



## Innovating in Learning Communities through the EcCoWell2 Approach

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This paper provides an overview of action taken by four communities that are innovating through the EcCoWell2 approach. The communities are: the Harlem district of New York, the Kuoshun neighbourhood in the Datong district of Taipei, the U 3<sup>rd</sup> Age community in Singapore, and a growing number of learning neighbourhoods in Cork, as well as their city-wide seminars.

Representatives of most of these communities met in Suwon, South Korea, during the 15<sup>th</sup> PASCAL International Conference, 30 August – 1 September 2018, with this paper as a follow-up to their initiatives.

### BACKGROUND

The EcCoWell concept was developed by PASCAL in 2012 to integrate development in learning cities: *Economy/Ecology, Community/Culture/Cohesion, Wellness/Wellbeing and Lifelong Learning*. A key aspect of EcCoWell has been the focus on learning neighbourhoods. This overall approach was taken up by Cork and Taipei, with EcCoWell community project initiatives shared in 2016 at the end of the Glasgow 13<sup>th</sup> PASCAL International Conference: [http://conference2016.pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/post-conference\\_meeting\\_report.pdf](http://conference2016.pascalobservatory.org/sites/default/files/post-conference_meeting_report.pdf).

The EcCoWell core of integrating health, environment and learning was reflected in 2017 in the *Cork Call to Action for Learning Cities* adopted at the 3<sup>rd</sup> UNESCO International Conference on Learning Cities, for global and local action. Learning cities were encouraged to be “green, healthy, equitable, inclusive, entrepreneurial and capable of offering their citizens decent work opportunities”.

EcCoWell has shown to be flexible in responding to change and challenges. EcCoWell founder, Peter Kearns, was asked in 2017 by the PASCAL Board to undertake a review of experience with EcCoWell. His report, *Rethinking EcCoWell*, recommended adding *Entrepreneurship and Happiness*: <http://lcn.pascalobservatory.org/pascalnow/blogentry/news/review-eccowell-approach-learning-cities>. The projects discussed in this note are directed at the EcCoWell2 iteration, with these additions to the original concept.

## THE INITIATIVES

Across the discussions and papers updating progress we see some cross-current themes emerging. Culture can be harnessed (new and old), in conjunction with the arts and festivals. It is all about community development, diversity and leading to growth in entrepreneurial action. Through revitalising communities, strengthening identity is an outcome in building social cohesion, engagement and resilience. And then, it is a movement towards people-centred placemaking.

### **Harlem – New York City, USA**

*Dr Maria Liu Wong, Dean – City Seminary of New York, Research Scholar – Learn Long Institute, Co-Chair – PASCAL Faith/Spirituality Learning Cities Network*

Arts and research figure strongly in the Harlem neighbourhood of the City Seminary of New York. The Seminary's Walls-Ortiz Gallery and Centre (WOGC) is a "community space for interaction with art, for conversation, for telling stories, for visualising and engaging faith, and for new questions and unexpected appreciations".

There is increasing change in this neighbourhood:

- From being the centre of African American life to accommodating greater White and Hispanic groups; and
- from empty lots and abandoned buildings to a regeneration of new affordable housing, a hotel, restaurant corridor, and business development.

The Seminary is committed to being a place of welcome and engagement in vision, mission and activities. It is witnessed that within the local community, individuals and organisations "breathe life" into the everyday for all ages. The involvement of all Seminary staff is crucial to integrate a public "way of learning and being together".



Curated events and activities look to adding meaning and purpose for residents at all phases and stages of life. In building empathy and inclusion, the Gallery-held *Harlem: Spirit of Community* this year grew awareness and engagement with the roles of galleries, libraries and museums. A community arts installation: *Joy and the Good Life* revealed action for greater global consciousness in enhancing personal fulfilment and spiritual development for disadvantaged community members. The *Gotham Arts Festival* provided entrepreneurial experiences for young people in cooperating with Brotherhood/Sister Sol support services. *Conversations: Looking Back and Moving Forward* exhibitions have continued inclusion initiatives.

