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Draft Project Concept Paper

Udaipur As A Learning City

Shikshantar is pleased to share the following draft proposal to stimulate critical reflection, open discussion and brainstorming, and creative action. We invite your feedback and support.

I.   What is a Learning City?

Learning Cities is still a nascent movement both conceptually and operationally. There are several definitions for Learning Cities that have been developed in different parts of the world (primarily in industrialized countries) such as Britain, USA, Sweden, Finland, Canada, Japan, and Spain. These definitions are still being evolved and include:

> "A Learning Community is a city, town or region which mobilizes all of its resources in every sector to develop and enrich all its human potential for the fostering of personal growth, the maintenance of social cohesion, and the creation of prosperity."
>
> Norman Longworth

> "A Learning City is one with plans and strategies to encourage wealth-creation, personal growth and social cohesion through the development of the human potential of all its citizens."
>
> OECD

> "A Learning City addresses the learning needs of its locality through partnership. It uses the strengths of social and institutional relationships to bring about cultural shifts in perceptions of the value of human learning. Learning cities explicitly use learning as a way of promoting social cohesion, regeneration and economic development, which involve all parts of the community? Through the range of resources they bring together, learning cities can provide local solutions to local challenges."
>
> Learning City Network

However, looking at the diverse and complex philosophies, cultures, histories, experiences, relationships and needs of India, we are not satisfied with the above definitions or the applications that have been derived from these in industrialized countries. We believe that there is a need to expand these understandings within the larger context of Swaraj (building on Gandhiji's Hind Swaraj). This will imply questioning and critiquing what have become well-entrenched notions of 'progress' and 'success'; challenging exploitative and dehumanizing structures, technologies and institutions; engaging in personal self-reflection and transformation; and, constructing complex shared visions of a 'full, just and meaningful human existence.' At the same time, we must seek to understand why predictions on development such as those made by Alvin Toffler, have yet to materialize, "tomorrow's development designs will not come from Washington, Moscow, London or Paris, but from the cities of Africa, Asia and Latin America. . . They will be indigenous, matched to actual local needs. They will never over-emphasize economics at the expense of ecology, culture, religion or family structure, and the psychological dimensions of existence" (Shafi, 1996)

Within this expanded framework of Learning Cities, the processes of learning will also have to be understood in a much larger sense that goes beyond what stifling terms like 'schooling', 'training' and 'literacy' imply. There must be a clearer differentiation between learning and teaching/disseminating/instructing along dimensions such as understanding, sensitivity, creativity, conscientization, intrinsic motivation and collaboration. We must also open up, transform and give new meanings to the mainstream understanding of roles and relationships surrounding 'teachers' and 'learners'. In addition, learning must be seen as both an individual as well as a collective activity i.e., groups and organizational entities must also learn.

Several core concepts underlying societal learning will also need to be discussed and elaborated as part of a complex shared vision by citizens of the city :

- Lifelong Learning

- Learning to Learn, Un-learn and Re-learn

- Intergenerational Learning

- Innovative Learning

- Situated Learning

- Collaborative Learning

- Distributed and Networked Learning

- Community Empowerment

- Human Potential, Human Dignity and Human Spirit

The understanding of spaces for learning will also have to be re-examined and expanded. Most efforts towards building Learning Cities in industrialized countries have concentrated primarily on institutionalized (formal and non-formal) delivery systems. We would like to move beyond this by locating more informal, dynamic learning spaces such as extended families, peer groups, work environments, professional associations, communication media, religious centers, natural recreation spots, and other socio-cultural meeting places. What unique roles do these spaces play in the life of the city? What are the relationships between these spaces? In the context of Learning Cities, we will seek to strengthen each of these informal spaces into 'communities of reflection' which support continuous, participatory processes of reflection, dialogue, creation, and socially positive change. Efforts will be made to build the city as a Generative Learning Ecology that stimulates the growth of such learning spaces as well as builds the connections between these learning spaces.

According to Fritjof Capra,

> "A diverse community is a resilient community, capable of adapting and changing situations. Diversity allows learners and communities to see their problems from varied perspectives and encourages them to develop different ways of dealing with them."

Promoting diversity calls for a deep understanding of the role and importance of local knowledge systems, languages, religions, and the larger wisdom frameworks in which they are situated, within a broader understanding of pluralism. An expanded vision of Learning Cities must therefore focus on:

(1) validating, strengthening and evolving diverse wisdom frameworks;

(2) developing peoples' self-confidence in their traditions and imagination while, at the same time, constructing frameworks for appreciating and respecting other peoples' perspectives and ways of living;

(3) supporting various means of communication and sharing by diverse actors and communities; and

(4) creating various mechanisms for conflict negotiation.

