies with Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Bonn fosters collaboration among diverse stakeholders.

While Bonn is in a mature phase of its ESD journey, it remains committed to continuous improvement. The city's proactive approach to involving citizens in sustainability processes has not only empowered individuals but has also fostered a sense of ownership among community members. This participatory model serves as a best practice for other cities.

However, the breadth of activities may not be sufficiently concentrated on adult learning and education (ALE). Strengthening this aspect could enhance the impact of sustainability education.

The involvement of numerous stakeholders presents challenges in terms of coordination. Establishing a more streamlined approach to stakeholder engagement could further amplify the city's ESD efforts. Bonn stands as a forward-thinking city that leverages its Learning City status to drive sustainability and educational innovation.

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VILADECANS

Viladecans (Spain) is a town on the Mediterranean coast near Barcelona, boasts a population of 65,549. It features a diverse landscape, from beaches to mountains. Driven by a vision of opportunity for all, Viladecans excels in culture, technology access, education innovation, and socio-economic advancement. The city attracts investments, diversifies industries, supports entrepreneurship, and trains professionals. The city maintains its small-town charm while embracing an entrepreneurial spirit to enhance its potential. Viladecans joined the UNESCO GNLC in 2016.

Is there a Lifelong Learning Strategy for the City?

There is not a specific document on lifelong learning in the city. However, there is the Viladecans 2030 Strategy, a document that defined the strategic framework of the city for 2030, to prepare it for the year 2050. The main objective of this document was to guide the administration and help it face global challenges in a proactive and committed way, in order to anticipate and maximize the economic, social and institutional opportunities present in Viladecans. The Strategy was designed through a participatory process and it seeks to make Viladecans a more sustainable, educating and caring city.

Activities on Green Competences and Sustainability

Viladecans has actively cultivated a culture of sustainability through various initiatives. The city implemented programs promoting healthy energy practices and even held contests recognizing institutions for their energy-saving efforts. On the health front, Viladecans launched hygiene programs and mental health campaigns, aimed particularly at vulnerable populations.

Vilawatt – a key project in Viladecans' energy transition is a collaborative effort involving citizens, companies, and the City Council. This joint structure aims to establish an integrated energy operator for more efficient energy management. A significant aspect of Vilawatt involves the deep energy renovation of three residential buildings in low-income communities. This renovation process was designed to be participatory, engaging both building owners and designers. The project aims to shift mindsets, empower citizens, and encourage active participation in energy renovation processes.

Local platform to integrate all energy transition efforts – initiative focused on improving the quality of life for its residents by promoting a culture of energy saving. This includes providing citizens with the tools to reduce their energy consumption and developing. The goals are ambitious: to lower energy bills, reinvest those savings into housing improvements, and stimulate the local economy. The participatory nature of these projects is designed to raise awareness and educate the community.

GreenMob project is an initiative focused on sustainable urban mobility. GreenMob aims to address urban mobility challenges by promoting sustainable transport options, reducing pollution, and providing a CO₂ emissions calculator. The project will develop a journey planner that integrates various modes of transport, providing users with detailed information and real-time updates while recognizing the mode of transport used and calculating its emissions.

Viladecans' commitment to sustainability has been recognized with **the European Green Leaf Award (EGLA) in 2023**. The city's multi-level approach, focusing on ecological transition and promoting a healthy lifestyle, impressed the jury. The involvement of citizens and stakeholders in the city's green transition was also a key factor. Viladecans is actively building a social ecosystem for its green transition, aligning stakeholders, involving citizens in decision-making, and participating in international networks.

Concluding Remarks

As in many cities, Viladecans focuses initiatives on school children and youth, emphasizing after-school activities through stakeholder cooperation.

A strategic planning governance mechanism involves citizens, whose inputs are considered by the Steering group, highlighting the educational potential of participatory processes.

The town also stresses citizen well-being and joy. The Jury deciding on the Green Leaf Award praised 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.

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LIÈGE

Liège (Belgium) is located in eastern Belgium along the Meuse River, is one of the country's most historically significant and culturally rich cities. Liège is a multicultural city in eastern Belgium with around 200,000 residents (600,000 in the metropolitan area). Culturally, Liège boasts a unique mix of French-speaking Belgian identity blended with a rich historical heritage. It is known for its vibrant festivals, architectural landmarks, and a strong tradition of folklore, with notable events. Once a coal and steel hub, it has successfully transitioned toward technology, logistics, healthcare, and education. The University of Liège, founded in 1817, attracts students from across Belgium and Europe, adding to the city's dynamic social fabric. Since 2024, Liège is a member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities, with a strong focus on sustainability and inclusivity.

