

Towards a culture of lifelong learning

Final report



tsi foundation



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Foreword

Over the last months B+B (Germany) and TSI Foundation (The Netherlands) tried to understand the impact of grassroots organisations on lifelong learning, to find leads that support a change towards a culture of lifelong learning - a culture that puts learning and (personal) development back in the center of our culture. Our findings confirm the experience we have in working with grassroots organisations. Indeed, many of them are enablers of learning and possible accelerators of a shift towards a culture of lifelong learning. We also gained insight in structures on a local level that might increase their impact. Specifically we focussed on the way local communities interact with their environment: the city itself. This city, we found, is not just a collection of buildings, streets and squares. Instead, the city forms an integral part of local communities. The way people live is strongly supported by the city and it's appearances and the same goes, we deduct from research we found, for the role and impact of grassroots organisations. This means that city-development can be seen as a new instrument to support lifelong learning and increase the impact of grassroots organisations.

Adding the city as an instrument to lifelong learning opens new routes to support lifelong learning. In our research we found elements in the design of public space that relate to lifelong learning. However, further exploration is needed to better understand how the city contributes to the impact of local grassroots organisations. For that, we created a first raw framework that visualizes the contours of a structure that supports lifelong learning on a local level. This framework needs further refinement, we already learnt. Especially when it comes to the digital society which is increasingly interacting with our physical society. We are encouraged to do so because we believe in the relevance of this topic. The perceived relevance is shared by different stakeholders we involved. Some of them already expressed their interest to further explore the outcomes. Their interest and support show us, we were able to address a topic that is regarded as relevant by many parties and needs further exploration.

We want to make one last remark about our own learning, during the project. Engaging in it was our first experience within an international context, on this subject. Along the way, we've encountered difficulties that we needed to overcome. Some of them causing us to develop new skills ourselves and others challenged us to push our own boundaries. But like in most communities we were able to find solutions, because we found ourselves committed to our work and to each other. And because of the support from our own communities. In fact, this project wouldn't have been feasible without their support, input and openness. We'd like to express our gratitude and thank them all! Of course, we are also very grateful for the opportunity and trust Erasmus+ gave us to carry out the research. B+B and TSI Foundation would never have found each other without the interposition of Erasmus+, so thank you for your support and help. We hope our work inspires others to join our search for ways in which a shift towards a culture of lifelong learning can be supported!

TSI Foundation

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Cause

From November 2021 until August 2022 the organisations *Beschäftigung und Bildung gGmbH*, based in Hamburg (Germany), and *The Social Innovation Foundation*, based in Groningen and Rotterdam (The Netherlands), worked on a project we named 'Towards a culture of lifelong learning'. This project, co-funded by the European Unions Erasmus+-program, was derived from the idea that additional effort is demanded, next to the large variety of learning possibilities in both formal and non-formal learning, to seduce people to actively work on their own up- or reskilling. The need to actively support lifelong learning is derived from research showing that especially lower educated people do not consciously tempt to improve themselves and their skills¹. And it's there positions in our society and labour market that need our care. The extra effort needed, relates to the context of learning and it's position in our culture. In this project we wanted to understand local culture and find leads that could contribute to a shift towards a culture of lifelong learning.

Changing perspective on lifelong learning

With many years of experience in working on challenges in the field of lifelong learning, we still felt something was missing, to assure durable impact, caused by all these organisations and methods used to support up- and reskilling. Our trigger to explore routes that increase impact of local working, (grassroot) organisations we found in the release of the UNESCO report *Embracing a culture of lifelong learning*², published in September 2020. From that report, we were triggered by the idea of supporting lifelong learning by changing the position of the learning in our society. In their report, UNESCO stresses the importance of grassroot³ organisations. From our work we recognise the potential many grassroot organisations have to really support the effective up- and reskilling of people, but also to - if powers are combined on a local level - support the change towards a culture of lifelong learning.

Towards a culture of lifelong learning

The necessity of a changing perspective on the learning of people and the recognition thereof is gaining interest and awareness. Recently, in September 2022, even the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science in a public speech⁴ addressed the negative impact of mentioning the differences in education as 'higher' and 'lower' education. This growing attention, we believe, makes the search for structures to support lifelong learning on a local level relevant and actual.

