

Municipality of Korinthos, Region of Peloponnese
Greece



Creating a Learning City

Keyword(s):

Community engagement, active citizenship

Lifelong learning culture



Introduction

Corinth as a Learning City is a local municipality-level initiative with a broader impact on the Greek level. The activities of this initiative relate to the effort and success of the Municipality of Corinth to become a member of the Global Network of Learning Cities of UNESCO. The efforts of Corinth are based on three pillars: education, culture, and tourism.

Main challenge

The main challenge was to create a lifelong learning culture in a small but very rich in culture, city of southern Greece through the cooperation of Local Administration authorities, educational institutions, and civil society organizations. Corinth has the privilege to be the home of the Department of Social and Educational Policy of the University of Peloponnese, where adult Education and Lifelong Learning is a major domain. Corinth is one of the ancient cities of Greece with rich culture and many organizations that promote it. However, for many years there was no tangible communication between Local Administration authorities, the aforementioned department and local CSO's. However, the political will of the local authorities to support the inclusion of Corinth in the network of learning cities gave birth to a new a fruitful cooperation with local stakeholders. This political determination was manifested in a one day conference and strengthened through the publication of a

book (depicted in the image above on the left) based on the experiences of three other cities, that had already participated in the UNESCO network.

Timing

The decision to go ahead with creating a local network for the promotion of lifelong learning was taken in 2020, a period that was characterised by the end of the long period of financial crisis in Greece. Lifelong learning was perceived as an answer to the consequences of the financial crisis.

Objective

Our objective was to create networks of collaboration among individuals and organizations in Corinth, as well as with individuals and organizations of other cities of the Global Network of UNESCO inside and outside of Greece. Extroversion is perceived as the key factor towards the success of our efforts.

Target group

Citizens and CSO's in Corinth. A special emphasis was placed on the socially vulnerable groups. The framework of all our efforts was Lifelong Learning.

Geographical range

Municipality of Corinth

Stakeholders and partners

Schools, Initial and Continuing Vocational Training Institutions, Civil Society Organizations, Cultural Organizations, and Universities. All the aforementioned stakeholders were engaged in the project through events, conferences, workshops, open discussions, a Festival of Lifelong Learning, discussions with active groups in concrete social domains.

Strategy / materials

Formally our attempt started in the end of 2020. Therefore, we are rather in our first steps towards the development of a formal strategy. Nevertheless, so far, we are experiencing good collaboration, elaboration and dissemination of our activities that

we try to be original, innovative, inclusive and to mobilize the active citizens and stakeholders of Corinth. For the time being all our activities are funded by the Municipality of Corinth. In order to promote our strategy, we used a website, mass media, the municipality media-network and Facebook. We have published two books, posters, leaflets, videos, papers, posts on social media. Our strategy is fully participatory and inclusive. From this experience we learned about the power and the richness of networking and collaboration of our citizens. We realized that the city had a hidden “capital” that could be activated.

Resources

Our efforts depend on funding from the municipality, the efforts of municipal employees, and a significant number of volunteers.

Compliance with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Our strategy is in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4)

Innovation(s)

So far, within the less than one year formal work of our initiative most of our activities are quite innovative given the size of our city and the available funds. More specifically:

1. We published two (2) books:
 - The first was published in the very beginning of the initiative before the formal accession of Corinth in the formal Global UNESCO Network. The title of it was: Learning cities. Good practices, methodologies, and policies in Athens, Thessaloniki, Corinth and Larissa. It was the first book in Greece for Learning Cities and probably not only in Greece. The book was an outcome of our first meeting in order to set the framework of our efforts.
 - The second book is an e-book titled “The framework of a learning city. The accession of Corinth”. At least for Greece it is the only book which encompasses Corinthian, Greek and international approaches on it, providing an identity of the approach of Corinth
2. We organized a conference for teacher support during the era of the “pandemic pedagogy”. This conference was the only one of its kind in Greece and it was realized during the first months of the pandemic. It was innovative and multidimensional related to the post-covid use of long distance learning, to the

psychological implications of Covid to schools, experiences to overcome the problems from another active learning city, dialogue of the local teachers unions with administration in a period of tension in the national level.

3. The First Lifelong Learning Festival of Corinth

- a. It was the first Lifelong learning festival in Greece with the participation with posters of most organizations that provide Lifelong Learning in Corinth. The festival provided a categorization of these active organizations in five domains (training, social interventions, school education, tertiary education, civilization). Two months afterwards each domain had a meeting through which a first mapping (problems, open issues, strengths) of lifelong learning in Corinth was achieved and a significant network of lifelong learning organizations of Corinth was established.

Evaluation

We are in our first steps of the initiative. At the moment we have not established a formal way of evaluation although it is in our immediate plans. At the moment the only criteria of evaluation are mostly the participation and the response of Corinthians which of course do not suffice.

Impact

Our answer is similar to the previous item. What is encouraging at the moment is the fact that our initiative is very well known in Corinth, there is a high interest in what we do as well as there are proposals for engagement of individuals and organizations. Soon we will document and measure more formally the impact.

Impediments

- To identify, map and find priorities for Corinth concerning the UNESCO Global Network and to develop a concrete lifelong learning plan and realize it
- To create an effective core working team comprised of as many stakeholders as possible.
- To find a “common language” within our city regarding lifelong learning.
- To define specific domains of activation.

- To overcome misunderstandings or conflicts
- To overcome competitions
- To understand the framework of the UNESCO Network and act within it
- To popularize the initiative
- To show the comparative advantages of the initiative and to terminate the confusion with other initiatives as European projects

I think the most effective ways to overcome all these difficulties are dialogue, hard work, planning, allies, critical thinking, open mindedness, patience, persistence, inclusion, acceptance of diversity, belief to the hidden capital which exists in every city.

Replicability

Every city has a special identity with possibilities, positive and negative points. It is well known that a simplistic “copy – paste” strategy does not work in multi-dimensional and complex social phenomena. Nevertheless, the exchanges of experiences, methods, theoretical foundations are very useful to understand ideas with relevance, to be encouraged, to enrich the arsenal of other initiatives, to collaborate, and to network. Thus, our first steps may be replicated if they are adjusted.

Concluding remarks

Although we are beginners in creating a lifelong learning culture, it is a particularly inspiring, innovative and potential initiative, where collaboration and networking provides an unknown so far and strong power of changes on the city level beyond formalities and bureaucracy, which is based primarily on the participation of Corinthians.

Website/Social Media profile(s) of the initiative

<https://www.korinthos.gr/learning-city/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Korinthos.learningcity>

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