

Larissa – Learning City: From Local Learning to Global Actions

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Abstract: Covid-19 demonstrates the vulnerabilities of living in close proximity to others and we ask this question: What kind of city would enhance the lives of all its citizens, including new arrivals? This question is at the center of attempts to bring adult and citizenship education to address community and social problems through a pedagogy of the city, in this case the City of Larissa. We explore the Learning City – its concept, goals, and reality; the cultural and educational obstacles the project faces and the actions and tasks facing Larissa - Learning City. UNESCO provides the framework, resources, and support for the Learning City project. It is planned as an exercise in democracy and citizenship which is the version of lifelong learning proposed by the Municipality of Larissa the local lead agency for this venture. The rationale for the project is built on the Freire inspired idea that the local is the starting point for addressing global issues.

Key Words: Democracy; Learning City; Larissa; Freire

1. Introduction

Paulo Freire locates the roots of his pedagogy in his home city stating that ‘I am a citizen of Recife first’ (Freire, 1998, p. 89). He believed that citizenship of the world starts from one’s own locality – not the other way round. This strong bond with his own place and its culture provides Freire with an identity, an openness to others and to global influences. In *Pedagogy of the Heart* [first published as *Under the Shade of the Mango Tree*] Freire (1998) writes about the pleasure of breathing pure air, of being by a river with clean water, no pollution, and walking on grass. In a recent interview Apostolis Kalogiannis, Mayor of Larissa, remembers his native city Larissa:

The beautiful courtyards with the roses, the bougainvillea. People sitting outside on sidewalks. The *good morning* they said to each other with ease. The concept of neighborhoodness (Botsaropoulou, 2021).

Kalogiannis is a citizen of Larissa first of all.

For 6.000 years, people have looked to cities for protection, safety and a better place to live. Since Uruk in Mesopotamia and over thousands of years, cities have built great buildings, theatres, and government. In cities people first began to write. The first schools followed the invention of writing in Syria, Egypt and Greece. Most people recognize these great cities - Babylon, Jerusalem, Damascus, Athens, Rome, and Constantinople. In them we find the beginnings of trade, great art and prosperity. There have been many movements of people toward the safety of cities, particularly in times of crisis, famine, disease and war. Cities give protection but were divided between those who were within and those outside. Cities have always been metaphors and symbols for promised greatness. Learning has made a major

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contribution to the development of cities and how they provide support for learning, through its conversations, museums, libraries, schools and universities.

But cities have problems and crises that often defy solution. The apparent openness of public spaces in cities can mask how cities are socially stratified, layered in ways that reflect wealth with increased segmentation and barriers to equality. Cities are deceptive, as they offer freedom and freedom of choice - provided one has the money to spend on its undoubted attractions. There are increased problems with who belongs to these created and manufactured spaces. Regeneration often leads to displacements and homelessness; property owners create new rights; surplus wealth is disguised in property portfolios. Many cities have become polluted, known for crime, homelessness and poor housing -sometimes on a vast scale. Covid-19 demonstrates the vulnerabilities of cities. It raises this question: What kind of city would enhance the lives of all its citizens, including new arrivals? This question is at the center of attempts to bring adult and citizenship education to address community and social problems through a pedagogy of the city. In this we will explore:

The Learning City – its concept, goals and reality

Cultural and educational obstacles

Actions and tasks facing Larissa - Learning City

Learning City

Paulo Freire was a critic of the capitalist logic that gives little value to the free pleasures of a city. 'Capitalism substitutes the free happiness of satisfying human needs for happiness that can be bought or sold, but above all, for satisfying the needs of capitalism' (Gadotti & Torres, 2009, pp. 1261-62). Whether the city has mango trees or bougainvillea, the city is the starting point for becoming a critical global citizen as within the city the local and global are in dialectical relationship. The experience of citizens is the starting point for a pedagogy of the Learning City.