As a start, in this report we discuss the outcomes of our research on the impact of public space on local social structures. Specifically we aim to understand the relationship between public space and local grassroot organisations. To understand this relationship we defined, as a final result, a first raw framework that makes the relation between both visible. We hope this framework enables governments and grassroot organisations to better understand the context of their work. From this understanding we believe they will find ways to interact in a manner that leads to a more active attitude of people - preferably the lower-educated and people with a distance to the labour market - towards lifelong learning and personal attention for re- and upskilling.

Approach

We started the project with desk research to define the idea of a culture of learning. After we found different ingredients that relate to this culture and the support of a shift towards it, we started interviews to test our ideas and broaden support for our search.

¹ In 2019 the *House of Representatives of The Netherlands* commissioned to [map](#) barriers for Lifelong Learning, revealing this.

² The full report can be read [here](#).

³ 'Grassroot' refers to the use of collective action on a local level to effect change on a local, regional, national and international level.

⁴ During the opening of the 2022 Academic Year at Maastricht University, Minister Dijkgraaf pleaded for an equal valuation of all education. His words, unfortunately only in Dutch, can be read [here](#).

Stakeholders involved

In order to understand the mechanisms of a 'local culture' and the impact of local actors and stakeholders, we approached different relevant groups of stakeholders:

Grassroot organisations and initiatives

First, we involved locally embedded grassroot organisations. Grassroot organisations are an important group of local actors when it comes to local social structure and the connection with people with a labour market disadvantage. In both Hamburg and Rotterdam - our scope for this project - many grassroot initiatives and organisations can be found that successfully support people in learning and employability. The impact we see from our experience over the years, is examined and endorsed by UNESCO. Therefore, grassroot organisations are explicitly mentioned in the framework they created to support the shift towards a culture of lifelong learning.

Government

Another group of stakeholders we involved are representatives of local government. They too, are an important actor. On one hand they support employability and learning by supplying the funding for organizations and programs in the field of non-formal education and learning. On the other hand, it's the local government that is responsible for city planning and city development.

Research

A third group of actors we involved relate to research in the field of social structures and cohesion. Representatives of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences participated. In the preparation phase we also talked with scientists from other institutions e.g. the Inholland University of Applied Sciences - based in Rotterdam. We used these talks to check our premises and to disseminate our work. Not only did we use their knowledge to test our premises, we also arranged a cooperation with the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences to experiment.

Process the outcomes

In processing the outcomes, we compared the results of the interviews to the experience we build in many years of working in local context, in different cities and on different levels. On the basis of this comparison, we conclude that the interviews confirmed our premise that grassroot organisations are an important accelerator of local learning. The interviews also drew our attention to another important element in the local learning context, which is the public space itself. The streets, squares, building and parks all form the decor of local social structures that are part of the local culture. Their shapes and positioning definitely relate to local culture. In our desk research we found literature that substantiates this relation. In further exploring the impact of grassroot organisations in their local context, we added public space as part of our research. The important question is how public space affects grassroot organisations. Finding answers to this question became the second line of research in the project.

Testing premises

By using the results of the interviews, existing knowledge, and our own experience we tried to link the impact of grassroot organizations to city planning and the effect of physical structures on people's behaviour. To make this possible we translated the outcomes to 'building blocks' - elements that relate to the support of people's learning - that form the ingredients of our final result: a first raw sketch of a framework that clarifies the interaction between social fabric and public space in relation to lifelong learning. During our work, we organized two online meetings, which we used to test our premises and sharpen the framework. In addition, we had contact with participants to check their feedback on our progression. This approach led to a better understanding of both the role and methods of grassroot organizations and insight in the way public space might support their impact. Next, we'll describe our insights which we

combine in an overall framework that represents this local interaction, leading to a shift towards a culture of lifelong learning.

Understanding the mechanisms

On behalf of this project and based on our presumptions and the outcomes of the interviews, we zoom in on two factors that enable the support of lifelong learning on a local level: social structures and the role of grassroots organizations in it and the relation between public space and lifelong learning.

