URBAN LEARNING CENTER

CONCEPT NOTE

Introduction

The Mayors for Economic Growth (M4EG), a joint initiative of the EU & UNDP, funded by the EU, is an invitation to reimagine urban and local spaces for positive transformative change and future-readiness. To facilitate this, local authorities that are members of the M4EG receive new learning and networking opportunities. This includes a new generation of Local Economic Development Plans, moving from a linear project to a 'portfolio of options' approach to tackling complex challenges, and innovation mentoring and seed-funds. An Urban Learning Centre (ULC) is being established as the umbrella to bring all this together and provide an enabling learning ecosystem.

How is the ULC a key component of the M4EG?

As the city structures are highly complex with different layers of actors and engagements, the M4EG focuses on "URBAN MAKEOVER," creating a responsive resilient, and sustainable urban or local space where the city or town will have increased economic opportunities and a vibrant community in various and compact forms with an embracing mindset.

The ULC intends to introduce approaches beyond 'business as usual' with a range of tools and approaches with an 'urban makeover' intention, including such things as foresight, social and community listening, sensemaking, adaptive and agile management, learning and monitoring effects, all with a strong focus on local solutions linked to the global objectives set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its framework of SDGs.

Why is the ULC being set up as a Learning Ecosystem?

Cities and towns are at the forefront of today's unprecedented complex challenges and uncertainties, yet local authorities and municipalities are overstretched with limited resources. Taking a standard best practice learning approach would not in itself be sufficient. The M4EG takes a more adaptive approach based on continuous learning and co-creation of approaches through shared experience of application. With value in bridging and connecting municipalities to each other, with peer-to-peer sharing of experience, around new tools and approaches to shape cities and towns to be more future ready, and to identify new partnerships and mobilise new funding for local authorities.

What are the components of a Learning Ecosystem?

The Learning Ecosystem is an interconnected system of interacting community members at national and regional level, organised around the practitioner member as both a learner and contributor. It is deliberately non-linear, designed to meet a variety of needs on a demand basis. The key components are as follows:

PEER NETWORK

The ULC will connect people together as part of a bigger community and learning network

INSPIRATION

A place to showcase projects and interventions to tell stories, provide solutions and build confidence

KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES

A repository of learning, resources, tools and experiences. Including connecting to other network resources across Europe and beyond

LEARNING PATHS

A series of formal structured learning modules for new tools and approaches, organised in pathways dependent on the learner's role and need

SOCIAL LEARNING

A combination of accessing experienced support in applying approaches to engaging with other cities in action learning and co-creation

APPLIED LEARNING

Applying what has been learned and then sharing that experience with the network

SENSE MAKING

A process to extract insights from the current portfolio of activities, to maximise impact and effectiveness, and to inform strategy and for policy making

DIGITAL ENABLERS

A platform to pull the key components of the ULC ecosystem together, act as a repository for resources, facilitate discussion topics, contribute content and facilitate the off-line activities

What are the Learning Modules and Learning Paths?

A number of learning modules are in motion already and others being developed with such topics including a new generation Local Economic Development Plans, Smart/Digital cities, Portfolio Thinking in Cities, Social Innovation, Alternative Financing, etc. With the actual modules to be determined following engagement with the M4EG community around confirming needs.

The modules will be designed around the audience, structured in bite-sized chunks on specific topics, using a variety of delivery modes, will cover 'soft' as well as 'hard' skills, and will provide certificates of completion. Learning pathways will be devised across the modules and sign-posting other resources, for different learning groups based on role, to ensure the learning is as efficient and relevant as possible.

List of learning opportunities (with some still under formulation):

- **Portfolio Journey 2022-2024**
- **Urban Imaginaries 1.0 2022** (Human Centered Design)
- **Urban Imaginaries 2.0 2023** (new generation local economic development plans)
- **City Learning Circle on Listening and other peer 2 peer topics**
- **Smart and Inclusive City**
- **Circular/Green Economy**
- **Social/Deep Listening/Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit**
- **Crowdfunding and other Alternative Finance approaches**
- **Strategic Risks and Foresight**
- **Leadership track and mentoring for Mayors**
- **City North Star programmes with mentoring from EU cities**

The learning modules and paths may be available on demand, on a competitive call basis, self-paced online modules, cohort-based peer group learning, etc. depending on needs and available resources.

URBAN
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LAUNCH

MAYORS
FOR ECONOMIC
GROWTH

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How will the ULC operate?

The community will be open to all M4EG members and their partners, including through a simple membership access process for the digital platform hosted on SparkBlue. UNDP will act as the SparkBlue manager and coordinator. Content will be provided by members and technical partners (especially for design of learning modules).

What is the plan for establishing the ULC?

Following the ULC concept launch in December 2022, there will be a survey to better understand M4EG learning needs. Learning modules and pathways will be developed, with the first new learning modules being rolled out in spring of 2023. The SparkBlue platform will be open for log-in for members and have initial information and resources in December 2022. With time, further platform functionality and content will be built.

Longer term, once established, the ambition is for the ULC to become self-sustaining for as long as it is needed and adds value.

Who will the ULC engage with?

Staff of all M4EG members (currently 350 local authorities in the EaP) can sign up and will have access to training, capacity development and knowledge exchange activities, through the Urban Learning Centre and its various learning programmes. The platform as well as all learning initiatives will be available in the relevant 6 languages.

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