ABSTRACT

This chapter makes the point that the cities we live in have become complex as a result of galloping population growth as well as economic and technological advancements. Coping with phenomena such as these demands a considerable amount of human capital development which frees up human beings’ potentials and capabilities and serves in sustaining living at all levels. Therefore, if urban dwellers must be empowered to take advantage of both the opportunities and challenges offered by the cities, limitless access to learning throughout life must be provided. Whereas the specific learning frame appropriate for assisting city dwellers has been identified as “learning cities,” it is the view of this chapter that the establishment of sustainable learning cities begins with the allocation as well as management of city spaces for learning. This role falls on the shoulders of city and regional planners who are here called upon to play their honorable part in the provision of learning.
INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century is marked by increasing urbanization and scientific as well as technological improvements. A larger percentage of the world’s population lives in cities, yet people continue to move from rural to urban centers. Cities have, therefore, become responsible for national as well as global development. With the level of infrastructural, economic and technological development in cities, human capital development is still regarded “the pillar of sustainable development”. In order to empower the people in cities, therefore, there must be limitless opportunities and access to learning throughout life. This is crucial because through learning, the quality of life is usually improved, while citizens are better positioned to solve personal and societal problems towards the building of a more sustainable society.

For this reason, cities of the twenty-first century have been encouraged to be learning cities. Cities that provide limitless learning opportunities for all. This is why lifelong learning is so central to learning cities. In building learning cities however, it is crucial to begin with the allocation as well as management of land resources which is the role of city and regional planners. City and regional planners can ensure that built and natural environments support learning in every way possible. This means that cities can indeed be planned and environment shaped in such a way that limitless opportunities are provided for citizens for continuous learning.

Building learning cities is all about widening access to learning opportunities and by so doing, learning can indeed be revitalized. Learning can be restored in families and local communities through the establishment of community-based learning centers. It will be right, therefore, to say that the focus of learning cities is that of seeking and maximizing opportunities to invest in or build human capacity. Through the building of learning cities, lifelong learning is made available for all for continuous upgrading of knowledge and skills in whatsoever field. This is the kind of learning which is wide in scope, covering the formal, non-formal as well as informal forms of learning.

Interestingly, over time, several new and innovative possibilities for learning and education have been opened up through information and communication technologies (ICTs), most especially through the internet. Information and communication technologies have recently become more widely available not only for information gathering but also for learning and self-improvement. Indeed, there are several ways the innovations offered by modern technologies can be maximized for continuous learning. However, building a learning city requires strong political will and commitment on the part of governments. Thus, a great responsibility rests on politicians as well as on administrators regarding putting public resources to the realization of the visions of a learning city. Building learning cities is therefore the joint responsibility of government and all other sectors of the society.
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