II.   Why Focus on Learning Cities?

"Most individual and group learning needs, attitudes and processes have an important city dimension."

Although cities have existed for centuries and have been magnets for attracting different cultures and peoples, the CITY is considered one of the strongest symbols of 'modern society'. Many cities play a significant role in the evolution of rural communities, their economies, information flows, and cultural systems. One cannot seriously discuss the situation of rural villages without taking into account the role of cities. Furthermore, at the dawn of the 21st century, the world finds itself in the midst of dramatic global transformations in which cities around the world are the focal points of change. The issues and concerns facing cities today are unique and must be addressed on an appropriate scale.

Today cities in India are facing innumerable problems such as the growing polarization between the rich and the poor, geographical and other forms of segregation, alienation of an "underclass", rural migration, overpopulation, pollution, the clash of various cultural systems, the breakdown of traditional social systems (particularly family structures), and the dilemmas created by individualistic cut-throat competition and a 'survival of the fittest' mentality. Growing pressure from external forces such as globalization, economic liberalization and socio-cultural thought control via different forms of media place additional pressures on city life. The pace of growth and change has exacerbated the problems of cities. It is important to note that cities, as organic whole entities and complex adaptive systems, have their own dynamics of growth and development.

The city is more than simply the sum of its parts. It is comprised of many agents interacting in non-linear ways which produces a certain gestalt that differentiates a 'city' from a large urban settlement. There also exists a certain connectedness and interdependence between the parts of the city i.e., what happens in one part has implications for another part. The city must be seen as a holistic unit which means that it must be addressed in terms of thinking and action at a holistic level. The complexity inherent in the above problems and trends transcend the pace of individual processes of learning and thus call for special focus on societal processes of learning. The future quality of life in India depends not only on individuals learning, but also groups, organizations, communities, and cities engaging in learning. However, many people living in cities are not prepared to deal with these challenges which require, for example, greater critical thinking, questioning, listening, discussion, creativity, reading, collaboration, expressiveness, sensitivity, levels of personal civic responsibility, conflict negotiation abilities, and decision making skills than in the past.

III.   Requirements for Learning Cities

The literature on Learning Cities suggests certain areas for promoting the emergence of Learning Cities and a Culture of Lifelong Learning.

A shared vision by the citizens of the city of where the city has been and where it is going in the future; and an understanding of what each citizen's role is in realizing this shared vision. Awareness of learning potential and opportunities and generation of positive learning

attitudes among all members of all ages of the city. Understanding the historical basis and current factors that have implications on the city's learning needs, attitudes and processes.

- Identification of the informal and formal learning resources and institutions.

- Linking of learning across different ages, for example by facilitating different generations to learn together and to learn from each other.

- Development of diverse citywide coalitions that motivate reflection and dialogue among key people in all sectors of society (public, private, formal, informal, rural and urban etc.).

- Interaction of different cultures, religions, languages, and traditions that exist within the city in order to build a trusting environment for mutual learning and sharing. Participation of local media both as creative learning tools in themselves and as a way to raise awareness of learning opportunities.

IV.   Examples of some Learning Cities facing the

Challenges of the Future

(1) More than forty cities in America have for the past 20 years been experimenting with various different models of "Learning Exchanges" which are educational matching services that facilitate the coming together of persons possessing certain types of knowledge and skills with other people seeking to learn. Ivan Illich in the early 1970s in Chicago popularized the learning exchanges, which provided those willing to learn with access to available instructional resources. They offered support in more than 3,000 areas and subjects in atmospheres' much more supportive and congenial to many learners' needs and processes. Through such arrangements some of the hidden and wasted resources which, exist in communities can be more fully appreciated and utilized.

(2) In 1979, Kakegawa became the first city in Japan to declare itself a "city of lifelong learning". Kakegawa, a small city 200 km west of Tokyo, aims at getting citizens more involved in educational and cultural activities. The city also aims to create a positive spirit within the community, to make it a more interesting place to live and to encourage more businesses to locate there so that the young people won't drift to Tokyo. Lifelong learning includes the expansion of "social education", the Japanese form of informal learning outside the school system: newly built facilities serve both the city as a whole and each of its 16 districts. Here lifelong learning is interpreted, as cultivation of new attitudes as its citizens are encouraged to participate more in culture, sport and volunteering; one aim is to make Japanese life less narrowly focused on work. In Kakegawa the activities are based around 3 levels; the city level (it provides classrooms and a large auditorium for city wide events and self organized activities for lifelong learning in fields like local history, horticulture, singing an so on. It has also helped in raising awareness and interest in ceremonial events through all age-groups), the 16 primary school districts (centers support other learning activities through the medium of clubs for specific areas of interests) and 140 smaller sub-districts (focus on sporting and cultural activities and they are encouraged to develop their own speciality such as green tea, roses or crafts). In addition, there are many more lifelong learning centers run by private non-profit organizations. The citizens of Kakegawa increasingly perceive lifelong learning as a culture, as an attitude to life and as a process of community participation.