Is there a specific Lifelong Learning Strategy for the city?

Liège's lifelong learning strategy is rooted in its economic and social transition after deindustrialization. It prioritizes Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), inclusiveness, and skills for the green economy. The city integrates lifelong learning across formal, non-formal, and informal education—through schools, universities, vocational centres, NGOs, and grassroots movements.

Activities on Green Competences & Sustainability

Green Skills Workshops (via community centres & NGOs): practical training in energy efficiency, waste management, and sustainable gardening.

University of Liège offers courses on sustainability management, environmental sciences, and applied student-business projects.

Eco-Schools Programme: engaging primary and secondary pupils in recycling, gardening, and energy-saving projects.

Liège en Transition: 180+ citizen-led projects resulted from a grassroots program that brings residents together to co-create sustainable solutions in areas like energy conservation, local food production, and green transportation. The Transition is a movement that encourages positive thinking about a post-oil world in order to increase our resilience to the growing risk of resource shortages. It is an exercise of rethinking the way of life in light of the changes imposed by the climate impact of human activities.

Circular Wallonia initiative: fostering circular economy practices, material reuse, and sustainable production. This initiative is structured around five priority action lines and encompasses a comprehensive set of 60 concrete measures aimed at achieving ten specific ambitions related to circular economy practices in the region.

Climate Active Neighbourhoods (CAN) project involves community-based CO₂ reduction and low-carbon governance models.

Participatory budgeting is another example of Liège’s commitment to public involvement. This initiative allows residents to vote on how a portion of the city’s budget should be allocated, directly influencing projects (creation of community gardens, the installation of bike lanes, and the development of renewable energy sources in local neighbourhoods) that reflect community priorities.

Major and Active Stakeholders

- **Municipality of Liège** – initiator of lifelong learning & sustainability policies.
- **Civil society:** Liège en Transition, Youth for Climate Liège.
- **Education & training providers:** University of Liège, vocational centres, Eco-Schools.
- **Business & industry:** local enterprises adopting circular practices, collaborating on green workforce training.
- **NGOs and third sector:** delivering workshops, mobilizing citizens, and supporting participatory budgeting.
- **Cultural actors:** museums & cultural institutions integrating sustainability themes into exhibitions and events.

Concluding Remarks

Liège illustrates how a former industrial city can reinvent itself through **lifelong learning and sustainability-focused initiatives**. By combining top-down policy (city strategy, UNESCO Learning City membership) with **bottom-up citizen engagement** (participatory budgeting, grassroots climate action), it strengthens both green competences and civic ownership.

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GIRONA

Girona (Spain) is a medium-sized city in Catalonia, Spain, with around 103,000 inhabitants. Known for its medieval centre, cathedral, and tourism, it also invests in technology, entrepreneurship, and sustainability. In 2022, Girona joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities, confirming its commitment to lifelong learning and inclusive education.

The drive towards learning and sustainability is highlighted by the initiative **Girona Smart City** which seeks to integrate technologies and sustainability to improve the management of resources and life quality of people (smart water management, LED lighting, solar panels, bike-sharing, waste management as well as the application Girona en Verde where citizens may find information about waste management, energetic consumptions tips, quality of the services in the city, among others).

Is there a specific Lifelong Learning Strategy in the city?

Girona's lifelong learning policy is structured around the **Pla Educatiu d'Entorn Girona**, which promotes education and social inclusion through cooperation among schools, associations, civic centres, and local businesses.

Key areas include **Adult education** (basic, vocational, pre-university training), **School support** (after-school activities and reinforcement programs), **Social cohesion** (workshops and seminars for integration of migrants and vulnerable groups), **Access to culture** (through libraries and civic centres), **Entrepreneurship** (alliances with SMEs and the Girona Emprèn programme).

This strategy aligns with **Catalonia's regional education policy** and the **UN SDGs** (notably SDG 4 – Quality Education, SDG 10 – Reducing Inequalities, SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities).

Girona has created the so-called Red de Ciudades Educadoras de las Comarcas Gerundenses which aims to empower small towns from the province with the aim of developing local policies regarding education. This network's mission is to transform the city into an "active classroom" where learning happens not just in schools, but in every social, cultural, and urban space.

