International Learning Village, Glasgow, Scotland

April 8th-9th 2016, 76 people gathered in Glasgow at the Netherton Community Centre for the first of three International Learning Villages hosted in a local communities to facilitate meaningful conversations and develop social capital between citizens and the public sector.

Background

Increasingly we have to deal with complex social, economic as well as environmental uncertainties across the world. At the same time traditional structures appear to struggle trying to deal with those challenges whilst the trust and cohesion across communities is getting lost.

The European Union faces these challenges and in recent years has increasingly emphasised that it is more important than ever for citizens to take part in discussions and help shape policies across Europe to better deal with and overcome challenges such as austerity, unemployment, migrant populations, aging population etc.

It is crucial to find new solutions, to explore new ways to increase citizen participation and democratic engagement whilst also promoting intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

An alternative solution is based on the knowledge and practice of social capital.

Social Capital is the basis of social engagement in all areas of community life so is required for the future success of Europe as a connected community.

The Social Capital World Forum (SCWF) was launched in Scotland 2009 by founders Colin Campbell (ASC) and Manfred Hellrigl (OFRI), to bring together organisations working with social capital at regional, national & international level.

Greater knowledge of social capital can facilitate progress in our communities to bring about a more sustainable and prosperous society. This concept is explored through the themes of sustainability and community resilience to move from learning to practice by ‘preparing the ground’ for future outcomes to develop.

During the 5th SCWF ‘Creating Space for Abundant Communities’ the idea of Learning Villages was developed. This event, paved the way for the 6th SCWF to further clarify those processes, this time within a real community setting through 3 events in Scotland, Sweden and Austria with the support from Europe for Citizens Program and the Scottish Government in Scotland.
Three International Learning Villages
Scotland - Sweden - Austria

Based on this idea the aim of the 6th SCWF is to develop a replicable framework to design and host conversations, in a Learning Village setting.

By delivering three International Learning Villages across Europe - in Scotland, Sweden and Austria, the objective is to create a template to deliver long-term relationship-building by tapping into the abundance of communities to develop a ‘skeleton framework’ based on the experiences gained.

The aspiration of the three Learning Villages is to bridge the gap between the public sector and civil society as well as providing the opportunity for participants to become involved in a transnational project, debating themes of common interest within an inter-cultural and cross-sectoral setting.

The Learning Village is set in a local community with a local hosting team of volunteers. The international team of practitioners with experience in participatory processes guide and inspire local residents to find their own local solutions within a global (EU) context.

The Learning Village approach provides a ‘safe container’ for conversations that matter and develops a social capital culture based on participation, cooperation and trust.

It is aimed at encouraging a wider range of stakeholders to participate, enhancing opportunities for collective learning and decision-making.

Within this space new relationships can be built, allowing participants to open up and share real life stories, diverse opinions and ideas and delve more deeply into our understanding of what generates community.

Learning Village in Glasgow

The first of the three Learning Villages (LV) was hosted at the Netherton Community Centre in Glasgow, April 2016.

During the two days leading up to the event, the international team gathered with the local hosting team to ‘set the scene’ and build their capacity. The local hosting team were community members of Netherton and staff from local public and third sector organisations including Glasgow Life, the Voluntary Action Fund and other local voluntary organisations who had become involved through previous interest and training in social capital.

76 participants from the third and public sector as well as community members participated in the Learning Village from at least seven countries out of which 15 percent were young people.
The Netherton Learning Village introduced both theory and practice to explore in depth the importance of participation and citizen engagement.

The concepts of competent communities and collective decision-making were explored to find bottom-up solutions to complex issues in our communities. Generally, people identified that ‘the potential is already there – it just needs to be unlocked’ by providing the space and opportunities for communities to meet and build relationships and trust, also to develop a sense of belonging and responsibility to facilitate open & diverse communication which then empowers individuals and groups to create energy and vision for their communities.

