

# Time is Running Out! Systemic, Disruptive Innovation to Achieve the SDGs

## Panel 3: Learning partnerships as innovation

Chair: Dr Maren Klein, RMIT

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Professor Mike Osborne, University of Glasgow

Jean Monnet Network on Social and Scientific Innovation to  
Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals



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# Framing our conversation:

## Learning Partnerships as Social Innovation

All of these key insights or messages can be summarised in a simple proposition:

- If our research demonstrates the **importance of living in and with the tension** between local and global...
- ... how to build urgently the **kinds of coalitions/alliances** that will commit to systemic transformation...
- ... understanding that the **uncertainty** and 'not knowing' where innovation might lead is **an experimental/learning process** which needs partnership support.

Current research and practice acknowledge that the “**partnership and bottom-up approach of smart specialisation that brings together local authorities, academia, business spheres and the civil society, working for the implementation of long-term growth strategies**” will be necessary to achieve the SDGs, which is what SDG 17 has argued for - revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development.

### Two key dimensions of partnerships:

- the need to “**mobilize both existing and additional resources**— technology development, financial resources, capacity building— and developed countries will need to fulfil their official development assistance commitments.”
- how “**multi-stakeholder** partnerships [are] crucial to leverage the **inter-linkages** between the Sustainable Development Goals.”

### Our key interest has been to examine learning partnerships as innovation in terms of ...

- WHY must we learn together?
- WHAT can we learn from each other?
- HOW can we more effectively learn with each other?



# Our learning partners



**WOMEN IN ADULT & VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**



**ASEM Lifelong Learning**  
IRELAND 2020-2025



**Università di Catania**



**SHLC**  
Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods

# Policy Forum Statement: Transforming Education and Training in Australia: Challenges and Opportunities (February 2023)

- We called on the Australian government that they must “take up the challenge of transforming education and training systems to **ensure that all individuals, communities, and businesses can participate equally** and achieve the outcomes necessary to enjoy a sustainable emerging future.”
- However, this desired transformation is based on a commitment to the principle that “**access and equity to lifelong learning are the keys to ensuring that no one is left behind.**”

## “Tensions between learning for the economic sphere (jobs) and learning for well-being/democracy” (Klein, Guevara and Wilson 2022)

- To achieve the 2030 Agenda or to even make headway in the achievement of the SDGs, joint action, bringing together the various stakeholders and engaging with different views, is required. ... **Partnerships between governments, the private sector, civil society, and other interested parties can cross-pollinate ideas and mobilise resources not available to the individual or individual organisations.**
- Most of all, though, openness to ideas and the ability and willingness to consider solutions outside the confines of what has always been done or one’s preferred worldview is necessary. Such **collaboration and partnerships will require not just being able to acknowledge and recognise tensions but engage with them conceptually and methodologically.** Localising and contextualising tensions between learning and earning rather than smoothing might just bring about a more effective engagement.

## Learning partnerships as innovation: Along one's life-time of lifelong learning, across the sectors of life-wide learning to ensure life-deep learning