In our desk research we were drawn, amongst others, to the work of professor Richard Sennett. In his publication *Building and dwelling - Ethics for the city* (2019, Penguin Books Ltd.) he dives into the past and future of city planning. He makes clear the strong and continuous interaction between the physical city, the 'ville' as he names it, and the social structures, named 'cité'. This distinction and its dynamics is exactly the mechanism that we want to understand. He also shows that the cité tends to use the ville in quite a different way than city planners intended or hoped for in advance. It would be very exciting to see if we can define elements in public space (ville) that enable the learning of people. If we can find ways to let the ville be supportive to the idea of lifelong learning, we might have found an instrument to support the shift towards, as UNESCO aims to achieve, a culture that puts learning (back) in the centre of our culture. Since his work turned out to be an important substantiation for our premises, we think it's important to follow his jargon. In the following of this report we will therefore use his terminology: ville and cité. Since the grassroots organisations are core of our research, we start with a description of our findings concerning the role of grassroots organisations and relevant conditions for their impact.

Understanding the Cité

First we wanted to understand the methods of grassroots initiatives to find leads to their role in supporting cultural change towards a culture of lifelong learning. Knowing that there is a so-called 'cité' and that grassroots organisations are definitely part of it, we aimed to understand their role in the cité itself. This to find leads to understand their role in cultural change. To do so, we looked at their relation with local community and we tried to find leads that linked their role to the 'ville'.

Grassroot organisations and their methods

We must conclude that our research was too limited to draw generic conclusions concerning their methods in relation to the change towards a culture of lifelong learning. We involved various organisations, all with their own target group, approach and goals. However, we did find one important succesfactor that seems generic:

Programmatic approach

The organizations we interviewed all have a programmatic approach. Although the approaches differ, the organizations all follow a specific sequence of steps. For instance, the project named College'53 we interviewed, allows young people to come in and, in first instance, keep themselves busy in any way they prefer. By creating this free space, the coaches can build a relation with the children and let them feel part of the community. Then, after two weeks, they start motivating the participants to work on a skill the participants choose themselves. When looking at the importance of a programmatic approach, a Rotterdam example like *Heilige Boontjes* (see Annex I for explanation) definitely increased their impact using a semi-fixed, proven concept.

Grassroot organisations as part of the cité

The various best practices we gathered underline that their local embedment is part of their success. From our first encounter with participants, we derived the importance of connection. In our desk research we

found this embedment relates to the idea of the 'social fabric' of a local community⁵. Social fabric is about the relationship and connections on a local level, which is in fact a further elaboration of the *cité* as Sennett describes it. These connections contribute to local culture. Therefore it seems relevant to understand if and how grassroot organizations can contribute to the shift towards a culture of learning.

Local connection

Connection is needed on various levels in communities. On a micro-level (neighborhood) connection relates to the inhabitants that form the communities and the local, grassroot organizations that could support them to up- or reskill themselves. When it comes to connection on a local level, various participants concluded that connection is not just being there and talking to people. Real connection means that you are intrinsically motivated to be part of the community. Only when people acknowledge you as a full partner in local community, local initiatives and organizations, you can be successful in supporting the community. From the interviews and our desk research we found that the grassroot organizations are important actors for keeping this social fabric alive and vivid, because of their connection and stable presence.

Continuation

Another important condition, which is in line with the previous, is the assurance of continuation. In earlier projects we saw partners build impact, but once continuation missed, their impact just drained away. There are two important factors that assure continuation. First there's the personal involvement of people - this refers to the connection we mentioned above. Secondly, there's the importance of funding; many locally based organizations struggle to find a continuous flow of funds that enables them to act on the basis of a more durable commitment.

We found several successful interventions, that are acknowledged by the municipality and others for their impact on people's lives. In Rotterdam, this goes, amongst others, for Bouwkeet, Kinderfaculteit Pendrecht, and Heilige Boontjes. Interesting is that all three of them are durably supported by private foundations that feel committed to the city. It allows them to build a strong position in local communities over time. Also, these private donors care for measurable impact. As an effect, these best practices all developed effective programs that really create impact.

Grassroot organisations as part of the ville

In our interviews with organizations, we zoomed in on the methods they use and the interaction with their local context. It was interesting to hear all of them mainly focusing on other partners when interpreting their own impact. The geographic position of organizations largely influences their success. In Rotterdam, for instance, an example of grassroot community building, [Marconia](#), was given the opportunity to build a community around the project because of its location. In this case, the Rotterdam municipality used this community-project to prepare their location for building houses. This as part of a strategy for gentrification. From a policy perspective location was definitely an important part of their success. Another example of the importance of location for the success of grassroot organizations are the more than fifty playgrounds around the city. These organizations, mostly run by volunteers, derive their scope in working with young children from their central location in neighborhoods. This position allows them to signal possible problems in families and to intervene - together with local partners.