Freire was aware that education could help citizens become 'uniquely critical, challenged to understand that the world which is being presented as given is, in fact, a world being made, and for this very reason it can be changed, transformed, and reinvented' (Freire, 1993, p. 24). He wrote about Sao Paulo:

We dream of a democratic school system where one practices a pedagogy of the question, where one teaches and one learns with seriousness, but where seriousness never becomes dullness. We dream of a school system where, teaching necessarily the content, one teaches also how to think critically. (p. 18)

The Learning City is a UNESCO (2022) project emphasizing lifelong learning. The objective is to enhance economic development, achieve environmental progress and enhance social life and equality in cities. Different cities choose their version of how to become a Learning City. As Papastephanou (2021) asserts, lifelong learning has reached the city but the economic emphasis in lifelong learning discourse (Fleming, 2021) is problematic. Papastephanou credits the Learning City project with recasting 'learning in urban spaces and for roughly outlining an alternative ethic of learning' – alternative to the economically misconstrued lifelong learning model (2021, p. 1). UNESCO, through its Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL), sponsors the Learning City project and supports the notion that living, surviving and well-being depend on

citizens learning. The education of citizens, whether it is of citizens, by citizens, for citizens, is the new imperative for democracy. Without learning there may be no democracy.

Wenger (1999) argues that learning is not an individual pursuit but is 'a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing' (p. 3). The way through current multiple crises is through learning. Plumb et al. (2007) write that

...the city has been and will continue to be a form of human association deeply interwoven with intense learning processes. It might even be argued that an important *raison d'etre* for cities is that they enable humanity to express everyday learning potential impossible in other spatial frameworks. (p. 46)

The great risk is that in a world of inequality, the entrepreneurial version of lifelong learning will reproduce inequality. Too often lifelong learning offers a future as economic success and prosperity. We are skeptical of forms of education that reduce learning to the instrumental, that reduce cities to economic entities and learners to consumers or clients. A more critical vision of learning is necessary, one that offers more than economic success. There must be on democracy, justice, care, social justice, equality.

Philosophers from Kant to Honneth agree that an education system and democracy require and presuppose each other. A vision for a Learning City might include: Democratic controls over all resources! Local government to redistribute wealth to favor not capital or private developers but to favor inclusion, equality, fairness and an increased capacity to care for people, communities and the learning needs of all. There must be a reclaiming of the city, its space, its planning and its ability to make itself (again) in the interests of all.

Economic crises and austerity, climate change, refugees, migrations, violence against women, Covid-19, poverty define this age. Though the experience of crises is not new it may be that the threats currently experienced are more immediate and require urgent and significant learning. Crisis may be a generative theme or theme of the epoch – as Freire defines them (Fleming, 2022).

'Democracy is the only politically conceived social order that has to be learned, over and over, every day, into old age' as a 'process of education and learning' (Kluge & Negt, 2014, p. 452). Making changes in what we know, in what we assume to be true, and in what we take for granted is a form of learning. The thinking and reflection required is complex, challenging, and transformative. What we take for granted is in crisis. Fake news, conspiracy theories and the re-emergence of far-right authoritarianism threaten political order. However, the current situation is understood, something has to change, and this is a learning project (Habermas, 1995). The learning involved is not just private - changing of one's mind - but a social retooling of what we know and take for granted. The learning city can expand opportunities for critical, emancipatory and transformative learning that supports urban development. A revitalized learning city can challenge existing notions of urban development and foster policies and interventions that could transform the urban environment and supports healthy living. It is also an opportunity to learn how to live together with diversities within a city in non-violent, congenial ways that are conducive to human flourishing. It might even be called emancipatory urban development through critical pedagogy of the city. Freire (1978) expressed it well when he asserted that a real education was

where the content is in a constant dialectic relation with the needs of the country.... For this reason, it is not possible to divorce the process of learning from its own source within the lives of the learners themselves (p. 42).

2. Cultural and educational obstacles

2.1 Every UNESCO Learning City is different

A learning city, in the process of fulfilling its goals, often has to deal with obstacles, owed to institutional, financial, administrative and managerial factors. Probably the most important obstacles have to do with cultural and educational factors, e.g. the hegemony of a social culture environment that resists change and an inability to recognize the value of emancipatory learning. These are regressive learning traditions. In this section, the characteristics and the function of these crucial *obstacles are examined within the context of Greek society, and more specifically the city of Larissa, a city of 200,000 residents, situated in a rural area of central Greece.*

2.2 The traditional social culture

Political scientists and social psychologists (e.g., Broome, 1990; Diamandouros, 2000; Doumanis, 1983; Katakis, 1980) agree that in Greece traditional social culture remains significantly strong, especially in communities like Larissa, where the traditional experiences, values, and perspectives of rural life are still preserved by the population. This culture is characterized by introversion and mistrust towards innovation, change and collective effort. The satisfaction of personal expectations and pursuits is a fundamental characteristic and creates strong bonds with a small number of people (the in-group) among whom a relationship of interdependence exists (Broome, 1990; Katakis, 1980; Polemi-Todoulou, 1981).

