



SHLC

Centre for Sustainable,
Healthy and Learning Cities
and Neighbourhoods

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Learning Neighbourhoods – why they matter

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Education is often hailed as a leveller of inequalities and a ticket to a better life for individuals and to economic and social development for nations. However, education is itself riven with inequalities of opportunity. Personal characteristics including gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status help determine our educational access, experiences and outcomes. So, too, does where we live. However, whilst such spatial inequalities are foregrounded, it is usually on a large scale, where progress toward global education goals is compared by nation or region, or between the Global North and Global South. It is rare to see sub-national units of analysis, featuring in the discussion of inequalities, and the smaller the unit, the less likely it is to be compared, generating a gap at the level of the city, especially of the neighbourhood.

Place-based Inequalities in participation in education are experienced not only by children, but also by adults, and these too are shaped by geography, alongside a range of other personal and situational factors, notably Indigeneity, gender, disability and socio-economic class.

Despite the relative lack of data disaggregated to neighbourhood level, we do know from a number of existing studies that neighbourhoods matter for schooling. Specifically, we know from a forthcoming publication (Nesterova, Osborne and Schweisfurth 2025) that

- Neighbourhood characteristics help to predict educational access and outcomes, and that disadvantages at the neighbourhood and school level may place students at risk (Catsambis and Beveridge 2001)
- Neighbourhoods have an enormous effect on students' futures as they affect their socioeconomic careers (Andersson 2004)

- When someone grows up in a deprived neighbourhood, their chances to end up in deprived neighbourhoods increase, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage (de Vuijst, van Ham, and Kleinhans (2015)
- Unequal distribution of schools' results in relative advantage in educational opportunities for children residing in well-served neighbourhoods over children living in more poorly served areas (Sykes & Musterd 2011)
- Strong residential segregation where the default is for children to attend their local school leads to a narrowing of the social mix in individual schools, which ultimately reproduces broader socio-economic inequalities and disadvantage (Kintrea 2021)
- Neighbourhoods with the highest educational level of the adult population increase the probability of children finishing the upper levels of secondary school (Kauppinen (2007)

However, relatively little attention has been given to fine-grained analysis at urban and neighbourhood level of differences in adult participation that reflect the impact and nuances of place, and of the geographical heterogeneity of opportunity. This in part is reflective of the fact that the 'quality of data in the field of adult and lifelong learning is low and the statistics are not comprehensive, primarily due to inconsistent definitions of participation as well as "lack of methodologies and resources to produce robust and meaningful data"' (Osborne and Hernandez 2021, p. 57).

There are some exceptions at urban level, mostly linked to actualising the learning city concept that has been promoted most notably since 2013 by UNESCO in its Global Network of Learning Cities (UNESCO-UIL 2013). This framework seeks to mobilise the resources of multiple actors to promote and facilitate learning that enhances the social and economic well-being of the locality.

The learning city foregrounds the idea that whilst national governments play major roles in assigning roles in setting policy agendas for education, it is city administrations that typically are the enablers of practice, working with a range of stakeholders, and who are more likely to adopt a lifelong and life-wide approach. It also recognises that the successful building of a learning infrastructure within a city relies not only on top-down approaches, but the agency of people living in cities, who are most likely connected by the common concerns within their neighbourhoods.

It is clear that neighbourhood matters, but that in most jurisdictions there is a little data to draw upon in order to make meaningful interventions to improve educational opportunity either for children or adults. Such interventions not only improve life chances, but create better places to live economically, culturally and environmentally.

We have considerable evidence of patterns of neighbourhood effects in education from fourteen global south cities in India, Bangladesh, Philippines, China, Rwanda, South Africa and Tanzania, from work of the Centre for Sustainable Healthy Learning Cities and

Neighbourhoods (SHLC¹), a major project funded with £7m by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) within the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). PASCAL Director for the Asia Pacific, Professor Mario de los Reyes, University of Philippines, PASCAL Associate Director, Professor Shilpi Roy, University of Khulna and Chair of the PASCAL Executive Steering Committee, Professor Emeritus Michael Osborne, former Director of CR&DALL, University of Glasgow were each co-investigators in SHLC. There were many others involved in this work, including notably in the field of education Professor Michele Schweisfurth and Dr Yulia Nesterova (a CR&DALL Associate), University of Glasgow. The project, amongst other things, undertook large-scale household surveys of a range of neighbourhoods in 14 cities (from slums to wealthy) in seven countries in Asia and Africa 14,000+ surveys in total), investigating the contribution of education and lifelong learning (and health) to sustainability, and almost 140 focus groups to gather further fine-grained information to inform policy.

From this and other work undertaken by PASCAL leaders and its associates in other projects concerned with learning cities and neighbourhoods, we intend to offer a series of Masterclasses led by PASCAL Asia-Pacific in co-operation with SHLC Philippines and SHLC Bangladesh as follows:

- **Neighbourhoods – why they matter?** The importance of education and lifelong learning to developing sustainable neighbourhoods
- **What is a learning neighbourhood?** Conceptualising learning neighbourhoods for Global South cities
- **How does learning neighbourhood work?** Key elements of a learning neighbourhood
- **What we need?** Pillars of learning neighbourhoods
- **Practical Tools to map the current contribution of education/LLL and health at neighbourhood level to provide a baseline for actions** – surveys and focus groups

Each of the above is based on the work of SHLC, and we will offer other complementary Masterclasses linked to a number of practical tools linked to the work of previous PASCAL projects, and the work of cities that are part of the PASCAL Learning City Network as follows:

- **Practical Benchmarking tools** to map the contribution of a range of actors to the development of learning neighbourhoods (the supply side) mapped against the actual demands and requirements as expressed by communities. (LILARA project – see Longworth and Osborne 2010)
- **Further in-depth approaches to map the contribution of the university and TVET sectors** as a whole in a city/region through case studies of suppliers of learning, and again mapped against demand (PURE project – see Duke, Osborne and Wilson 2013)

¹ See <https://centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk>

- **Key Education and Lifelong Learning Actions in Neighbourhoods** – Good practices and lessons learned from the PASCAL LCNs (see <https://lcn.pascalobservatory.org/>)

This work will be launched at the 19th PASCAL conference in Kerala, India in November 2025, details of which will be available shortly.

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