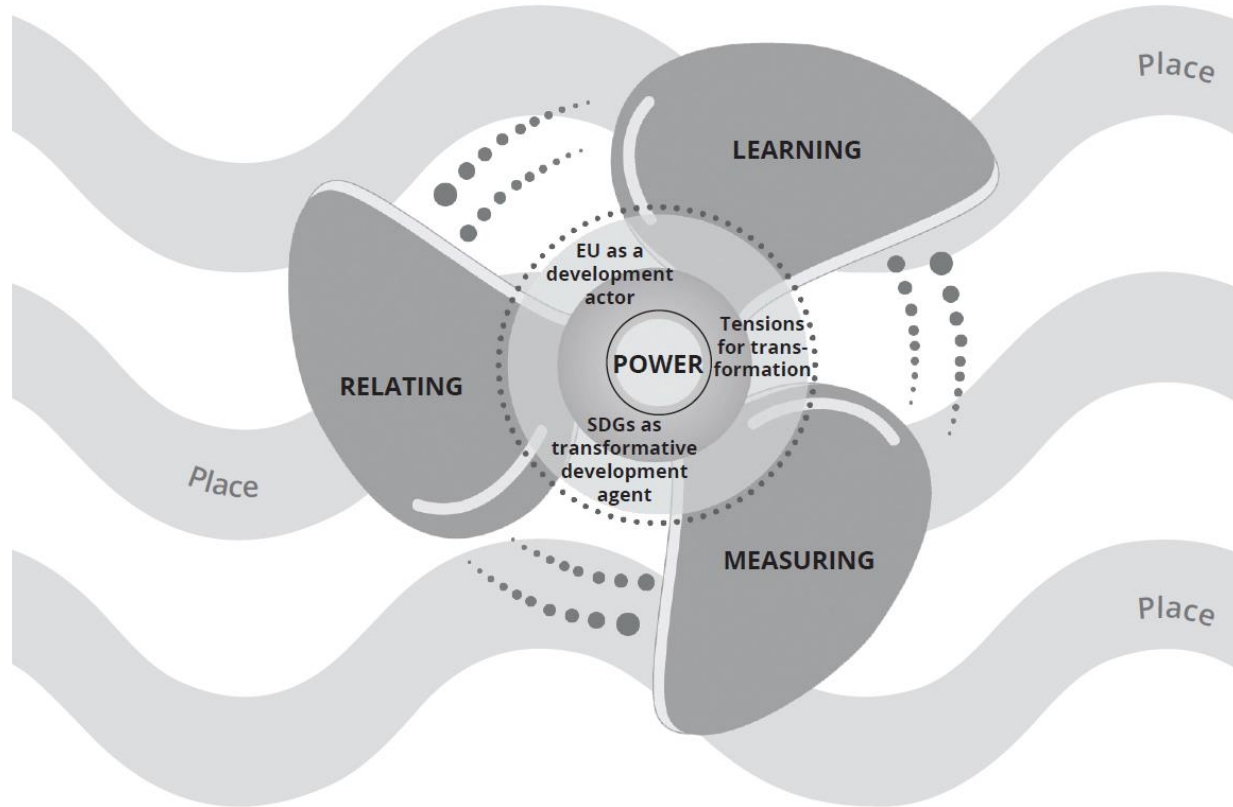
- **Within the university**, we argue that the SDGs provide us with the opportunity to engage in this transformative process which will require that we **learn to collaborate more effectively and meaningfully** not just with our colleagues across different disciplines but with our students, so we can learn together to co-create our shared future. (Piazza, Castiglione and Guevara 2024)
- **Within civil society**, the article poses that a new social contract for education provides a crucial and exciting opportunity to weave difference, dialogue, and justice into the fabric of capacity-building approaches, **reframing capacity building not merely as a means to an end but as a vital and valuable form of education in itself, as practitioners, educators, policymakers, and organizations work and learn together to shape new shared futures.** (Emmerton and Guevara 2023)

## As we approach the mid-point of the SDGs and prepare for the UN Summit of the Future ...

- We argued that any socio-scientific innovation will only succeed if we recognize the **significance of incorporating learning not just to promote innovation, but as an integral part of innovation itself.** (Piazza and Guevara, 2023)
- The concept and practice of partnerships are being revisited in line with the call of the UN Secretary General for **a more inclusive and networked multilateralism** because “**multilateral governance, designed in simpler, slower times, is not adequate to today’s complex, interconnected, rapidly changing world.**”
- **What kind of learning and partnership as social and scientific innovation will be required** to achieve this emerging multilateral governance, if we are to at least make significant progress towards achieving the SDGs by 2030?