Understanding the Ville

To understand the mechanism of interaction between the ville and the people living in it, we defined two experimenting zones in Hamburg: Billstedt Platz and Großneumarkt. In Rotterdam we could join an existing program of the redesigning of two squares: Polderplein and Kuipersplein (under construction). Given limitations in time and budget the experiment itself was merely a theoretical experiment. This means that

⁵ Social fabric refers to "the relationships and connections we make with one another; making us all a part of the common thread of society as a whole", as it is defined by [Renee Sherrer](#).

we did not actually rebuild the squares, but worked on conceptualizations of what might be squares that support lifelong learning.

The concepts were designed by students at the School of Built Environment, which is part of the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences. As part of the minor Creating Resilient Cities - which focusses on making cities more resilient towards challenges like climate change, social inequality and economic insecurity - a group of twenty students worked on conceptual models of the two Rotterdam squares from February until July, using different theory's and models. The students came from six different countries - mostly European, but also including South Africa and Indonesia - which allowed them to include very different perspectives on city development. The outcomes consisted of six different interpretations of the squares (three per square). The models included the design and materialization, because this too influences the use of public space.

To see if we could find generic conditions for supporting lifelong learning through city development, we arranged them a two-week exchange to Hamburg, to our two experimenting zones. This allowed them to compare situations in Hamburg and Rotterdam. B+B arranged for them to meet local partners and, because of their involvement in one of the squares, they provided feedback on the initial concepts of the students. Although each of the four squares involved had different challenges to meet, we did find generic conditions for public space to support lifelong learning:

Hub-function

An initial interesting condition for lifelong learning we found, was that - to trigger people to learn or to experiment with (new) skills - public space needs to support meeting. In their research the students experimented with various designs and materials to best meet the needs of local community. For that, they firstly interviewed inhabitants on the street. The first image showed in Annex II is an example of integrating meeting in public space. In this case, the students integrated an agora in the square. This element allows local organizations surrounding the square to organize activities outside. There is, for instance, a mosque near the square that organizes a lot of activities in the field of lifelong learning (like language classes). Interesting to note is that to stimulate organizations to actively use these kinds of interventions, support is needed.

Social embedment

Students concluded that, although physical elements can be added to public space to support lifelong learning, the elements need the embedment in social programs. This is something that can be observed in successful social projects. In Rotterdam for instance, playgrounds like '[Cruyff Courts](#)' are successful, because coaching is added to the playgrounds. An interesting topic for further research might be to challenge grassroot initiatives to make more use of public space in their approach.

Variety

People are different and so are their needs and interests. An important challenge, therefore, is to find ways to connect to the large variety of needs and interests. In their concepts, the students tried to find ways to cope with this variety. Image two of Annex II is an interesting example of combining differences in one concept.

Ownership

Ownership is about feeling committed to and feeling responsible for your own city or neighborhood. It may seem simple: if people care for their own public space, it's more likely that they actively use it. Yet, in many cases public space lacks an owner. The importance of ownership in relation to lifelong learning is that ownership is one of the elements that assure people to meet on the square. This allows people to inspire each other. An important solution to acquire ownership is to involve inhabitants in developing their own environment. Ownership not only did come up in the research we conducted together with the students. In our first online meeting with participants they too stressed the importance of ownership.

Lead by example

The impact of interest and connection became clear in one of the interventions in which the students got into contact with inhabitants. We arranged for them to clean the Polderplein once a week with waste grabbers, as a means to trigger children's curiosity and to change their perspective on what is 'normal'. At first, the square was full of dirt and shards of glass while children were using the different playground equipment on the square. Adding the students to the square meant that 'normal' routines and perceptions were broken. The children's curiosity draw them to help the students clean their own environment. And already in the second week of the experiment the children instantly helped the students, thus reframing their own perception of normal. For the students too, working this way was new and exciting, as Katherine, one of the students, describes her experience (see inlay).