V.   How do we envision Udaipur emerging as a "Learning City"?

At this point, we see this process-project developing in three over-lapping phases:

Phase 1

In the initial exploratory phase, we will identify a core group of dynamic and committed individuals in Udaipur with whom we will organize a series of meetings and brainstorming sessions to be able to come to a shared working vision on the concept of Learning Cities and a framework of catalyzing the movement in Udaipur.

This core group will focus on learning more about Udaipur as a Generative Learning Ecology. Udaipur, a 1200-year-old Mewar dynasty, coupled with the rich diversity of tribal cultures, has facilitated and nurtured an immensely wide magnitude of learning processes and spaces. Though a lot has been said and written about Udaipur, a great deal remains to be explored, rediscovered, re-contextualized and evolved. To kick-off the project, we propose undertaking in-depth analyses of Udaipur, using various participatory research methodologies and tools, in which we would pose questions such as (see also Annex A):

- What is the contextual and historical basis for Udaipur's formation and growth?

- What are the main problems and challenges confronting people of the city and what are their aspirations for the future generations?

- What kinds of exploitation and inequities exist and what are the local mechanisms for correcting these?

- What are the attitudes of various communities about education and learning?

- What formal and the informal learning spaces, institutions, resources and relationships exist within the city? What learning experiments have been tried in the past?

- What are the kinds of local knowledge systems/practices that have existed and how do they continue to influence the lives of different communities of the city?

- What dynamic organizations and individuals exist who believe in and are committed to support processes of societal learning? Who are the groups who might resist innovations in societal learning?

- How are the learning needs of Udaipur different from those of other cities?

Phase2

Expanding and sharing our understanding of the concept of Learning Cities with a much larger group of people and institutions. By hosting several community forums, we will try to engage in processes of reflective dialogue to identify and analyze specific issues, concerns and needs of different people living the city and to begin to build partnerships for action. We will work with interested citizens to generate various proposals for action. In addition, at the end of this phase, we will create a directory of learning resources and spaces in present in Udaipur to be able to support a wider range of learning interests and styles.

Phase 3

Growing out of the background research and the proposals that emerge from the reflective dialogue processes, we will inititate new concrete activities to strengthen the Generative Learning Ecology of Udaipur as well as to support various specific learning initiatives within Udaipur.

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Annex a:

Towards Understanding The Potential Of Udaipur

Udaipur was the capital of the state of Mewar, one of seven major Rajput states. The history of Udaipur stretches back far beyond its foundation in the sixteenth century to the Sisodia Maharanas who followed the code of honor laid down by, Guhil, the founder of Mewar in 568 A.D. The city gets its name from Udai Singh II, who laid down the foundation stone for the capital beside Lake Pichola in 1559.

A peaceful and relatively small city, Udaipur nurtures a population of approximately 4 lakh. Udaipur and its surrounding regions have present in them many diverse, indigenous, folk and cultural groups and communities such as the Bhils, Garasias, Meenas and many more. Udaipur is called the 'city of lakes and palaces' and is now one of the leading tourist attractions in Rajasthan. The past 1-2 decades have seen the interesting growth of travel in this part of Rajasthan opening many new doors and links for the city and its people.

Udaipur is now growing into an important industrial and business base with the emergence of many large mines, zinc plants and enterprises. Along with the recent boom of the marble industry, the city has a surprisingly large number of organizations and institutions (semi-autonomous projects or non-governmental) that have mushroomed in the last 15 years. It is interesting to note that Udaipur is well known for its spirit of community service and volunteerism.

Research into Learning Cities will require the different communities of Udaipur to reflect on and share their wisdom and knowledge about the city, highlighting relevant events, forces, processes, traditions, and spaces that affect the lives of different communities. We will explore the different roles of people, communities and institutions in shaping today's Udaipur. As part of this, we will try to take into account the various perceptions that citizens have of Udaipur as a city—how they see themselves and their responsibilities in making it a more meaningful, peaceful and sustainable city for the coming generations.

Areas of research:

The history of Udaipur and Mewar. Explore the political, economic, and social importance of Udaipur's historical places, festivals, ceremonies and the various kinds of learning processes/ attitudes/structures that are being supported or nurtured by them. Visit monuments which are still being recovered and understood as ancient civilizations such as Ahar. We will try to analyze the relevance and impact of these spaces in generating various forms of reflection and in creating meaningful and dynamic relationships within/between different categories and classes of society. We would also try to understand the efforts and interests of the different individuals and institutions to evolve them as important informal spaces for societal learning.

