

Big Tent V Declaration

Learning to Build Inclusive Cities with the joint-effort of community, city government and higher education

Since 2010, several regional and international networks promoting community engagement in higher education have been periodically preparing together collective statements of shared vision on a specific theme. This declaration is co-produced by Global Alliance for Community-based Research (GACER), Asia Pacific Community University Engagement Network (APCUEN), Centro Bolivianos de Estudios Multidisciplinarios (CEBEM), Commonwealth University Extension and Engagement Network, Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI), Living Knowledge Network, Pascal International Observatory, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), Service Learning Asia Network (SLAN), Talloires Network and with inputs from participants of the 11th PASCAL Conference on Cities Learning Together held at Hong Kong during November 18-20, 2013.

More than half the population of the world is now living in urban habitats. Asia is the fastest growing region in urbanization with inequalities, poverty, insecurity and exclusion amidst abundance and prosperity. In the past decade, nearly half a billion Asians have moved to urban habitations, and the trend continues. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have historically been recognised to serve public goods, with unique social responsibilities in producing knowledge for societal development.

Cities and towns are also centres of economic activity; they produce myriad opportunities to create and engage in new livelihoods; they are educational and artistic hubs; and they create cosmopolitan living spaces. Cities are also exclusionary; urban poverty is growing rapidly, even in small and medium towns; youth with limited skills are finding themselves under-employed in competitive cities; access to basic services of water, sanitation and housing for all the city-dwellers is far from reality.

It is in this milieu that institutions of education (especially higher education) can support a process of making cities inclusive for all. Municipalities, local governments, mayors and councilors are in search of ideas and capacities for creating better cities. What and how can we realise this dream of inclusive cities? What contributions can educational institutions make? How can the enormous resources of HEIs be mobilised towards this vision of inclusive cities?

These questions frame the content that we want to focus on for the **5th Global Dialogue on Community-University Engagement**, in what has become known as the **'Big Tent' statements**.

Recognising

- More than half of the world's population is now living in urban areas
- The Asia-pacific is most rapidly urbanizing region
- Cities and towns are engines of economic development
- People living in cities and towns enjoy exceptional educational, cultural and livelihood opportunities
- Millions migrate to cities and towns in search of a better life

Global Dialogues on Cities are Raising Important Issues

- The sixth World Urban Forum was held in Naples Italy in 2012
- Its theme 'Urban Future' focused on making cities welcome to all
- It pioneered the theme that 'all city-dwellers have a right to city'
- It recommended land rights and security of tenures for all city-dwellers
- It focused attention on sustainable urban development
- It recommended that public spaces in urban areas be treated as common public good
- The first international conference on Learning Cities held in Beijing in 2013

Realities of urban spaces are complex and multi-dimensional

- The life in the city is exciting, and strenuous
- Well-being in small and medium towns is qualitatively different from large metropolitan areas
- For many city-dwellers, cities offer enormous educational, cultural, health and livelihood opportunities
- For the urban poor (and people with special needs), cities can be exclusionary on account of lack of identity, livelihood, shelter and knowledge
- Migrants to cities feel harassed and insecure
- However, urban poor also contribute to making the cities livable

Educational Function of Cities needs to be enhanced

- World Urban Forum discussions and recommendations do not touch upon education

- Most policy-makers and urban planners do not view cities as spaces for life-long learning for all
- Mayors and councilors pay attention to schools and colleges
- Many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are located in cities, but do not necessarily 'belong' to them
- Learning to be Inclusive Cities is yet to be taken seriously
- Framework of Beijing Learning Cities declaration can be harnessed

Therefore, we recommend that efforts should be made to

1. To promote greater engagement of HEIs in undertaking research on issues of exclusion in cities where they are located;
2. To facilitate student participation in ways that make cities more livable for all city-dwellers by undertaking research, service learning and practical problem-solving;
3. To develop long-term partnerships with municipalities and other urban local bodies to put life-long learning and capacity-building on the agenda of their administration for all city-dwellers;
4. To promote educational programmes for young students, working professionals and senior citizens such that their expertise can be utilized in urban governance matters in all round and inclusive development of cities;
5. To encourage closer partnerships between HEIs and community-based organisations in the various neighbourhoods of cities such that specific urban development challenges—housing, livelihood, access to water and sanitation, health, safety and security, transportation and cultural aspects with sustainable strategies;
6. To prepare curriculum in various educational programmes of HEIs which is based specifically on the realities and requirements of local city-dwellers;
7. To foster a network of partnerships amongst HEIs, city governments, civil society and the private sector in order to enhance inclusivity in city life.

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