Policy and progress indicators are being investigated to record achievements and promote the initiatives of the Seminary and its Gallery. Presentations are made at international conferences and research papers authored for international journals. Coming on 7 November 2018, is the cooperative experiential session at the International *Transformative Learning Conference: Global Learning Cities - Empowering Citizens and Transforming Communities*.

## **Kuoshun Neighbourhood – Taipei, Taiwan**

*Dr Eugenia Chang, President – Datong Community College, Taipei City*

Datong Community College is set in the heart of an historic district and is dedicated to the six factors of Taipei as a learning city (culture, ecology, waterfront, health, safety and welfare), as well as forging its own place in “learning as a way to enhance the quality of citizens’ life” with their transformation into an integrated EcCoWell neighbourhood.

With the decline of business and industrialisation of the original neighbourhood and the movement of many young people to better employment opportunities elsewhere, the ageing population (those 65+) now constitute 18% of the population. Revitalising the neighbourhood has become a major initiative of the Datong Community College, viz. through

1. Creating a platform for merging ideas between resident groups and the neighbourhood leader;
2. Reaching consensus and coherence in meetings with residents; and
3. Conducting lectures, courses, workshops, and seminars around local power in neighbourhood renewal and resurgence, step by step.

An initial programme was to revitalise the abandoned houses and wastelands with volunteer teams renovating buildings and developing green back alleys for greater liveability and ecological sustainability. A credit to this restorative work and training, the community members’ garden on the rooftop of the District Office won the *Best Farm Roof in Taipei* award.



Kuoshun neighbourhood had been one of Taipei’s major rice distribution centres, thus products and culinary skills with rice had been paramount, but were now being lost. Datong Community College designed workshops to re-introduce rice food history and processing, for the younger generation especially. Seniors have felt valued in passing on their knowledge (see the 92 year old to the left, coaching a rice turtle cake class). In cooperation with the Office of Commerce and local merchants, the College introduced the *Rice Food Festival* and *Market Streets’ Map* for visitors and shoppers.

Through health prevention and promotion courses, the College has worked also with the District Health Centre to facilitate seniors leaving their homes to avail themselves of examinations, support and vaccination services. With this start towards community connections, additional courses for greater involvement have been activated with participation in memory training, computer operations, stress management, financial literacy, exercise and health, art, video making to traditional music classes. Achieving better health and wellbeing and providing opportunities as assets, the elderly have also been encouraged to join into more community volunteer groups.

## U 3<sup>rd</sup> Age – Singapore

Thomas & Carol Kuan, Founder and Managing Director respectively (Thomas is Convenor of the PASCAL International Members' Association [PIMA] Special Interest Group on Later Life Learning)

With the catchcry *Enjoying the Best Stage of Life*, this universal U3A movement of later life peer learning is aimed at social networking, sharing learning experiences, achieving active ageing and having fun in learning. Lifelong learning runs through all sectors of the community, no matter what backgrounds, position in life or formal education has occurred. Thus, in the experience of learning activities and making new friends, seniors are seen to develop a greater sense of self-worth and wellbeing.

Both the Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/u3rdage/> and the <http://u3a-singapore.com/>, home site illustrate the over 3,000 members with an extensive course range.

Categories of offerings cover: various arts and folk crafts, eco walks, creative writing, guided autobiography, Qigong for health and wellness, intergenerational activities, scenic educational trips, a SMS (i.e. 'Seniors Meet Seniors') platform known as a 'knowledge café' conversations, cognitive enhancement, social entrepreneurship, train the trainer (e.g. 'From Working to Retirement'), classic films and drama, to partaking in a *Lifelong Learning Festival* with the theme: 'Every Day a Learning Day'.



