

Lifelong Learning in Cities. The growing importance of community learning places for inclusion, citizenship and social sustainability

*Associate Professor **Roberta Piazza**, University of Catania, Italy*

Abstract:

The renewed attention being given to cities, since they considered to be vehicles for promoting lifelong learning (UNESCO 2013 a, b), makes it possible to create new opportunities for learning, more closely linked to community activities. Access to learning opportunities to meet adults¹ needs and aspirations - as research has already highlighted - can foster multiple benefits extending beyond the economic to a range of other outcomes, related to health, social care, cultural development, social cohesion and civic participation.

However in learning cities - cities with an explicit commitment to recognize learning and innovation at the heart of their vision - the main political challenges are related to the need for balancing opportunities for individual learning to the wider city-wide context: to compete in the knowledge-based economy, cities not only need to address economic development, innovation, but also social cohesion and sustainable development. The over-emphasis on skills and competences required for employability in the market in the dominant discourse on lifelong learning (EC 2012, 2016) needs to be balanced by a new vision of active citizenship, conceived of as a matter of individual and collective participation in a wider social sphere. Skills required for the jobs of the future cannot be the same as those required by the citizens of the future.

Adult learning and community education - as stated in the recent Pascal Statement on Innovation in Building Sustainable Learning Cities (2016) - could be seen as a vehicle to empower individuals to overcome disadvantage and to strengthen capacity within communities to participate in local development. Experience from all around the world shows the important role of learning in the making and re-making of places. For learning to be embedded into local consciousness (Osborne, Tibbitt 2014), it should be explicitly acknowledged in policy, at different levels, for the development of regions, cities, towns and local communities.