The creation of an in-group has its roots in the centuries when Greeks were vassals of the Ottoman Empire. People, trying to survive under extremely difficult circumstances, developed strong interdependence within the nuclear family, as well as with people they trusted (relatives, friends, and even friends of friends). Out-group members were those outside the network of in-group affiliations. Social behavior was strongly dependent on whether the other person was a member of the in-group or the out-group. A great deal of commitment and solidarity existed between in-group members. On the contrary, the relations with out-group members were characterized by a great deal of suspicion and antagonism (Broome, 1990) and their influences were rejected. Doumanis (1983) argued that in traditional Greek communities social relationships were either positive or negative, with no room for neutral gradation in between: "Families were either co-operating with one another, closely and intimately, or were competing aggressively, cunningly and sometimes fiercely" (p. 28).

These rural perspectives still constitute basic dimensions of the social culture of Greek citizens, including the citizens of Larissa many of whom live or have family roots in agricultural areas. The commitment and the interdependence of people within in-groups and their competitiveness towards out-groups constitute basic aspects of Greek social reality and explain a great deal of the citizens' behaviors. Holden (1972), exploring the competitive nature of the Greeks' social orientation, argued that they tend to believe that "the friend of my enemy is my enemy, and the enemy of my enemy is my friend" (p. 89). Broom (1990)

highlighted that the mistrust of citizens toward out-group members lead to a generalized lack of reciprocal relationships.

At the beginning of the 21st century, a European research project (National Centre of Social Research/EKKE, 2003), asked this question: “How important is family for you?” Greeks scored the maximum point on the scale (10th) with 85%, while the typical percentage for Spanish people was 69%, and for Dutch people was 43%.

For many Greeks participation in synergies and collective actions, based on a consent that occurs through the process of discourse, constitutes an endeavor that is outside their frame of reference. A great deal of the adult population – including Larissa’s - is not interested in reforms that are for the sake of the social community or the socially vulnerable as they do not belong to a familiar in-group. The major concern is the maintenance of the interests of each one’s in-groups. Greek civic society remains undernourished (Voulagris, 2008). This situation becomes even more fixed due to the problematic functioning of public authorities (state, local government) which are characterized, (with only a few exceptions that have to do with specific brief periods of time), by dysfunction, bureaucratic rigidities, and resistance to reform (Spanou, 2021). As a result, citizens’ trust in public authorities is reduced and the power of in-groups is reproduced.

However, over the years, a new culture has emerged. Diamandouros (2000) has particularly explored this alternative “reformist” culture. He claims that it primarily draws from the ideals of Enlightenment and political liberalism, has a positive stance regarding reformations with a democratic prospect, and aims at decreasing the power of clientelism and corporatist practices. People who adopt this culture are inspired by the model of a responsible citizen who contributes toward social development and economic growth.

Accordingly, a city like Larissa, should pursue, by activating the creative social forces which adopt the reformist culture, the transformation of the dominant traditional social culture that constitutes the background against which conflicts are staged and local synergies impaired.

2.3 The lack of culture and expertise in adult education

A second major obstacle to the development of a Greek Learning City like Larissa has two dimensions. The first concerns the absence of a culture of adult education in Greek organizations and among most citizens. The second concerns the organizations that lack expertise in adult education.

There is a low level of understanding that adult education could significantly contribute to the financial, social, and cultural growth, as well as to the personal development of learners. An OECD (2019a) report showed that Greece is classified in the last 1/5 of the member states of the Organization concerning this issue (p. 1). The lack of culture that the organizations of adult education have is characteristically expressed by the extremely low financing of relevant programs by the state, local government and commercial enterprises (Kokkos et. al, 2021). Indicatively, Greece is ranked 21st in the European Union for the percentage of GDP available for training (CEDEFOP, 2020a, p. 77). Additionally, it holds the last position for the percentage of enterprises that offer training to employees 21.7%, compared to 72.6% as the European average (CEDEFOP, 2020b, p. 38).

The lack of adult education culture among citizens in research by the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises/SEV (2020), finding that 50% do not wish to participate in educational activities. Other reports show that the lack of desire for participation is associated with the low quality

and the teacher-centered features of the programs (CEDEFOP, 2020c; Karalis, 2021), along with the low awareness among the adult population, especially those from socially vulnerable groups, regarding opportunities for training and education (OECD, 2019b).

