cities BEYOND GROWTH

SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN CITY POST-GROWTH TRANSITION

Prepared by the Institute for Political Ecology

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Set of recommendations on the role of education in city post-growth transition

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Introduction

This set of recommendations is derived from the learnings and experience from Cities Beyond Growth educational course implemented through Erasmus+ programme in the project ''Wellbeing for All: Building Climate Resilient Cities Together'' led by Transnational Institute.

Educational course was composed of general online module, tailored modules and final closing module at the Green Academy.

General online modules have focused on six sectoral areas (mobility, housing, care, digital, food, energy) in which European speakers have shared their experience with post-growth friendly policies. Participants were able to engage in discussion in the details and work in break-out rooms gaining more in-depth insights in the policy design and implementation.

Tailored modules (mostly in person) have been adapted to various target groups in cities accross Europe where participants engagd into interaction around specific transformative practices and policies which are or could be implemented in their local environments.

Closing module at Green Academy focused on transnational exchange among participants from various cities and municipalities. Numbers of cities participating in the module has expanded and ensured rich discussion and learning, combining insights from scholars, researchers, activists, municipal public servants and city councillors. They focused on opportunities, contradictions, restrictions, challenges and resistances that occure in post-growth policies.

Key learnings and take aways

All modules have focused on application of transformative learning and critical pedagogy principles. Participants gained knowledge on how to better understand, sustain, develop and regenerate their urban eco-systems. We have applied place-based and action oriented learning which used their local community and municipal resources as key reference and framework for imagining further action. They also refered to current economic realities where they had to factor in economic and physical limits but also ecological and social trade-offs when developing or proposing sollutions that would rely

on social, political and economic models that do not depend on indefinite GDP growth. Throughout the whole learning process there was a focus on just and fair distribution, trust building, care and sharing principles.

Both from content development and methodology courses have referred to empirical evidence and experiences of participants who are active in their cities and municipalities, particularly in tailored and closing module. Focus on problem-posing, conscientization, dialogical learning and praxis has ensured that through collective and horizontal exploration learners develop more profound and critical understanding of social, political and economic contradictions and power structures that reproduce inequalities or opression and make their cities dependent on the growth machinery.

Throughout implementation our courses aimed to deliver transformational learning which can support systemic change in cities. Transnational perspective which provided a variety of examples have played important role empowering learnings to feel more connected and less isolated, regardless of the sphere or sector in which they operate.

Recommendations

On the basis of our experience with all three learning courses we propose further recommendations and guiding principles for educators in city post-growth transition. These recommendations emerge as proposals from our own learning identifying successes but also shortcomings in the implementation. They are mutually dependant,

1) **Building trust** is essential pre-condition and neccessary investment in all stages of education. Particularly in preparatory phase it is important to invest sufficent time in building trustworthy and open relations with learners originating from city administration as they are often operating under variety of constraints related to organisational culture, hierarchy and power relations. Clear purpose of educational course needs to be communicated timely, confidentially and carefully ensuring that they feel safe and comfortable. Similarly, for different reasons, learners originating from deprivileged or marginalised communities need to find learning place friendly and be able to use it for their own empowerment. In practical terms it means creating smaller circles which occassionally change their composition so that all learners have opportunity to create deeper connections and trust.

2) **Peer to peer exchange** is of utmost importance for learners engaged in city post-growth transition. Horizontal learning which is collaborative, equal and reciprocal can empower those who often find themselves isolated or powerless. Connecting

them at the level of their expertise and engagement can often lead to fruitfull exchange on identifying similar patterns related to specific field of action and share of sollutions. For this purpose it is useful to use think-pair-share learning model where learners consider a problem individually, discuss it in pairs, and then share with the full class. Creating twin couples (between different cities), smaller working groups or learning circles which can meet and exchange in less formal setting around specific issue can lead to generation of their own knowledge based on experience. They can be grouped around the different criteria (experience, sector, role). This can deepen the understanding, lower the anxiety, build a sense of belonging and maximize time. This can have long-lasting impact that continues to be active and reliable connection in the future.