Activities on Green Competences & Sustainability

Girona is active in integrating sustainability into lifelong learning:

Escoles Verdes Girona (Green Schools Program) – integrate environmental education into school curricula, with school gardens, energy-saving projects, and recycling campaigns.

Sustainable Energy Week Girona (Setmana de l'Energia Sostenible) – this annual event is organized by the City Council and it comprises for example public workshops and info points on solar panels, energy saving, and renewable sources.

Girona + Neta – is an initiative to increase the public awareness and citizen participation in waste reduction and recycling. There are activities that transform public spaces into green and clean areas, organizing community activities for cleaning and maintenance, promoting sustainability and practical learning about waste management.

CHARLEROI

Charleroi (Belgium) is the largest city in Wallonia (200,000 inhabitants, 500,000 in the metropolitan area). Historically an industrial hub for steel and coal, it now focuses on diversification in **aerospace, biotechnology, and green energy**. The city is culturally diverse, with a mix of Belgian nationals and immigrant communities, creating a dynamic social fabric. Charleroi is known for its rich cultural scene. It is home to several art centres, museums, and theatres, including the Photography Museum (Musée de la Photographie), which is renowned internationally. The city also has a strong tradition of street art, music festivals, and performing arts, showcasing the region's creativity. Since 2020, Charleroi has been a member of the **UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) Charleroi Learning City – UNESCO GNLC**, under the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) cluster.

Is there a specific Lifelong Learning Strategy for the city?

Charleroi embeds lifelong learning in its **City Project Plan 2019–2024**, which outlines seven priority areas: inclusivity, sustainability, better public services, entrepreneurship, citizen engagement, vibrant city spaces, and cultural/educational hubs. While not a standalone lifelong learning strategy, these policies promote **accessible, equitable, and citizen-centred learning opportunities** across sectors, aligned with SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) 4, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

Activities on Green Competences & Sustainability

Gilly School Forest – “Bring Nature into the Classroom”: Hands-on ecological education for students, focusing on biodiversity, climate, and sustainability. At the Royal Athenaeum of Gilly, students engage in a weekly environmental course that introduces them to concepts like biodiversity, climate action, and sustainable practices. By transforming parts of the school's landscape into green spaces, students can study native plants, learn about the importance of soil and water conservation, and observe local wildlife.

Action Plan for Sustainable Energy & Climate: 50 measures, supported by the House of Energy and Energy Counter, helping citizens reduce energy use and adopt renewables. Two dedicated resources, the **House of Energy** and the **Energy Counter**, provide essential support to citizens, offering guidance on reducing household energy consumption, adopting renewable energy sources, and improving overall energy efficiency. These centres serve as hubs where residents can learn about sustainable energy practices and access practical tools for a low-carbon lifestyle.

Nature in the City: With over 20 green areas—ranging from parks and gardens to designated spaces for urban agriculture—Charleroi promotes a harmonious balance between urban living and biodiversity. These spaces invite residents to experience nature within their city, fostering a greater appreciation for natural ecosystems.

Nature Districts: Revitalization of unused spaces with resident co-creation, boosting sustainability awareness and community ownership. By involving local residents in the co-creation of these green areas, the city ensures that these spaces reflect the needs of the community and fosters a sense of collective responsibility.

Open Call for Citizens: Funding for neighbourhood gardens, social economy businesses, and anti-discrimination projects.

Charleroi's urban renewal project, titled “**Charleroi: the (re)conquest of the West,**” represents an ambitious effort to requalify over 2,200 hectares of land, heavily influenced by the region's industrial heritage.

Key Stakeholders

- **Citizens** – grassroots initiatives such as neighbourhood gardens and climate action groups.
- **NGOs & social economy operators** – tackling inequality, discrimination, and inclusive education.
- **Local business sector** – especially in **green technologies, clean-tech, and circular economy practices.**
- **Public authorities (City of Charleroi)** – providing funding, coordination, and policy frameworks.

Concluding Remarks

Charleroi demonstrates how a former industrial city can **leverage education and innovation to drive sustainability and social inclusion.** The city emphasizes **community participation, citizen-driven projects, and partnerships across sectors.**

The Charleroi model offers inspiration in:

- embedding lifelong learning into broader urban strategies;
- combining **green competences with social inclusion;**
- engaging citizens in **co-creation and open calls;**
- aligning local policies with the **UN SDGs.**

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GLASGOW

Glasgow (United Kingdom) is the largest city in Scotland, with a population of around 635,000. Historically an industrial hub, the city has transformed itself into a European leader in sustainability, education, and innovation. In 2019, Glasgow joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC), placing lifelong learning at the heart of its urban development. The city is internationally recognized for its climate leadership, particularly as host of the UN Climate Change Conference COP26 in 2021 (Conference of the Parties), and for initiatives like the **GALLANT Project (Glasgow as a Living Lab Accelerating Novel Transformation)**, which turns the city into a testing ground for green solutions.

