



LEARNING CITIES AS LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS TO FOSTER
DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN THE AGE OF AI

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STAKEHOLDER COOPERATION TO FOSTER LIFELONG LEARNING

Stakeholders come from across civil society and they work in

- formal
- non-formal and
- informal settings

„**Active citizenship** in the learning city: A successfully implemented consultation system should inspire citizens to do more than just deliver an opinion.

N. Longworth (2006) Learning Cities, Learning Regions, Learning Communities. Kogan Page. London. p. 153.



Source: Longworth, 2006

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Position paper forming part of an ongoing doctoral dissertation

Explores the transformation of learning ecosystems in the age of AI

Special emphasis on non-formal and community learning in Learning Cities for democratic participation

VUCA world: uncertainty and instability

Fake news, post-truth, declining trust

Growing conflicts and autocratic tendencies

Transformation of learning environments

Rapid expansion of Artificial Intelligence



LEARNING CITIES AS LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS IN THE AGE OF AI

- ❖ Community participation as a core principle
- ❖ Learning cities as spaces of social cohesion and democratic engagement
- ❖ UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities as policy framework

AI as a transformative factor reshapes structures and actor-relations within learning ecosystems:

- Decentralises access to knowledge
- Transforms learning processes and educational roles
- Supports personalised learning and accessibility
- Raises new ethical, social and democratic challenges



UNESCO AND HUMAN CENTRED AI

AI as a Transformative Factor in GNLC (380+)

- AI for all' approach
- Ethical and inclusive AI integration
- Support for lifelong learning and local learning communities
- Development of digital competences in cities
- Human-centred and participatory perspectives



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Source: <https://sdgs.un.org/>

CENTRAL HYPOTHESIS

The role of adult educators is not diminishing, not becoming less important, but changing and expanding, especially important in non-formal learning, as facilitators of

DIALOGUE - CRITICAL REFLECTION - TRUST - PARTICIPATION

In the VUCA world, their role becomes increasingly important:

- Especially relevant in non-formal learning spaces
- Adult educators as facilitators of dialogue, trust and participation
- Community learning remains essential despite technological change

RESEARCH QUESTION

- Does AI strengthen or weaken participatory and community learning?
- How does AI reshape the role of adult educators?
- How can technology coexist with and foster human-centred democratic learning?
- How can learning cities balance innovation and inclusion?
- *How could AI support learning for democracy?*

POST-TRUTH ERA AND DEMOCRACY

Growing social polarisation and misinformation

Conflicts, war and autocratic tendencies

Need for spaces of democratic dialogue and reflection

Personal presence and human connection become more valuable

Community Learning and Participation

Learning is also a social and relational process

Community-based learning builds trust and cohesion

Festival-based and local initiatives create democratic learning experiences

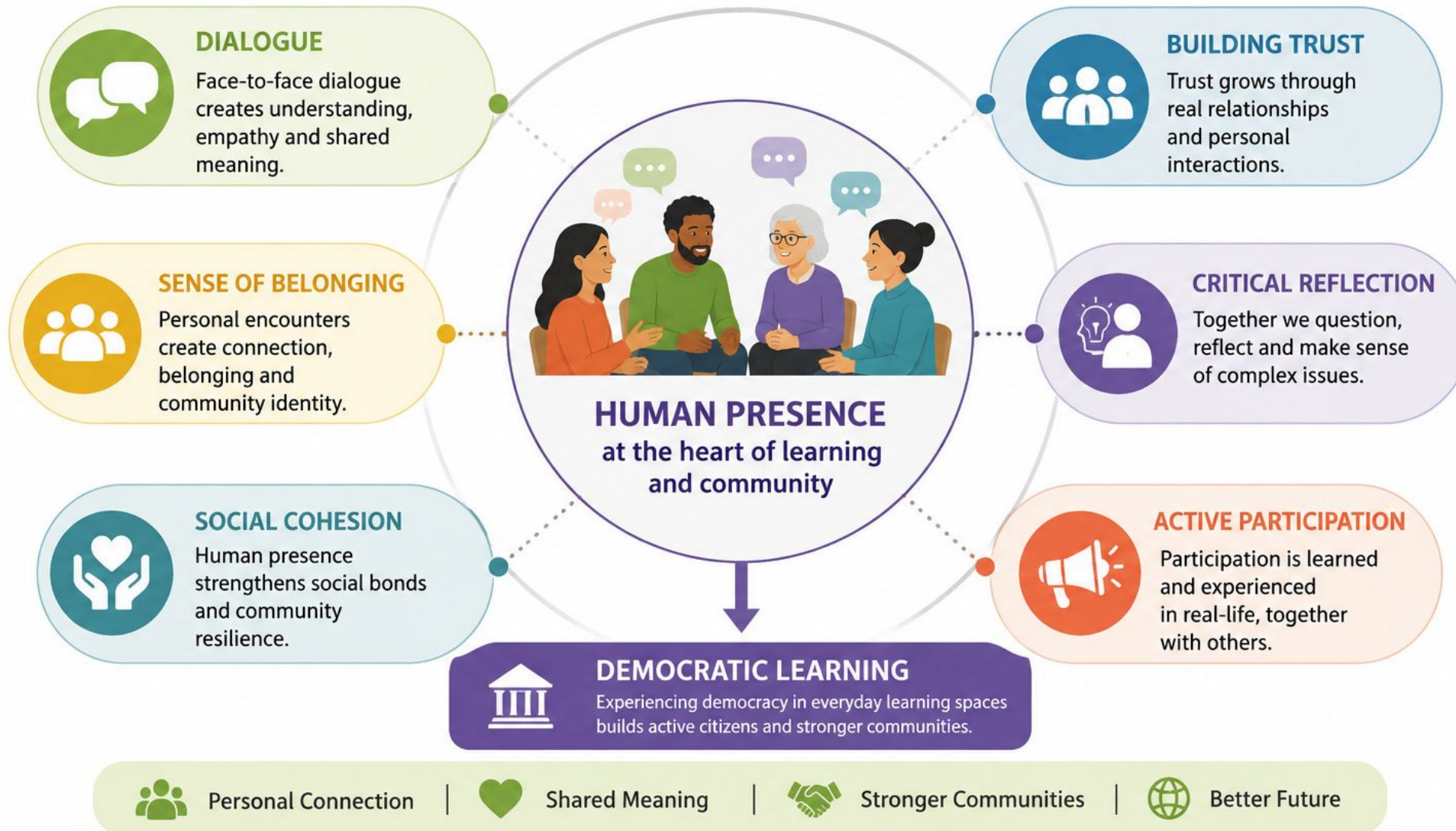
Dialogue enables critical reflection: Participation as lived democracy