Cultural and artistic forces. Highlight and situate the creative traditions that serve as a means of expression and articulation such as the music tradition of Maharana Kumbha in the city palace, and the artistic traditions of painting and drawing in the Mandanas, Chaaps or Phardas, etc. It would also be important to study literary works such as Chattar Singhji Mehta's "Meera Bai" and translations of the Gita into Mewari as well as other texts/manuscripts used in poetry, dance, games or puppetry which interpret and represent life in many different ways and forms. It would also be important to learn from the experiences of groups like "Aaj" and "Tulika" which have been working with local artists and cultural groups in Udaipur. In addition, we would try to explore the role that popular culture media (such as TV, computers, radios, cinemas) is playing on the lives of people. We would also look at the various popular culture spaces that various age groups (youth, families, retired people, etc.) "hang-out" in.

Different religious and ethnic groups. Examine the role of different religions and spiritual institutions in the lives of the different communities in Udaipur. We will try to understand for instance the strength/inspiration and meaning people derive from their faiths and the understanding and perceptions about other communities faiths vis-à-vis one's own. We will highlight the role of certain temples, mosques and religious shrines (Jagdish Temple, Machala Magra, etc.) and religious practices rituals, holidays. We will also explore the growth of certain religious faiths/communities in the city such as the Bohra and Sikh communities – and learn about why they came to Udaipur and what motivates them to continue to live here.

Traditional socio-economic structures. Explore the role and the participation of individuals in different apprenticeship structures within family/community traditions to understand the patterns of learning that have been instrumental in peoples' lives for generations. This would involve understanding the different traditional professions such as artisans, craftsmen, masons, goldsmiths, sweet-makers, etc. who have been associated to these learning activities and occupations for many generations.

Educational movements. Engage in in-depth interaction with individuals who have been playing a key role in various educational movements and the older, innovative institutions such as the Shramjivi College (Lok Shikshan Sansthan), Rajasthan Vidypeeth, Vidya Bhavan, Rajasthan Mahila Vidyalaya, Mahila Mandal, Saraswathi Bhavan, Meera Girls' College, etc. It will be important to delve into how? and why? these were started and the spirit with which they continue to influence different learning values and innovations.

Interesting People And Places To Explore For

Preliminary Round Of Exploration For Learning Cities Project

Places and Institutions to Visit:

- Aaj group
- Ahar Museum
- AmbavGarh Fort
- City Palace, Maharana Mewar Foundation
- Community Science Centre, Sahelion Ki Bari
- Fateh Memorial Clock Tower
- Fateh Sagar/ Nehru Garden
- Field Club
- Gandhi Smriti Mandir Samiti
- Jagdish Temple/Suraj Pole
- Lok Kala Mandal
- Mahila Mandal
- Meera Girls' College
- Neemach Mata Mandir
- Rajasthan Mahila Vidyalaya
- Rajasthan Patrika
- Rajasthan Vidyapeeth
- Ramakrishna Mission

- Saraswathi Bhawan, Gulab Bagh

- Shilpgram

- Shramjivi College (Lok Shikshan Sansthan)

- Solar Observatory

- Soochna Kendra

- Theosophical Society

- Town Hall

- Tulika Group

- Udaipur University

- Vidya Bhavan Society

- Western Zone Cultural Centre, Bagore ki Haveli

Initial Round of Meetings:

- Shrimati Manjula Bordia, Retired Lecturer in Philosophy
- Shri Shail Choyal, Eminent Artist and Founder of Aaj Group
- Shrimati Indu Dave, retired principal Vidya Bhavan School
- Shri B.P. Joshi, Retired Director SIERT, Udaipur
- Shri G.L.Joshis' family, Former Teacher at Vidya Bhavan School
- Shrimati J.P. Mehta, Western Zone Cultural Center
- Shri J.S. Mehta, President Vidya Bhavan Society, Udaipur
- Shri Dashottar, Gandhian and Thinker
- Shri Kishore Sant, Social Activist
- Maharaja Arvind Singhji, Maharaja of Udaipur
- Shri D.C.Soni, Prolific Writer and Thinker on Education
- Shri S.K. Verma, Ecologist

Books and Materials to Review:

- "A Passage to India" by E.M.Foster

- Dharampalji's writings on "Education in India" from the Pre-British period

- Archives and resource material available at the City Palace, Udaipur on traditional arts and practices

- Maharana Mewar Foundations' resource material and books on education and culture

- Gregory Jones "Peaceful Revolutionaries"

- "Interpreting Development" book on the voluntary sector of Udaipur James Tod, "Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan"(1829)