# The Propeller Model



# Partnership in Global Research – Professor Michael Osborne, University of Glasgow

*Equitable Partnership in which there is mutual participation, mutual trust and respect, mutual benefit and equal value placed on each partner contribution at all stages of the research process*



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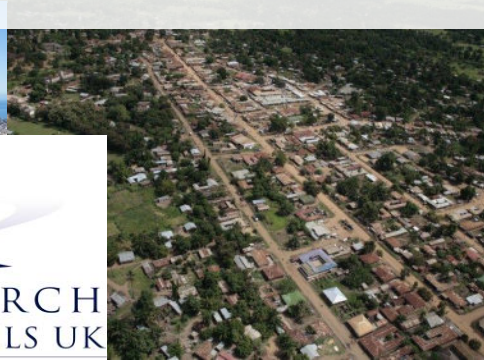


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*Strengthening research capacity through cross-country comparative studies of urbanisation*



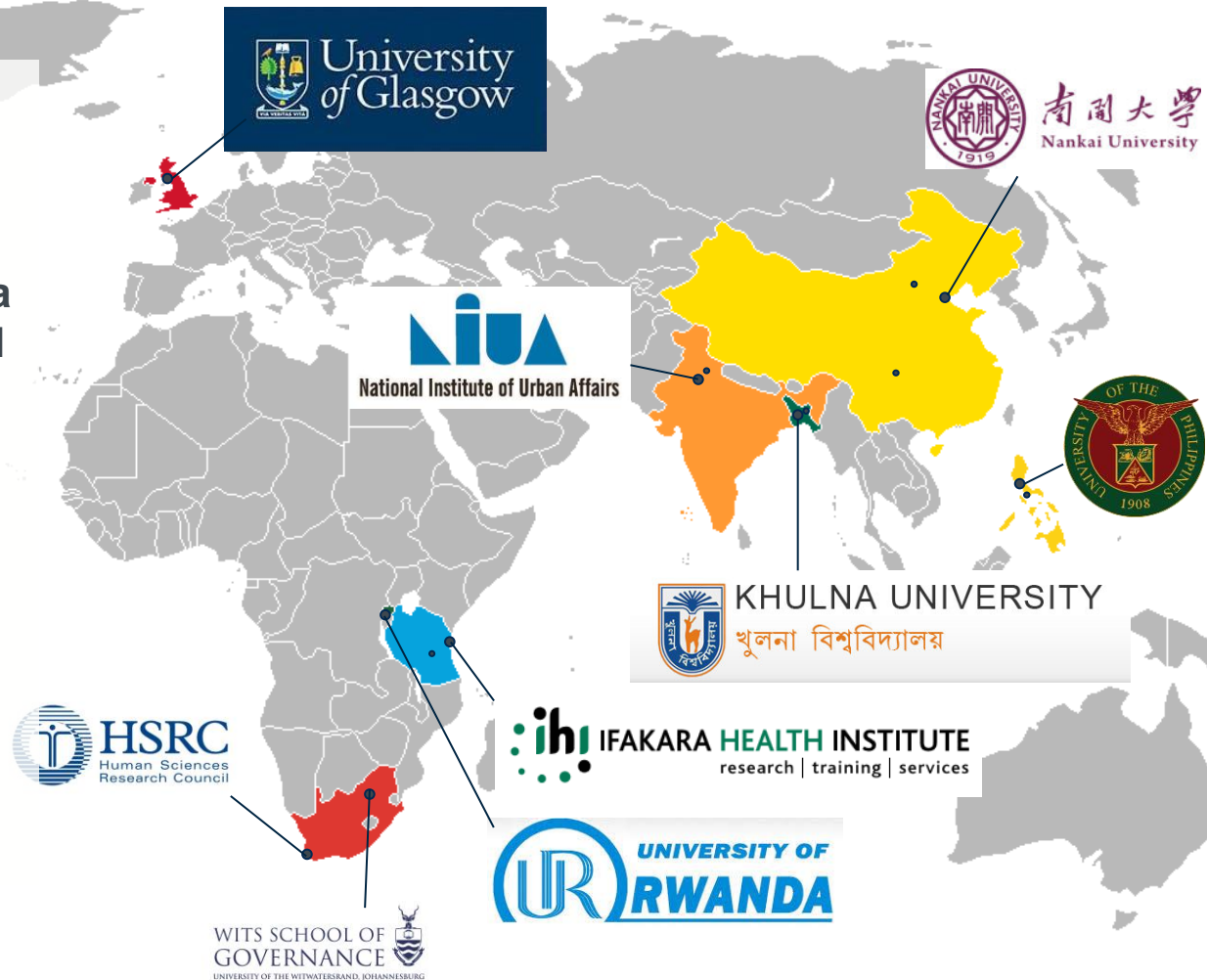
# Global Urban Transformation

- Sustainable cities and neighbourhoods depend on populations with the resilience and resources that health brings and on relevant learning;
- Access to healthcare and quality education depend on sustainable development of cities and the neighbourhoods.



# International Partnership

- Focused on **Africa and Asia**
- Based on strong and trusted existing research linkages with **key partners**
- With a **shared vision**
- **Co-design** at all stages of research process – **bid writing, design, implementation, analysis, dissemination**
- **Equitable distribution of resources**



# Comparative research for a full understanding of cities

- Relationship between urbanisation, migration, health and education
- Neighbourhood level database built with Big Data
- Spatial and social analysis at neighbourhood level
- Multi-level comparisons

National and local  
geographical,  
historical and  
cultural features

Political,  
administrative and  
urban governance  
system

Level of  
urbanization,  
industrialisation  
and economic  
development

Spatial, social  
and economic  
analysis of  
sustainable  
neighbourhood

## Capacity Strengthening through North-South and South-South Collaboration

- **Knowledge exchange and co-construction** in and between countries – **multi-directional** and **contextualised**
- **Methods training, visiting research fellow programme, professional staff exchanges and fora, research seminars/webinars, conferences and wider network building**
- A flexible, responsive fund – the **Capacity Development Acceleration Fund (CDAF)** - to provide opportunity for **early career researchers** and to **address emerging issues**