Is there a specific Lifelong Learning Strategy in the city?

There is the **Glasgow Community Learning and Development Plan (2021–2024) GCLDSP Plan**, coordinated by the **Glasgow Community Learning and Development Strategic Partnership (GCLDSP)**. This framework for Glasgow's lifelong learning strategy emphasizes **inclusion, sustainability, and community empowerment**.

Key priorities include:

Digital literacy and financial inclusion for disadvantaged groups.

Environmental education and skills for a green economy.

Community-based learning, linking universities, schools, NGOs, and citizens.

Glasgow's learning strategy is closely tied to its goal of becoming a **climate-resilient, net-zero city by 2030**. Universities, especially the **University of Glasgow's Centre for Research & Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning (CR&DALL)**, play a pivotal role in research, outreach, and skills development.

Activities on Green Competences and Sustainability

Glasgow integrates lifelong learning directly into climate action through multiple flagship initiatives:

The GALLANT Project is a £10 million program funded by the UK's Natural Environment Research Council, that engages citizens in biodiversity restoration, urban regeneration, and low-carbon energy solutions. Residents participate in mapping species, redesigning green spaces, and co-creating renewable energy systems.

Active Travel Strategy (2022–2031) promotes walking, cycling, and wheeling as alternatives to car travel. It reduces emissions and improves health by investing in safe cycling paths and pedestrian routes.

Glasgow Green Deal is a nine-year action plan to build a just, net-zero economy through energy efficiency retrofits, public transport investment, and green jobs.

There is also a number of cultural activities that raise the awareness of sustainability issues:
Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) exhibitions on sustainability, such as “Sustainable Fashion” and workshops.

Glasgow Science Centre runs “Our World, Our Impact” – climate engagement programs.
Create4Glasgow gave young people a voice in shaping climate priorities after COP26.

Key Stakeholders

Glasgow’s success lies in **broad collaboration** across sectors. Major actors include:

- **Local government:** Glasgow City Council (policy, planning, and strategy).
- **Universities & research centres:** University of Glasgow and CR&DALL (knowledge transfer, community engagement).
- **Community and voluntary sector:** Glasgow Life, Volunteer Glasgow, and Workers’ Educational Association.
- **Business and housing associations:** Jobs & Business Glasgow, Wheatley Group, Glasgow Housing Association.
- **Citizens:** Active contributors in biodiversity mapping, energy projects, and community planning.

Together, they form a **city-wide ecosystem** that links education, sustainability, and social equity.

Concluding Remarks

Glasgow demonstrates how **lifelong learning can drive urban sustainability**. By embedding education into climate action, the city not only builds resilience but also ensures that all communities benefit from the green transition.

Using culture and creativity (museums, youth projects, art initiatives) is a great way how to raise awareness.

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DUBLIN

Dublin, Ireland is the capital of Ireland and has a population of about 1.26 million. Dublin is known as a hub for ICT, pharmaceuticals, and creative industries. Since 2019, Dublin has been a member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities and **in 2021** received the UNESCO Learning City Award. The initiative Dublin Learning City is co-chaired by the Marino Institute of Education and Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, in partnership with Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, National College of Art and Design, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Dublin City Council, and the City and County Education and Training Boards.

Is there a specific Lifelong Learning Strategy in this city?

Dublin City Council's **vision** is to build a dynamic, sustainable city with inclusive neighbourhoods, a vibrant economy, and connected growth. Its **mission** is to drive sustainable development through civic leadership and services that improve citizens' quality of life.

The city promotes lifelong learning through the **Dublin Learning City initiative**, ensuring education is accessible to all and encouraging progression to further and higher education. The city strategy is strongly linked to **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)**, inclusion, health, equity, and entrepreneurship.

Annual highlights include the **Learning Festival**, which opens schools, libraries, museums, and community centres to all citizens with free learning events. Nationally, Ireland's **ESD to 2030 strategy** frames education around sustainability, human rights, and global citizenship (**gov.ie ESD Strategy**).

Activities on Green Competence and Sustainability

Mapping Green Dublin - a participatory urban greening project in Dublin 8, led by University College Dublin, involving residents and local groups in planning green spaces for health and wellbeing.