Greece holds the lowest rank among the members of the European Union, for lack of expertise among adult education organizations, with a performance of 1,3/5, concerning three crucial aspects: a. the quality of the adult education system; b. the efficacy of relevant national policies; and c. the relevance of the programs for addressing the needs of the participants, of the economy and of society (European Commission 2019, pp. 104-105).

The reasons of the lack of adult education culture and expertise are associated with the way the system of adult education is structured. Until the beginning of 1980s there were rare activities, because the country had gone through prolonged periods of dictatorship or extremely reactive governance, as well as due to the depression of civil society. In 1981 Greece, for the first time in modern history, elected a social democratic government that expressed the aspirations of citizens for a new life. An extended movement of popular adult education occurred. However, the boost for its expansion came mainly from the state's intervention. In Greece adult education was not created by the dynamic within civil society. As a result, the importance, habit and practice of adult education have not been embedded in the collective consciousness, neither in the perception of the political forces nor educational organizations. Furthermore, the dynamic of the popular education movement gradually faded due to the growing conservatism of Greek society. Accordingly, within a short time, instrumental, low quality continuing vocational training dominated the field.

As a result, Larissa wishes to be a learning society and develop extensive and emancipatory actions of learning, may have to overcome many obstacles to the lack of interest in adult education and of the traditionally low quality of the educational activities that are offered. Programs that include the philosophy, the principles and the methodology of transformative adult education should be offered and should respond to the needs of the adult population, especially the marginalized. Programs should function as focal points where people can meet, communicate, learn, participate in dialogical processes, and thereby perceive and challenge problematic assumptions they have embraced and so become more self-reliant, open to others, receptive to diversity, and interested in learning and public affairs. Adult education settings can thus become microcosms where learners are equipped with the necessary capabilities to realize and exercise their rights and take control of their lives. Simultaneously, by engaging within that framework in discourse, learners may experience the principles of democratic active citizenship and learn how to apply them in their lives and in their communities (Mezirow, 2000).

In particular, the challenge for adult educators should be to encourage and enable learners, particularly those from socially vulnerable groups, to become more self-reliant so that they may eventually make their own way to critically engage with the subject-matters at hand, including the dysfunctional aspects of their culture. In doing so, learners might become increasingly capable and willing to participate in educational processes, become more open to new perspectives, as well as become more critically reflective of their own and others' assumptions. Accordingly, they could become aware of the cultural factors and social conditions that inhibit their development and become empowered to participate in society as active citizens and learners.

3. "Larissa – Learning City ": Actions and tasks in present and future

The acceptance of the project for Larissa - Learning City was neither self-evident nor taken for granted. In 2015, in the heart of the then Greek economic and social crisis, Larissa became the first Greek city to become a member of the UNESCO Global Learning Cities Network, which announced its decision to become a learning society. The Learning City was certainly not a logo. Neither was it a rebranding of the education programs of the city but a project to construct and support the identity of Larissa as a learning identity. The concept of the Learning City referred precisely to a learning organization, which is constantly called upon to learn and transform itself, with learning being an ongoing process that is strategically utilized (Watkins & Marsick, 1996). The need to overcome a difficult social reality with new structures and institutions, the formation of communication channels and synergies with institutions and citizens, actions with an emphasis on vulnerable groups were theoretically the main issues. This political process, social choices and educational interventions are not politically neutral. They have a political dimension. They refer to a course of change that includes the realization of the causes of a social crisis, and the search for new balances, sometimes involving conflicts.

3.1 The challenge of change

Complex bureaucratic procedures and the chronic problems of the services and structures of the city emerged from the beginning. Already, the planning and implementation of the First City Conference on the "Relationship between Local Government and Lifelong Learning" with the presence of adult education experts created unexpected administrative difficulties in a Municipality that had never organized scientific conferences! The lack of similar experiences at the level of Greek local government, the non-existence of a department responsible for Lifelong Learning and the general lack of experienced staff with knowledge of the basic principles of adult education made the attempt to intervene in the field particularly challenging. The absence of a culture of collaboration within the structures and services of the Municipality in combination with the understaffing made it difficult to plan. It is characteristic that the last recruitment of permanent staff after the memorandum policies of the last decade took place in 2004!

With this challenging environment, the first changes in the level of organization of the Municipality were designed. The UNESCO (2013) documents on Learning Cities set the framework and the conditions:

- (1) Strong political will and commitment of the authorities of a city.
- (2) Involvement of all interested parties.
- (3) Mobilization and utilization of resources.