'Going to Duimdrop and not being able to speak good Dutch was nerve racking at times, however, soon I learnt that quite a few of the school children could speak some English and we could get by with a mixture of Afrikaans, English and Dutch. A few school children spoke excellent English. Where did they learn this? Discord, YouTube and movies. Many of their parents I learnt did not speak English or only one parent spoke Dutch. I really admired their ability to learn new languages and to speak them confidently. We had very interesting discussions about places we wanted to travel, what it is like living in Africa, family situations, our best friends and favourite foods.'

- Katherine



From ville and cité towards a culture of lifelong learning

Our initial goal was to understand the role and methods of grassroots organizations in their urban context. We aimed at finding a better understanding and to find ways to increase their local impact on lifelong learning. As a result, we found that an important addition to their work could be public space itself: the ville as Richard Sennett named it. Using the conceptualizations of the students at the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, we can conclude that public space can only add to the work of grassroots organizations if people consider public space part of their everyday life (ownership). However, we also found the importance of a social structure to support and feed a culture of lifelong learning on a local level. So how can local ville and cité be supported on a city-level? First, we zoom in on the local level.

Local learning areas

On a local level we see attention and effort to support peoples' learning grow. The number of grassroots organizations we found and the numerous experiments with micro-credentialing and informal learning from local governments, indicate that there is an ambition and urgency to actively contribute to lifelong learning. Also, from the interviews we learned that organizations are willing to cooperate within their own local communities: they really intend to be part of local social fabric. The interaction with public space, we learned, could also increase their impact. So, in fact, if we succeed to find effective ways to connect ville and cité, we create local learning areas. These areas should be able to trigger people to try new things, connect with others or improve skills. This idea of a using public space as a trigger for learning is visualized in image 2 of Annex II.

Local Recognition Areas

The idea of local learning areas relates to the idea of local recognition areas and networks (LRNs). A concept that is being researched in another Erasmus+-project, [REVEAL](#) (Recognition of Experience Validation of Experience, Achievements and Learning). In fact, the idea of LRNs is a next step in the approach we choose, because after triggering the learning, using local actors and public space, to secure a culture of lifelong learning the recognition of this learning within the (local) communities is very important. Although we haven't worked out the connection with REVEAL yet - the project is in progress still - it's important to

mention this link, since a further exploration of the outcomes of this project will surely benefit from the lessons learned from the REVEAL project.

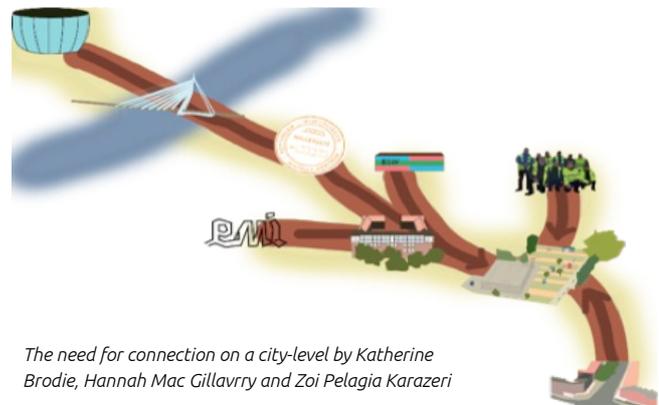
Cities of learning

Although our findings support the conclusion that it's possible to transform neighborhoods into learning areas, our experience in earlier projects show that one essential element often is missing: the presence of ownership. It seems logic to say that the grassroots organizations, given their local embedment, are able and willing to secure the culture of lifelong learning. And yes, on their own local level they are able and willing to durably support lifelong learning. But from the interviews, as mentioned earlier, we found that many grassroots organizations struggle to find long-term finance. The successful organizations we found all dispose of long-term funding and a working business case, but they are a minority. For many other, smaller grassroots initiatives a position like that is difficult to achieve. Apart from this internal struggle, the constant search and uncertainty leads them to lose sight of the 'bigger picture'. Therefore, we think it's important to find a vehicle that assures continuity and has the tools to feed local communities. For that, a structure on a city-level is needed, we believe.

Embedment on a city-level

The importance of commitment on a city-level is not something that we find is relevant to support lifelong learning. Many cities around the world are connected to the initiative of learning cities - including the city of Hamburg. We do want to explain, from our experience, why this embedment is a condition for the existence of a culture of learning. In former projects we were involved in - for instance in the project [West Practice](#) - we learned the importance of broader embedment. This means that local initiatives need and want to know they are part of a bigger whole. Also, to increase impact, learning from other initiatives is important. Therefore, connection on a local level needs to be supported on a city-level.