Dublin Learning City Festival (Festival Programme) - a citywide learning celebration with workshops, walking tours, and cultural activities, many focusing on sustainability and green skills.

Green Schools Ireland (Eco-Schools) - a national environmental education programme operating in Dublin, encouraging students to take action for climate and sustainability.

Cycle to Work Scheme (Bike to Work) - A tax incentive for employees to purchase bicycles, encouraging sustainable commuting.

Tidy Towns Initiative & WEEE Ireland (Tidy Towns, WEEE Ireland – Waste Electric and Electronic Equipment) - Community competitions and recycling schemes supported by Dublin City Council, strengthening waste management and environmental awareness.

Major Stakeholders

- **Higher Education & VET:** Trinity College Dublin, UCD, Marino Institute, NCAD, RCSI, Education and Training Boards.
- **Municipal sector:** Dublin City Council (strategic planning, services, festivals).
- **Civil society & NGOs:** Social enterprises, cultural groups, and sustainability NGOs (e.g. The Wheel, Spark Change).
- **Green initiatives:** Mapping Green Dublin, environmental groups, and recycling organisations.
- **Local communities:** Learning Neighbourhoods in North Inner City promote intergenerational and inclusive learning (Learning Neighbourhoods Map).

Concluding Remarks

Dublin demonstrates how a European capital can embed lifelong learning into urban policy while directly linking it to sustainability and community wellbeing. Its UNESCO Learning City status strengthens cooperation with Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Belfast, and Derry/Strabane, forming **the Irish Learning Cities Network**.

Key lessons for other municipalities:

- Link lifelong learning directly to sustainability and SDGs (especially SDG4 – quality education and SDG11 – sustainable cities).
- Use festivals and open events to engage citizens of all ages.
- Support bottom-up, community-based initiatives (e.g. neighbourhood learning and greening projects).
- Build strong coalitions between city councils, universities, and NGOs.

Dublin shows that investing in learning cities not only improves employability and cultural life but also strengthens resilience, sustainability, and social inclusion.

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DERRY

Derry/Londonderry (Northern Ireland) is the second-largest city in Northern Ireland, and the fifth-largest on the island of Ireland. Located in County Londonderry, the city now covers both banks of the River Foyle. Population of the city is around 90 000 people. Derry joined the **UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities** in 2019, focusing on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The city integrates lifelong learning with sustainability, inclusion, and innovation.

Is there a specific Lifelong Learning Strategy for this town?

Derry's lifelong learning strategy is embedded in its **Inclusive Strategic Growth Plan**, prioritising education, sustainability, and community resilience. Key initiatives include: **Foyle Learning Community** provides for cooperation of schools and education centres. **North West Regional College (NWRC)** covers technical, vocational, and professional training tailored to local labour market needs. **Learning Cities Festival** is an annual celebration of learning for all generations. **Social inclusion projects** enhance access to education for vulnerable groups. **Sustainability projects** focus on urban agriculture and recycling.

Activities on Green Competences & Sustainability

NWRC Green Skills Academy (NWRC) – training in green jobs, renewable energy, and sustainable technologies.

Zero Waste North West – workshops on waste reduction, repair, and recycling.

Eco-Schools Northern Ireland – schools awarded the Green Flag for sustainability projects.

Foyle Reeds Project – restoration of wetlands and biodiversity in the River Foyle.

Major and Active Stakeholders

- **Education & Training:** NWRC, Derry Youth & Community Workshop
- **Community & Culture:** The Nerve Centre, The Playhouse, Tower Museum, Siege Museum
- **NGOs:** Triax Neighbourhood Management Team, Foyle Hospice
- **Industry:** Seagate Technology, Allstate NI

Concluding Remarks

Derry demonstrates how **lifelong learning can drive sustainability, social inclusion, and economic growth**. The city's success lies in:

- Strong **multi-sector collaboration** (schools, NGOs, businesses, local government).
- Linking **education to labour market needs**, especially green skills.
- Using **cultural heritage and public spaces** for learning and community engagement.

Recommendation for other cities: Build local learning communities, connect education providers with employers, use local resources and integrate sustainability into community projects to strengthen resilience and innovation.