The political will of the Municipal Authority, the agreement of the vast majority of the Municipal Council was expressed by the institution securing the project by establishing a committee of bodies under the auspices of the Municipal Council. The Municipal Council three years later agreed the founding of a new innovative institution, the Citizens' University, that is based on the principles and methods of adult education and transformative learning. This highlighted substantial support for the project. At the same time, a substantial effort was made to involve more sectors in the city. More than 70 representatives of institutions and services of the Municipality participated in the work of the committee "Larissa, a Learning City".

Progress was made with the continuous involvement of organizations in a series of collective actions. New actions, such as Camp in the City, Social Tutoring and Parent Schools have highlighted key priorities and solid policy choices for the development of partnership policies.

The increase of actions and the first positive results from the efforts of a first core of Municipality executives and activated citizens highlighted the need for better planning by utilizing every available resource. The first changes were planned at the level of organization of the Municipality with 22 new structures, mainly in the fields of education and social policy. At the same time, new staff joined the Municipality, who had experience with similar procedures but were mostly on short-term contracts. This caused instability and pressure in the organization and administration of the Municipality. But it was often the trigger for a fruitful reflection on a course of changes that could affect the daily lives of employees. An integral part of this course was the implementation of interacting training programs for the staff of the social and educational structures, which were directly involved with the project. At the same time, European programs were utilized with the active support of the executives of the city for specific services and the exchange of informative visits in Greece and abroad. These were key elements in supporting the actions of the Learning City and helped employees and executives of the Municipality to understand and respond to new realities.

3.2 2015-2022: Before and after the pandemic

From 2015-2019, the Municipality organized conferences, educational programs and actions aimed at vulnerable social groups. An important milestone was receiving the UNESCO City of Learning Award in Cork, Ireland in 2017.

The emergence of the refugee crisis and the choice of the city to form a supportive framework for the approximately 2,000 refugees found in the area; the cooperation with the disability movement; the creation of new structures; the effort to create an educational community for Roma with elements of holistic intervention; all highlight the priorities of the period to support vulnerable groups. The operation of a Municipal White Taxi for free transportation of citizens with mobility problems and the creation of book production studios for the visually impaired were important innovations. At the same time, the improvement of the operation of the kindergartens, the creation of the Network of 11 Municipal Centers for Creative Employment and the first steps of the Citizens' University with the participation of thousands of trainees in its programs (Deligiannis, 2021) all contributed to strengthening effort, without, however, always being understood by even these participating citizens in the actions of the "Learning City". The absence of a Greek culture and tradition of adult education "from below" as a social need was a continuing barrier to developing the Learning City. Jarvis (2010, p. 29) recognized that the concept of a learning community is often confusing, although it is related to the concept of social change.

At the UNESCO International Conference in Medellin, Colombia the City of Larissa was chosen as a global coordinator of the UNESCO Network of Learning Cities for Active Citizenship Education. The outbreak of the Covid pandemic had a significant impact on the project and many initiatives were stopped while others came to the fore. Even the right of all children to access education was questioned. Understandably, many educators were disappointed, and staff believed that nothing actually changes.

However, following a period of stagnation, the Citizens' University began to organize online discussions focusing on the new reality of the Covid-19 era. In a new, online environment and with the involvement of the staff of the Municipality, there followed a quick adaptation to

the new situation. The impact in areas such as Public Health, economy and education were analyzed, as having a significant impact on the local community. New resources, new skills, initiatives and innovations led to creative educational interventions. In collaboration with organizations operating inside and outside the city, participatory learning cycles were organized to support the education of the city in distance education, online parent schools, online health education programs on healthy cities and programs for the elderly.

The new reality has highlighted a lack of consultation on issues affecting important parts of the city. The need for new institutions led to creating new municipal bodies with an inclusive mandate and emphasis on youth; the formation of a local youth plan; as well as gender equality and integration policies for refugees and immigrants. The Municipal Council decision to create the Municipal Youth Council, the Municipal Equality Committee and the Council for the Integration of Refugees and Immigrants were important initiative of the Covid era. The strengthening of these new institutions and the development of a culture of cooperation and learning formed the basis for the organization of new actions and educational programs with an expanding circle of participants. This led to the organization in September 2021 of the 1st Festival of Youth and Lifelong Learning.