In their research, our experience concerning the need for a 'bigger picture', was substantiated by one group of students. They linked this condition to their conceptual approach (see image). The interesting and relevant question their visualisation raises - using the Rotterdam Erasmus Bridge as part of their image - is: how can we bridge (connect) local learning areas around the city? When looking for a way to create embedding of local learning areas on a city-level, knowing the importance of ownership, we found that libraries might serve as a city-wide structure for that.



The need for connection on a city-level by Katherine Brodie, Hannah Mac Gillavry and Zoi Pelagia Karazeri

The library as guardian of learning and learning areas

During our research we got a chance to interview libraries in Hamburg and Rotterdam. We wanted to interview them because libraries are important sources for learning. Libraries are well-known players in cities and countries around the world. In our interview with CEO Theo Kemperman of the Rotterdam library, he explained the library being a constant factor in the field of learning for centuries. Also, the image of libraries around the world is comparable. All over the world libraries represent a natural and safe place for people to gain insight and new knowledge. Not only do they facilitate the learning in a centralized spot, but many of them are embedded on local level, with small satellites around the different parts of town. Sometimes libraries have busses driving around to schools and other places to unlock learning in cities. The remarks of mister Kemperman support our idea that the involvement of libraries in the structure that supports lifelong learning and the culture of lifelong learning, is an important condition. But how could their role look like? And is it realistic to secure this role in the DNA of libraries?

Reinventing the library

In our research we found that most libraries have a variety of educational programs, targeting different groups of people and interests. Also, we learned that both libraries in Hamburg and Rotterdam are involved in a process of reinventing themselves. Their need for reinvention does not stand on its own. Around the world libraries face the same challenge when it comes to unlocking knowledge and inspiration in a world that becomes more digitalized. In the past their focus was lending books to unlock reading and support knowledge and awareness of developments and (local) history. But as online reading and living grows, the focus on lending books needs an update. Both libraries are more and more convinced that reading is not their primary goal anymore. In the actual context their goal is to unlock learning and curiosity.

In the Netherlands, Rob Bruijnzeels is a real pioneer in the field of reinventing libraries. Although we didn't get the chance to interview him in the context of this project, his work inspired us, since he experimented with various concepts of the future library in different countries. Interesting in his approach, he designed together with Joyce Sternheim, are the 'five steps in the process of creating a new library' (see image). In the follow-up of this project it seems promising to continue our connection with both libraries and further explore how a role in guarding local culture of lifelong learning matches the interpretation of the future libraries in Hamburg and Rotterdam. The five questions he raises create opportunity to link the library to a city-wide structure that is committed to lifelong learning.



Source: *Imagination and participation*, by Rob Bruijnzeels and Joyce Sternheim

Conceptualisation

In our search we found various ingredients on different levels of city-life that seem relevant to support a shift towards a culture of lifelong learning. Combining all the ingredients in one picture to imagine the structure that is needed to support lifelong learning in local communities, we come to the following framework:

Interacting Enablers of a Culture of Lifelong Learning

Embedding on a city level

- LIBRARY NETWORK
- ✓ Extended infrastructure
 - ✓ Natural connection to learning
 - ✓ Evolving to 4th place w/co-evolution

Accelerator of learning

- GRASSROOT INITIATIVES
- ✓ Strong connection
 - ✓ Energizers and challengers
 - ✓ Local innovators

Home base for social fabric

- PUBLIC SPACE
- ✓ Connection-enabler
 - ✓ Triggering environment
 - ✓ Ownership through recognition



What makes it interesting is that all ingredients we used are already there. The important addition is that we connect them differently. Although this visualisation is still very abstract, we think it's a usable basis for further exploration.

Interpreting the framework

In describing the mechanisms, we explained interaction on a cité-level and the importance of connection. We found that grassroots organizations are important actors when it comes to connection on a local level. Also, they are very well equipped to accelerate peoples learning. Next, we found the ville to be an important element in local social infrastructure. We learned that the presence of squares could support peoples learning if this public space meets conditions like accessibility and contains elements that trigger curiosity or - as one participant remarked in our first online meeting - triggers competition. If conditions are right people will feel at home in their own public space. This feeling is a condition for people to be open to personal development and learning. The last important ingredient is the broader embedment of local learning. We found the library to be an interesting guardian of learning, since this role very well links to the position they've already had for centuries. By visualising the different elements in an organic way we want to emphasize the continuous interaction between the ingredients, because this interaction is what supports the shift towards a culture of lifelong learning and what keeps this culture alive.