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GRONINGEN

Groningen (Netherlands) is the largest city in the north of the Netherlands with 238 000 inhabitants. As the largest city and economic and cultural centre, it is known as 'the capital of the north'. Known also as a student city with three universities and strong knowledge institutions, it is recognized for progressive urban policies, clean air, and cycling culture. Over two-thirds of travel in Groningen are done by bike. The city maintains international relations and promotes economic cooperation, to help its universities and businesses. With the prime position as city of knowledge, the aim is to attract and retain international talent. Since 2019, Groningen has been part of the **UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC - GNLC Groningen Profile.)** in the cluster on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

Is there a specific Lifelong Learning Strategy?

Although Groningen does not have a single lifelong learning strategy document, learning is embedded in the **Akkoord van Groningen (Agreement of Groningen)** – a long-term partnership between the municipality, province, universities, hospitals, and businesses. Updated every four years, this agenda focuses on **energy transition, health, and digitalisation**, aiming to link education, labour market, and innovation.

Activities on Green Competences & Sustainability

Circular Groningen Drenthe is an association of more than 100 members. By organizing supply chain collaborations and knowledge sharing, they make the steps towards a circular economy more accessible for companies and organizations. Their aims are for 50% less use of raw materials by 2030 and 100% circular economy by 2050, with initiatives in innovation, entrepreneurship, and knowledge exchange.

Groningen is part of the **Net Zero Cities initiative** which has been designed to help cities overcome the current structural, institutional and cultural barriers they face in order to achieve climate neutrality by 2030.

Repair cafés and workshops are financed by the city to promote reuse, reduce waste, and provide jobs for unemployed people and build a circular economy.

Sustainable Groningen platform – duurzaamgroningen.nl offers citizens practical tips on sustainable housing, food, shopping, transport, and gardening. The categories of topics covered include the following:

- The House – insulation, grants and useful tips,
- Garden and surroundings – Everyone wants green around them,
- Waste and Reuse – Dispose of your waste sustainably,
- Food – Buying local, preparing and storing sustainably,
- Shopping – Buy second hand, repair,
- Doing business – All about responsible entrepreneurship,
- Transport services – Sustainable from A to B.

Events & community initiatives – e.g. clothes swaps, vintage markets, housing exhibitions on sustainable building, and campaigns on rainwater use and gardening.

The sustainable behaviour is quite developed and became integral to the lives of citizens.

Major Stakeholders

- **Municipality of Groningen** – coordination and funding.
- **Knowledge institutions** – University of Groningen, Hanze University of Applied Sciences.
- **Hospitals and healthcare providers** – linking health with sustainability.
- **Civil society & NGOs** – especially environmental and cultural organisations.
- **Industry & business partners** – involved in circular economy and energy transition.

Concluding Remarks

Groningen demonstrates how a city without a formal lifelong learning strategy can successfully integrate **lifelong learning and sustainability goals** through strong partnerships and citizen-focused initiatives. Its approach shows that:

- Collaboration between universities, local government, and businesses is crucial.
- Practical, community-based initiatives (repair cafés, local subsidies, citizen platforms) motivate residents more than top-down programmes.
- Linking sustainability with tangible personal benefits (lower costs, better health, community engagement) is effective.

What appears to work in Groningen is the **connection of skills to the individual situation of people** – if they see personal benefits from a certain behaviour, they are more likely to take it up. So, it is advisable that all training or awareness raising activities should be related to practical activities that improve the (financial) situation of people. For other municipalities, Groningen illustrates how **learning cities can combine education, sustainability, and innovation** into a coherent vision that benefits both citizens and the local economy.

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LJUBLJANA

Ljubljana, Slovenia is a UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) member and recipient of the UNESCO Learning City Award 2021. The city is also active in the GNLC Cluster on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and a member of **European Cities of Learning**. Its vision is captured in the slogan “Ljubljana – a city of education for all.” Ljubljana is the political, scientific and cultural centre of the Slovenian nation and, with over 295,504 inhabitants, it is the largest city in Slovenia and its most important economic centre. 31.8 per cent of the population is under the age of 30. Over the course of the last 15 years, Ljubljana has radically changed its image and evolved into a sustainable green city whose policies attach the utmost importance to education. Ljubljana is a city of culture, home to numerous theatres, museums and galleries, and also boasts one of the oldest philharmonics in the world. Today, it is a city where scientists come because of its university and internationally renowned institutes, artists because of the world-famous graphic arts biennial, the art academy and countless art galleries, business people because of numerous business meetings and fairs, and international experts because of congresses.

Is there a specific Lifelong Learning Strategy in Ljubljana?

Ljubljana does not have a single strategic document, however its goals in the area of lifelong learning are embedded in its commitment to UNESCO GNLC.