U 3<sup>rd</sup> Age – Singapore initiated the *Path to Happiness* board game, played like Snakes & Ladders. It's a life-size version where pairs or teams immerse themselves to interact across the generations in undertaking tasks or responses to questions that exchange experiences. It creates bonding and understanding, as well as encouraging positive mental health. Another pairing of older ('silver') citizens and the younger generation is with the group *Walk & Talk* conversational outings: discussing and visiting places of arts, culture and lifestyle interests. Partaking in these activities is designed to share moments of gratitude, life encounters and ideas related to happiness as well as fun learning, expanding perspectives and hopefully being a catalyst to further appreciation, meaning and leadership.

## EcCoWell2 – Cork, Ireland

Denis Barrett – Cork Learning City Coordinator

Cork began a very early uptake of the EcCoWell approach, especially as an enhancement to its internationally recognised annual *Lifelong Learning Festival*. Initiatives within learning neighbourhoods continue to foster engagement as from the initial two communities (Ballyphene and Knocknaheeny), two more were added last year (Togher and Mayfield), with another two being announced soon (The Glen and South Parish). Instrumental to this flourishing advance has been not only the local city Steering Committee, but also Adult Continuing Education at University College Cork, which has hosted a programme coordinator specifically attendant to Learning Neighbourhoods' development, interfacing with the neighbourhood committees.

At the 2017 UNESCO 3<sup>rd</sup> Learning Cities Conference that created the *Cork Call to Action for Learning Cities*, the four learning neighbourhoods active then all hosted programmes for the international delegates. On 20 September 2018, Mayfield will explore the EcCoWell2 elements with the local steering group keen to sponsor another community *Expo* to engage all residents.

EcCoWell is seen as “resulting in greater equality, social inclusion and ultimately quality of life” for the constituents of Cork.



Emerging out of the Lifelong Learning Festival conjunction from the Cork City Council role in development with inter-agency health, sports, education, and environment partners, EcCoWell2 has been embraced to further associated initiatives through a range of seminars and consultations out of the strong alliance between these various ‘actors’ in the EcCoWell ‘stage’.

Open Network Sessions have been a feature of the ever-developing EcCoWell projects. This year *What’s on Your Mind: Lifting the Lid on Mental Health Activities across Cork* was the topic. Capitalising on the Cork ‘life in the city’ Urban October activities, the EcCoWell2 team are coordinating *Creative Cork: Arts & Culture as a Source of Sustainable City Solutions* seminar. Cork has a vibrant creative arts sector and this gathering will explore further opportunities for practitioners and organisations. Ranked in the top eight of the European Commission’s “ideal cultural and creative cities” and the prime “start-up” city in Ireland, this assembly of interest will study the impact of an arts identity on economic and social wellbeing.

Worthy to note is that University College Cork is organising the 16<sup>th</sup> PASCAL International Observatory Conference on *New Rural Horizons: Adult and intergenerational learning as catalysts for supporting resilient rural futures*, in Cork and Cahersiveen, 13-15 March 2019.

### **Reflections**

EcCoWell is in many ways still at the start of its journey as it has added new dimensions in its second phase. Developing EcCoWell has demonstrated many responses to this integrated approach that strengthens various pursuits to ‘bridge and bind’ what makes a learning city or community; especially towards happiness, wellbeing and entrepreneurship.

We have seen in the preceding exemplars various means and insights being progressed to foster innovations that lead to deep, sustainable actions which are explicit in their equitable engagement of people, attentive to expanding knowledge/skill, supporting opportunity, and finding a route to quality of life. Sustainable learning communities need this spark to unlock the creative mind also.

We have mentioned the adage of learning with fun and note that *New Philosopher* May-July 2018 dedicated an issue to *Play Matters*. The editorial quoted the National Institute of Play founder, Stuart Brown, stating this is “the vital essence of life...the basis of what we think of as a civilisation”. Let’s contemplate this element and ensure further investigation and action.