Using the framework

We very well realize that this visualisation is on a rather abstract level and not yet applicable for grassroots organizations. In our proposal we already mentioned that this would be a first step in finding a route to support a shift towards a culture of lifelong learning. Based on the outcomes of this project, the different elements can be further refined. This refinement also relates to an important ingredient that we purposefully left out of the framework. This ingredient is digitalization. Since the role differed fundamentally from what we expected in advance, we dedicate the next section to this topic and explain why we left it out at this point.

Digitalisation and the shift towards a culture of lifelong learning

The impact of digitalisation on our society is growing rapidly. More and more, people use digitalisation to support their everyday life. The same goes for the impact of digitalisation on work and the labour market. In Rotterdam various stakeholders experiment with digitalisation. This includes the municipality that [experiments](#), for instance, with applications of digitalisation to support employability using digital Open Badges. Their effort also focuses on introducing inhabitants with (the possibilities of) digitalisation. The same goes for Hamburg, where the Hamburg Open Online University takes digital education to a next level.

Since digitalization is such an important factor that influences all that will happen now and, in the future, we included digitalization in our project. For that, we involved the Rotterdam-based organisation House of Esports to learn about the impact of digitalization on social structures on a local level. In the interview with them we found the importance of fun as an element to trigger behavioural change. In testing our ideas and concept framework with partners we invited for an online meeting, we found that digitalization is not just a development that supports and intervenes in everything we do. Digitalization itself leads to a new dimension in the way people live together. For many people living together with friends around the world is in fact the same as living together in their own neighborhood. They meet people online, find new friends - some of whom they (will) never see in real life - and work online. The contacts they have online equal those in the offline world. Moreover, one of the participants added that our premise that on- and offline are two different worlds, doesn't match the way especially younger people experience their life. Adding digitalization to our framework as if it were just a development that supports change doesn't fully recognize the much broader impact digitalization has on people's lives and local social fabric. In the follow-up of this project, we will need to further explore the digital pillar we added, because of the feedback, to our framework.

Final words and conclusions

Our goal was to find ways to increase the impact of grassroots organizations. Our research did confirm our experience and premises, when it comes to the impact of grassroots organizations on lifelong learning. The research we conducted was too limited to find generic elements in their approaches that support lifelong learning and link their impact to the culture of lifelong learning. For that, the variety in approaches grassroots organizations and initiatives use is simply too large. We did find leads, though, to connect public space to lifelong learning and to the impact of grassroots organisations. From the work of Richard Sennett we learned that grassroots organizations are very likely to adapt their approach to physical changes in public space. And we learned that libraries might grow to become the guardians of lifelong learning and the culture of lifelong learning on a city-level. In the framework we created, we aim to visualize a conceptual approach to support a culture of lifelong learning on a city-level. But, as mentioned earlier, this was our first step in finding ways to support a change towards a culture of lifelong learning and next steps are needed.

Next steps

We hope this report inspires grassroots organizations, governments, and libraries to think about their own role in a future that demands more attention for active support of lifelong learning. Of course, we learned over the years that paper can wait and extra effort is needed to inspire people. This goes for the awareness we want to create, but also for the need for further refinement. For that, we aim to experiment with interventions in public space. The experiments need to be concrete and lead to tools for grassroots organizations that help them to use public space for their own benefit, to increase their impact on learning. Further, we intend to continue conversation with partners from the municipalities and libraries of Hamburg and Rotterdam. The goal thereof is to find a basis for and define actions needed to create the embedding of lifelong learning on a city-level.

Finally, we look forward to parties that, having read our findings, want to contribute to the process of shifting our culture towards a culture of lifelong learning. And of course, we are interested in all remarks and critical notes you have!