Medium-term goals: near-universal kindergarten enrolment, digital literacy for the elderly, integration programs for migrants, intergenerational cooperation, and inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Long-term goals: increasing adult participation in lifelong learning, providing equitable access to education for all, and ensuring a high quality of life in a green, tolerant, and safe city.

The city explicitly links lifelong learning with **sustainable urban development, culture, and environmental protection**.

Activities on Green Competences & Sustainability

Third Age University – Garden Volunteers: older learners volunteer in the University Botanic Gardens, spreading knowledge on biodiversity and intergenerational learning.

LAG “Harmony between Town and Countryside”: EU-funded local development projects promoting environmental protection, intergenerational homes, and social inclusion.

CoFarm4Cities Project: “Development and Testing of an Urban Farming Model through Pilot Interventions in the Central European Region – Urban Farming in Central Europe” – urban farming pilots linking schools and local food supply chains; includes education on composting, food cycles, and promotion of locally produced food.

Carbon Neutrality Information Point: established in 2023 to raise awareness on decarbonisation, renewable energy, and sustainable lifestyles.

Sustainable Development Awareness Programme: reinvests 10% of energy savings from building renovations into sustainability education in schools and kindergartens (hands-on workshops, experiments, didactic tools).

PS Lifestyle (where PS stands for Positive and Sustainable) will enable residents of eight European countries to adopt a more positive, sustainable, and healthier lifestyle by reducing their carbon footprint. The project will achieve this by establishing a carbon calculator to assist residents in adopting even more sustainable behavioural patterns for a sustainable lifestyle.

Key Stakeholders are

- **Municipality of Ljubljana (MOL)** – main driver and coordinator
- **Educational institutions** – University of Ljubljana, University of the Third Age, schools, and kindergartens
- **Cultural and civic organisations** – libraries, museums, NGOs, art platforms
- **Environmental and urban planning groups** – including SMEs and NGOs active in the green transition
- **Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (ACS)** – key partner for adult learning
- **International networks** – UNESCO GNLC, European Cities of Learning, NetZeroCities

Concluding Remarks

Ljubljana demonstrates how **lifelong learning can be integrated into city-wide sustainability and climate strategies**, ensuring intergenerational participation and engagement of vulnerable groups. Its approach combines **policy commitment, diverse stakeholders, and practical projects** ranging from urban farming to energy education. For other European cities, Ljubljana offers a strong example of how joining international networks (UNESCO GNLC, NetZeroCities) and leveraging EU funds can amplify local lifelong learning strategies while driving the green transition.

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TRNAVA

Trnava, Slovak Republic – often called the “Slovak Rome,” is one of the oldest and most historically significant Slovak cities, with a strong academic tradition. The city seats 2 universities. Its current population exceeds 60 000. In 2022, Trnava joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (**Learning City Trnava**) in the Education for Sustainable Development cluster. The city actively combines education, innovation, and sustainability, making it a national role model for a UNESCO Learning City in Slovakia.

Is there a specific Lifelong Learning Strategy in Trnava?

While Trnava does not have a standalone lifelong learning strategy, learning is embedded in its **strategic municipal documents**. **Low Carbon Strategy Trnava 2022–2027** emphasizes education in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and citizen engagement. **Program of Economic and Social Development 2014–2025** promotes modern and inclusive education, digital skills, reskilling, and innovation. **Community Plan of Social Services 2021–2025** focuses on social inclusion through training for vulnerable groups (seniors, unemployed, people with disabilities).

Activities on Green Competences & Sustainability

Baterkáreň (Battery point) – a multifunctional community space for workshops on upcycling, zero waste, and circular economy; organizes swap markets to reduce waste. These workshops empower citizens to develop practical green skills, promoting environmental responsibility at both the individual and community levels. It plays a key role in Trnava’s efforts to educate citizens on sustainability practices through interactive learning.

Public Renewable Energy Workshops – practical training on solar energy installation and maintenance as part of the city’s Low Carbon Strategy.

Festival Učiaca sa Trnava (Learning Trnava) – annual event connecting schools, NGOs, and businesses, with activities on sustainability and lifelong learning.

ConnecTT initiative provides comprehensive support for integrating foreigners into the community and promoting social sustainability. This program offers language courses, cultural workshops, and social integration activities, ensuring that all residents can actively participate in the city’s social and economic life.