**Inspiring stories about local active citizen participation** where shared and common threads emerged such as ‘everyone has something to give’, ‘having the courage to take the first step’ and ‘it is not just what we do, but how we do it’ that can make the difference and enable to ‘think outside the box’.

Diverse ‘Stories about Change’ were told on themes such as the creation of youth networks, active older people, community festivals, integration into a new community, inter-generational exchanges and how single individuals can become crucial members of a community. Overall, the stories carried the message of the transformational power of volunteering, positive approach, community support, sharing and friendship, motivation and encouragement, like ‘you are never to old’ to change, help and overcome barriers.

Having spent the first day delving deeper into the topic of community cohesion, the second day was about ‘putting it into practice’. Participants put forward ideas for local projects, to be ‘analysed’ by the LV community, looking to identify the purpose, missing elements and what the next best steps might be. **15 projects** were put forward (see table), displaying a great diversity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temple Tunnel</strong></td>
<td>Community effort to make the local tunnel safer for everyone</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Red Tent</strong></td>
<td>To provide a meeting space for women in the local area to connect with each other</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jangling Space</strong></td>
<td>On creating a local cooperative involving local people in building things that ‘jangle’ as well as providing an educational space</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Timebank (I)</strong></td>
<td>On offering skills to community and creating an online platform where people can share and exchange skills</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Timebank (II)</strong></td>
<td>On sharing skills with the rest of the community and linking that with the relatively empty local community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Inspiration</strong></td>
<td>On how schools can promote respect facilitated by the regional equality council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open school</strong></td>
<td>As an intergenerational project for everyone at any age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Participation</strong></td>
<td>A project on how to involve young people in decision-making</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Netherton Festival</strong></td>
<td>Using a participatory community-led approach to organise local festivals</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School Gates Go</strong></td>
<td>For more active travel to school encouraging walking and cycling to school involving children and parents alike</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Self-build made simple</strong></td>
<td>Creating a space for people to come together and support them to build their own housing</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Community-wide Garden</strong></td>
<td>Making gardening more accessible and involving young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enabling the Romani Community</strong></td>
<td>To overcome language barriers affecting kids and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>News and Views</strong></td>
<td>On how to share local news and celebrate the ‘good stories’ in the Netherton area and developing an online platform for this</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Village for Schools</strong></td>
<td>To take ownership and get more young people involved</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
This first community-based Learning Village ‘prepared the ground’ for meaningful conversations and social innovation providing space for a variety of stakeholders (cross-sectoral, inter-cultural and across countries) to exchange knowledge and experience learning together by ‘diving deeper’ on the question of ‘what a successful community looks like’.

### Outcomes and Next Steps

A local and international network of community members and representatives from the public and third sector formed within the context of ‘Connecting City and Citizens’.

The Netherton Learning Village in Glasgow, Scotland provided the local context to explore opportunities of competent and abundant communities, offering 15 projects to be taken forward.

The learning and outcomes from the Netherton Learning Village will be collated to inform the next two Learning Villages in Gothenburg (Sweden) and Dornbirn (Austria) in September and November 2016, respectively, out of which the Learning Village Framework will then be created.

In the longer-term, the aim is to enable citizens to engage and participate in decision making in their own communities by increasing the understanding and awareness of a social capital culture based on the principles of participation and strength-based approaches.

The Learning Village Framework will act as a tool to enable local decision-making and innovation, empowering communities to find sustainable solutions themselves and address the challenges they face in a global context.

Together, the 3 Learning Villages will provide the space for up to 30 projects (around 10 each). The SCWF and its associated networks will then disseminate and share the learnings and outcomes of the Learning Villages.

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www.social-capital.net
www.sc-wg.org
https://vimeo.com/162140537
https://vimeo.com/163912227

We would like to thank all those whose hard work, support and effort made the event possible and also the participants for sharing their thoughts, experiences, knowledge and dreams.