**Global urban experiences and international knowledge exchanges**

**Cities and neighbourhoods in emerging economies (BRICS)**

**Cities and neighbourhoods in fast changing and low-income countries**

# Outcomes and Outputs

- A holistic and deeper understanding of the urbanisation process and its **interrelationship with health and education**, based on use of **innovative methods**
- **Best examples** of urban planning, management and sustainable urban neighbourhood
- A strong country and **comparative knowledge base and policy** influences to drive forward global sustainable urban development
- **Localised and specific responses**
- A **world class research** team with multi- level expertise and collaborative platform
- A new cadre of **networked ECRs** with a strong emphasis on mentorship
- **Capacity strengthening** with/beyond core work through CDAF - included **unenvisioned partnerships**, e.g. UNESCO IIEP
- **Knowledge exchange** at level of cities/regions, communities, institutions and individuals – **workshops** at key stages in fieldwork, **impact symposia** with researchers, policy makers, NGOs, IGOs, and British Council
- **Open calls** at events to local researchers to present their research ideas and results
- **Traditional outputs, co-written in teams** - books, reports, working papers, articles



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# Fostering Learning Cities for Resilient Futures

Roberta Piazza, University of  
Catania, Italy

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*Panel 3: Learning partnerships as innovation*



**SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

Jean Monnet Network on Social and Scientific Innovation to Achieve the  
Sustainable Development Goals



# The Role of Cities in Global Sustainability

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- Cities accommodate over half of the world's population and drive social and economic advancement.
- However, they account for over 70% of global CO2 emissions and are vulnerable to extreme weather events.
- Cities are crucial in addressing global challenges like poverty, inequality, unemployment, and climate change (UN Habitat, 2022).

# Strategies and Challenges for Urban Sustainability

**Systemic Solutions:** Innovative, interdisciplinary approaches are necessary (Edmondson et al., 2019).

**Sectoral Approach:** Engaging various stakeholders and levels of government is essential (Oksanen, 2000).

**Challenges:** Institutional constraints, lack of coordination, and limited expertise hinder sustainability efforts (Polk, 2015; Norström, 2020).