3) **Trans-hierarhical approach** can break the usual power relations and patterns that originate from role or experience. With this approach learning course can create safe space and methodology to break the status quo relations and enable learning accross all levels of governance ensuring that all learners work together for the same goal. Potential frictions and conflicts need to be managed by educators in order to allow fair and equal participation of all learners. Creating groups or circles which are hierarchically diverse can break the power patterns and accelerate learning on both ends.

4) **Systemic approach** is neccessary when working on the city post-growth transition. A post-growth transition is systemic because the current economic model is fundamentally built around perpetual growth expansion, making isolated or individual lifestyle tweaks insufficient to resolve ecological and social crises. It needs to create big picture which shows all spheres and sectors integrated and interlocked. Goal to co-create a post-growth city requires an integrated approach that explores the growth dependency of all sectors. Creating intersectoral working groups or exercises as 'co-creation', 'futuring' or 'visioning' can be useful to create a systemic vision of post-growth transition.

5) **Experiential based** learning is one of the key values. Specific experience of each learner can be abundant pool of knowledge which can ground or test theoretical considerations in their local or institutional reality. All experiences need to be treated equally and be employed in creating common vision of city post-growth transition. In reverse, real-life tasks and concrete experiences of learners might be identified and interpreted through theory. Role-playing or simulations can be used to deepen the experience or find other sollutions. Sharing of experiences can take

place in the broader circle allowing reflective observation from different viewpoints.

6) **Participatory.** There is never enough participation. Learners are usually empowered through their involvement which can effectively impact their community and where they are able to actively propose, debate, co-create, and decide on municipal policies. Various participatory and deliberative methods can be applied to increase capacity for learnerns to engage in participation in their own municipalities and local environments.

7) **Transnational exchange** is desirable whenever possible. Not many European cities are involved in post-growth transition. Yet, their number is growing and so does the the empirical evidence related to impacts of emerging municipal policies. Learning from successes and failures of other European cities can be beneficial for learning of how post-growth transition unfolds or develops in different political, cultural and social contexts. Apart from that, cities who might be sceptical or discouraged to engage in post-growth transition can be empowered and feel less isolated.

8) **Transformative learning** is what counts the most. During the course learners are exposed to various contradictions or challenges on how to translate such ideas into practice in their own city. Key assumptions of the city development are often deeply rooted in growth paradigm so learning process enables to envision alternatives and co-create different vision for their city development. Learners learn to think how to question dominant assumptions and ideologies, how to challenge unfair distribution, how to ensure that city's progress works for all and not for the few. Such learning if succesfull can lead to more efficent action in the line with systemic change.

Post-growth educators often do pioneering in leading in designing and implementation such courses. Very often they are faced with funding restrictions and reluctance of participants to engage in program that questions alleged foundations of the progress. They are learning from mistakes and failures and often face silent pressure rooted in assumption that growth path is inevitable and key precondition to ensure social and environmental well being. Therefore a long term and persistent investment into building networks, learning from each other, building trust with city administration, academia and the movements is of crucial importance for future endeavors in this direction.

City administration public officials operate very often in the constrained framework where city is perceived as a 'growth machine'. In such context it is often difficult to engage into programme where this very foundation is critically examined and questioned. While further increase of social inequalities and climate crisis seem to only increase presence and magnitude cities learn that often they don't possess neccessary knowledge and skills to cope with such crisis. Apart from that, internal resistances, lack of knowledge and relations to economic power (financial sector, banks) makes city administration too hesitant to engage. Yet, in each city administration there are persons who see disadvantages of such approach and understand that it does not make their city more resilient. With such programmes they have opportunity to prepare their city for systemic change, gain public trust and integrate their insights into planning and policy making.

Civil society organisations and social movements are usually at the forefront advocating for post-growth transition. Working with and in the local community they understand failures and shortcomings of municipal policies that postopone action and prolong growth dependency of their city, reproducing inequalities and further environmental degradation. Such learning courses can provide an important educational platform that can deepen their knowledge and make their advoacy and community work more efficent and successfull thus impacting municipal policy making toward post-growth transition.