The unforeseen health crisis prompted many cities to reconsider the way cities operate (Markopoulou, 2021). Implementing the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SVAK) and the decision of the Municipal Authority to turn the city towards sustainable mobility policies, even in the midst of a pandemic, created a great debate in the city about public space and the concept of a sustainable city. The construction in a very short time of new bike lanes over 20 km long in the city center and the transformation of neighborhoods into "smooth traffic roads", combined with "smart systems" of controlled parking came into conflict with traditional beliefs and attitudes of citizens, and many years of public policies supporting car use. The development of new traffic education programs for all levels of education targeting different social groups of citizens. The strengthening of democratic public dialogue has been a difficult political choice for a learning society that can and does survive when education and change are done together.

The efforts, of course, do not stop here. The initiative that created the new Internal Service Organization of Municipality made it possible to begin new Services, such as the Services of Education, which promote the planned changes. The cooperation with UNICEF and the recent nomination of Larissa as a "Candidate Child Friendly City" gives the appropriate framework, for the preparation of a comprehensive local action plan with the cooperation of measurable indicators and tight schedules that allow moving away from the rigidities of previous Public Administrations.

4. Evaluating a course of change

Lack of previous experience, continuous resistance to change and limited resources, difficulties and inevitable mistakes along the way are real and prevent complacency. The transition to learning organizations requires that it be accompanied by measurable results and the use of assessment systems, even if they are often difficult and complex to integrate (Poulopoulos & Tsimpoukli, 2016). This is sometimes contrary to the work culture of Greek local government bodies yet on the initiative of the scientific team of the Citizens' University, terms of evaluation and continuous redesign of actions and learning cycles were formulated. The evaluation of educational interventions requires procedures of feedback of the whole

network of factors involved in it. With several difficulties, some procedures of group evaluation and self-evaluation of the trainers were introduced. The first evaluations have largely confirmed that the original goals and targets have been met (Deligiannis, 2020). However, even where high satisfaction scores appear, small deviations show that the connection between theory and practice, and the practical application of learning, is always in demand.

For all programs the participants stated that they chose this Learning Cycle mainly after the announcement of the program in the local newspaper. Few were informed via the internet. They described the role of the trainers as encouraging, advisory, and empowering and the cooperation and interaction of the training teams as excellent. They found the educational material given to them very interactive and informative, which helped them in the exercises they did at home.

Especially in parent schools, trainees stated they developed skills such as patience, communication, and active listening. The examples and solutions proposed, the case studies that were elaborated and the use of educational tools were evaluated as good practices, while the role of the trainers was particularly inspiring. Suggestions were made for alternative hours, for example, they suggested the possibility of operating morning classes, as the children are at school. Important attitudes were those of the participants who pointed out that they would attend the same Learning Cycle again, as the needs of children are constantly changing. In particular, they proposed to enrich the Learning Cycle by organizing programs to raise awareness of men in the role of father (few men participated and then left), programs focused on age groups (e.g., childhood, adolescence, etc.) and specialized programs on parenting.

The results are encouraging. However, it takes time and knowledge in a process of change, in interventions in vulnerable groups and in the formulation of integration policies. A process of continuous redesign of actions, with targeted scientific research and the contribution of emancipatory members of staff of universities and scientific associations will give new perspectives, as there is no magic ingredient to becoming a Learning City (Osborne, Kearns, & Yang, 2013). Reactions to change must be explored and understood and democratic dialogue can be exhausting. The failure of past practices highlights precisely the need to evaluate new approaches and move slowly away from stereotypical behaviors and attitudes.

5. Conclusions

The health crisis has alerted us to the interdependence of all in society, in our city. Equality seems both more obvious sometimes and less achievable in others. The pandemic has widened social gaps and contributed to the even greater marginalization of the weak, the Roma, the refugees, and immigrants, the economically weak. It all points to the work that remains to be done.

On the other hand, when a crisis occurs, we are forced to learn many things in a very short time. Throughout this period there have certainly been significant concessions to democratic conquests. In some cases, significant steps have been taken to adapt to the new situation. Local communities clashed with each other. The pandemic has brought us in contact and educated us, often violently, on concepts such as social alienation, hygiene practices, and the protection of the elderly (Deligiannis, et al, 2021). The very concept of solidarity has become

a condition of survival, proving emphatically that the function of cities is intertwined with the formation of human relations and with global concerns.

This concern for a local place seems to be important for Freire too. In his conclusion to *Under the Shade of this Mango Tree* (1998) he recalls difficult times in his own local place: "we felt the risk that hope would run out". This story of Larissa - Learning City is told in that same spirit. Freire (1998) continues: "It is an effort to keep hope alive...What makes me hopeful is not so much the certainty of the *find* but my movement in *search*" (p. 59).

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