Fostering collaboration among stakeholders

Trnava is actively working on initiatives to develop a Learning City through community-based projects such as the **School of Teachers** and **Biznis Point**, which aim to improve skills in the local education sector and business sector. The city emphasizes lifelong learning through events like the Week of Lifelong Learning, fostering collaboration between various educational organizations, and focusing on accessible learning opportunities for all ages. This reinforces the city’s goal of creating a knowledgeable, empowered community.

Concluding Remarks

Trnava shows how a medium-sized Slovak city can build a **Learning City model** by combining sustainability, education, and inclusion. The success rests on strong **partnerships** between the municipality, NGOs (e.g. **Lifestarter, Baterkáreň**), universities, and local businesses. Trnava's pathway to becoming a learning city emphasizes the role of partnerships with local organizations like Lifestarter, which plays a critical role in driving lifelong learning activities in the city.

For other Slovak municipalities, Trnava demonstrates that:

- Green competences and sustainability awareness can be developed through **community-based projects and practical workshops**.
- Civil society organizations are valuable partners, but municipal leadership and funding are essential for long-term impact.
- Joining international networks (e.g., UNESCO GNLC) provides visibility and access to good practices.

Even without a dedicated lifelong learning strategy, cities can integrate education for sustainability into existing municipal policies, create partnerships, and become role models for inclusive and green learning.

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PÉCS

Pécs, Hungary is Hungary's fifth largest city (approx. 173,000 inhabitants) and a major cultural and educational hub located close to the border with Croatia. It is a regional centre, and a university centre. The University of Pécs, the oldest university in Hungary (founded in 1367) is also one of the largest institutions of higher education in the country and offers a wide spectrum of study programs to approximately 20,000 students. The main challenges of Pécs include the shift from dominating heavy industries (mining) to light, smart and sustainable industries, as well as the demographic problem – decrease of population and lack of skilled workers. The city joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC) in 2016, in the cluster on Health and Well-being. Pécs is a city of ethnic diversity that seeks to promote cultural and social cohesion.

Is there a Lifelong Learning Strategy in Pécs?

Although Pécs does not have a single overarching lifelong learning strategy, it has developed multiple initiatives that collectively promote a learning city approach. These include mainly the **Learning Festival** that takes place annually since 2017, in autumn. It is coordinated and organised by an NGO, the House of Civic Communities in Pécs with the partnership of around seventy NGOs, schools, community organisations, foundations, art groups and environmental groups which offer more than 120 programmes over two days. The engagement in the UNESCO Learning City Award received in 2017 strengthened its commitment to civic participation and community learning.

Activities on Green Competences & Sustainability

Pécs actively integrates sustainability and green skills into its learning initiatives:

Learning Festival – yearly programs include green topics; for example, 2024's motto was “Pécs – the sustainable learning city, Green City – sustainable knowledge transfer and skills development.”

UP Green University – University of Pécs initiative promoting green competences and smart sustainable solutions.

100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission (EU) – Pécs is among the selected “100 Net Zero Cities,” focusing on renewable energy, sustainable urban services, and community learning.

Misina Family Centre (since 2020) – citizen-led transformation of a former building into a community and environmental awareness hub.

Participatory Budgeting – supports citizen-driven green projects and civic initiatives.

NGO initiatives such as Green Bridge Foundation – aim at intergenerational environmental education through gamified learning. There is also the **Senior Academy** that focuses on active ageing programmes linked also to sustainability awareness.

Main Stakeholders

The main actor of the Learning Festival, the House of Civic Communities (NGO) works in close cooperation with the **University of Pécs** with a strong Department of Adult Education and Human Development, that became the academic and research partner for sustainability and adult learning.

Of course, the Municipality of Pécs is an indispensable player, especially as a provider of participatory budgeting and EU-level initiatives. The industry & private sector is represented for example by VEOLIA, the energy provider with a biomass energy plant that operates an educational visitor centre promoting renewable energy.

A number of cultural institutions & NGOs, including museums, foundations, and community groups provide a number of educational activities, especially during the Learning Festival.

Concluding Remarks

The **strength of Pécs** lies in its **multi-actor collaboration**: the municipality, university, NGOs, businesses, and citizens co-create initiatives that combine cultural heritage, health, and sustainability.

The **Learning City model** in Pécs is bottom-up and community-driven, which may inspire other cities where municipal structures are not the sole drivers of lifelong learning.

Pécs demonstrates how EU initiatives (e.g., 100 Net Zero Cities) and UNESCO networks can be **leveraged to mobilize citizens around green competences and sustainability awareness**.

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