**Collaboration:** Partnerships with universities and local stakeholders are vital for effective sustainability solutions (Lozano, 2021; Caughman et al., 2023).



Various urban models (Green City, Smart City, Healthy City, EcCoWell City, Resilient City) focus on different aspects of urban sustainability.

Common goals include integrating strategies for community well-being, shared identity, and ecological, cultural, and social development.

Example: EcCoWell Cities promote well-being and lifelong learning (Kearns, 2012a).

## Urban Models and Sustainability

# The Learning City Concept



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Learning Cities integrate economic, political, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions for talent enhancement and local regeneration.

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Learning is central, providing a framework for citizens to respond positively to change (Longworth, 1999).

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International recognition since the 1990s (OECD, UIL).

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Role of UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and the PASCAL Observatory in promoting Learning Cities globally.

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Mobilizes resources to foster lifelong learning, equality, social justice, and sustainable prosperity.

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Supports social sustainability by emphasizing equity, cultural relations, political participation, and community-driven action.

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Engages stakeholders through networks and initiatives to address urban challenges and promote integrated urban development.





# Collaborative Partnerships in Learning Cities

Learning cities enhance collaborative efforts and stakeholder coordination (Atchoarena & Howells, 2021; UNESCO, 2020).

Partnerships for both formal and informal learning systems are crucial for effective outcomes.

Success factors: strong leadership, clear vision, stakeholder involvement, sector cooperation, support resources (Thummaphan and Sripa, 2022).

Case studies: South Korea's local governance and partnership approaches (Chang and Cha, 2008; Byun and Ryu, 2012).



# Challenges and Opportunities in Collaborative Efforts

- Partnerships do not guarantee coherence; territorial disparities may persist.
- Importance of local learning partnerships focusing on adult education.
- Benefits: citizen-oriented services, enhanced transparency, public trust, social cohesion.
- Quality education supports sustainability transformations, higher-order learning, and problem-solving skills (Piazza & Guevara, 2023).
- Governance framework characterized by a culture of learning is essential (Broek et al., 2024).

# Rethinking Social Innovation in Cities: The SSIASDG Network

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- **Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3):**
  - Focus on place-based innovation over traditional sector-based policies (European Commission, 2012; Foray et al., 2011)
- **Key Points:**
  - Emphasis on socio-ecological innovation
- **Propeller Model:**
  - Perceives SDGs as interconnected and integrated (Guevara et al., 2020; Wilson & Guevara, 2020)
- **Transformative Approach:**
  - Moving beyond technical solutions to recognize political and moral dimensions (Auld et al., 2021)





# The University of Catania's Role in SSIASDG



## Focus on School Dropouts:

- Catania's highest national dropout rate at 25%

## Metropolitan Observatory for Prevention:

- Established in 2021 under the Prefect of Catania
- Synergy among diverse actors including Juvenile Court, Police Force, and University of Catania

## Working Groups and Urban Regeneration:

- Analysis of educational poverty and socio-cultural vulnerabilities (Di Profio, 2020; Saraceno et al., 2022)
- Digital mapping and index of social vulnerability

## Pilot Schools and Youth Reintegration:

- Five pilot schools identified in high social fragility areas
- Reintegration of minors into the educational system

## Recognition:

- Ministry of the Interior's recognition in September 2023 as an exemplar

# Challenges and Recommendations



## Challenges:

Institutional constraints and limited resources

Ensuring equity and inclusion

Overcoming deep-rooted mindsets



## Recommendations:

Engage city leaders and conduct regular evaluations

Involve diverse stakeholders (Ofei-Manu et al., 2018; Facer & Buchczyk, 2019)

Develop collaborative governance



# The Role of Partnerships and Future Directions

- **Partnerships for Sustainability:**
  - Foster innovation and holistic problem-solving (Sachs, 2015)
  - Prioritize community and environmental well-being over short-term gains (Wilson & Shortis, 2020)
- **Future Research:**
  - Document and disseminate successful initiatives
  - Explore strategies for replicating successful models in diverse urban contexts



Thank you

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# Thank you.



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