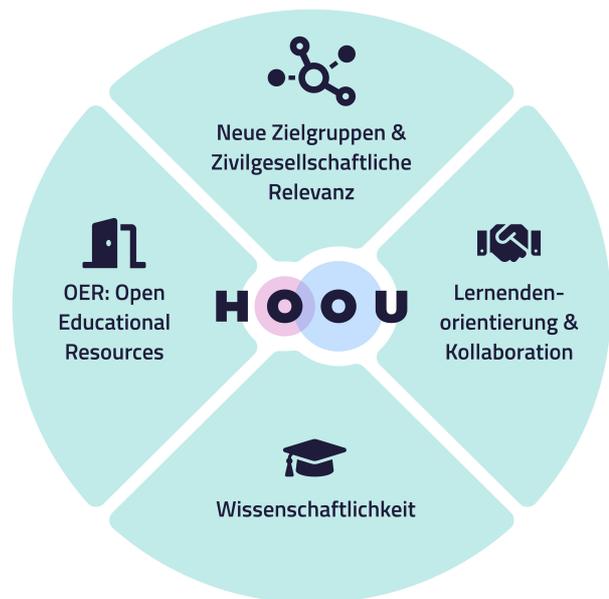
Annex I - Best practices

We found various examples of grassroots initiatives that contribute to the up- and reskilling of people with a distance to the labour market. We showcase two of them underneath, that we believe relate to the success factors for grassroots initiatives we found.

Condition I - Connection

Hamburg Open Online University (HOOU) is an interesting example of a local initiative, because it tries to make learning available, using digital infrastructure.

The HOOU has set itself the goal of promoting digital innovations in higher education teaching and transporting these innovations beyond the borders of its universities. HOOU promotes the creation of innovative digital learning opportunities and offers them freely accessible. With its educational platform, HOOU supports the opening of universities and creates a digital space for collaboration and cooperation. HOOU coordinates a collaboration of eight institutions involved in society to answer the question of how we want to learn in the future. HOOU sees access to high-quality and open academic education as a fundamental building block for a free, democratic and diversity-sensitive society.



Connection

Despite HOOU being a big organisation - instead of a grassroots initiative, still they very well succeed in connecting with a large variety of target groups. They use this connection effectively to inspire people and communicate in ways that differ from traditional organisations. The collaboration they have with other local learning centers and universities (of applied sciences) allow them to expand their community, thus increasing their impact.

Digitalisation

We mentioned the importance of digitalisation, being not just supportive, but adding a whole new dimension to society. HOOU seems effective in connecting to this new digital society.

Condition II - Continuation

Heilige Boontjes, Rotterdam - This project (*Holy Beans*, in English) started bottom-up, using coffee as a means to support young people with a distance to the labour market to gain working experience.

Heilige Boontjes started as a local project to offer troubled youth a way back into society. The idea was to start a coffee shop where young people are taught discipline and work rhythm. Dozens of



Source: Trouw newspaper, July 18th 2018. Image: Arie Kievit

young people have now found their way back into society thanks to the project. The entire process, from distribution to sales, is made possible by young people with a distance to the labor market. The initiative was started by a social broker and a police officer.

Connection

The core task of Heilige Boontjes is to help people find work. To be able to do so, the initiative focusses on skills and adjusting behavior, but also on circumstances: you can't expect someone to report to work at 8 a.m. the next morning, if they don't have a roof over their head that night. This approach perfectly fits the connection these initiatives need to be able to create impact.

Continuation

The success of Heilige Boontjes is not just the result of their connection with their community and target group. Heilige Boontjes also succeeded in committing private funders. Collaboration with private funders helped the initiative to grow to a real and stable organisation. From Rodney van Hengel, one of the founders, we learned that this connection ensures them to adopt a business approach and to be aware that they need to answer for their impact.

Annex II - Triggers that support lifelong learning

Students of the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences did research on the integration of lifelong learning in the design of 4 squares. In Hamburg they focussed on Billstedt Platz and Großneumarkt, in Rotterdam on the Polderplein and Kuipersplein. The images in this annex, in our opinion, show different elements the students found that might support lifelong learning. These are conceptualisations, but useful for further exploration.



Figure 1: Triggering meetings at Kuipersplein by Archie Cambell, Elenodora Angelidou and Harm van Barneveld



Figure 2: Triggering curiosity at Polderplein by Chrysa Mastrogianopoulos, Vaia Pitaskou, Kadir Terzi, Tobias Jah



Figure 3: Support ownership at Großneumarkt by Maria Asimakopoulou, Ayla Girwar, Maria Grosch