Illustration by Diana Ejaita, 2024

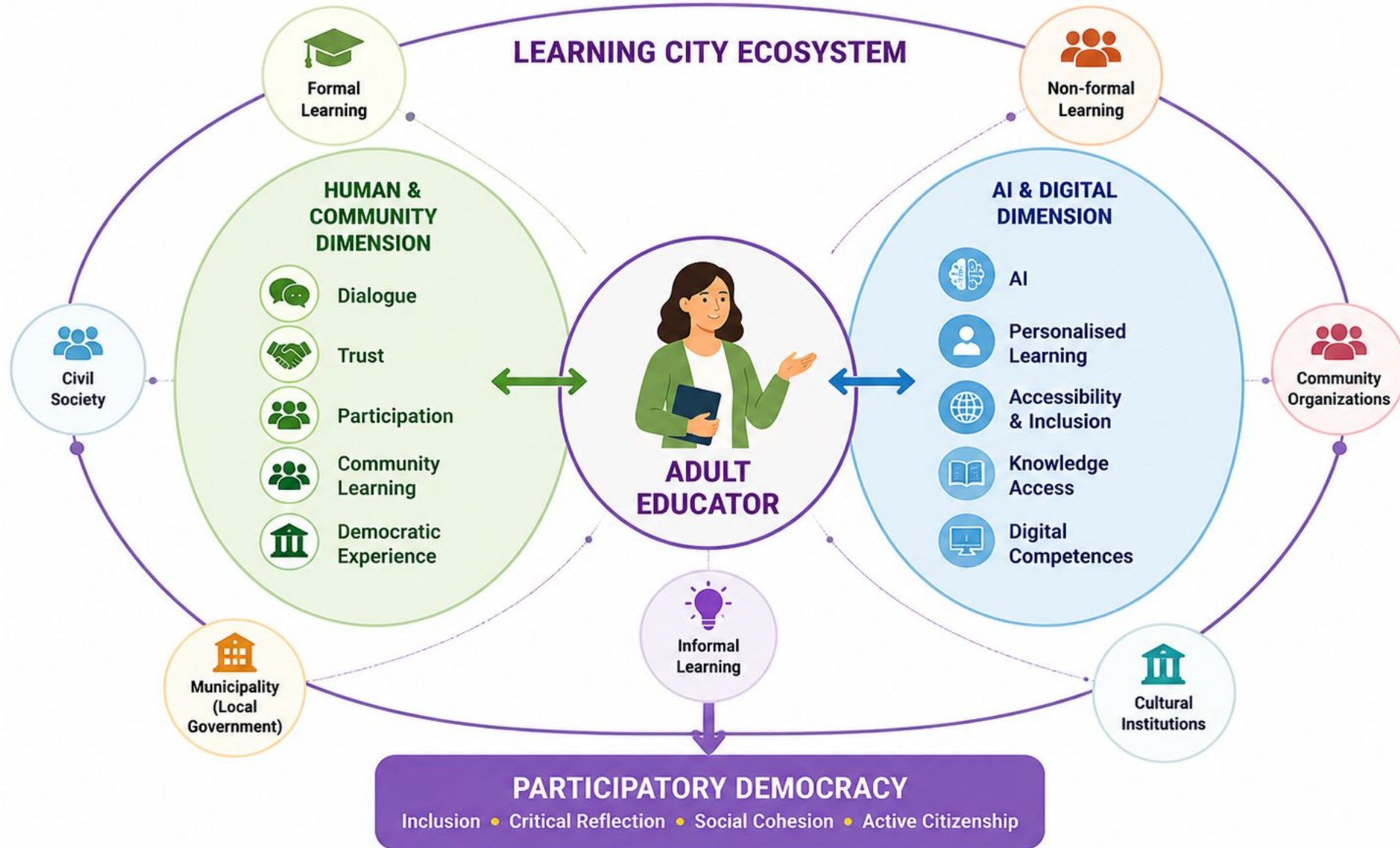
Why Human Presence Matters

The Human Core of Learning and Democracy



In a world of technology, human connection makes learning meaningful and democracy possible. ❤️

Learning City Ecosystem in the Age of AI



AI and Human Connection Together for Lifelong Learning and Democratic Communities

FINDINGS

- AI should not be understood only as technological innovation
- Transformation of adult education is also a normative and political issue
- Human connection remains central to democratic learning
- Learning cities may become key spaces for resilient and participatory communities
- Need for ethical and community-oriented AI integration

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Thank you for your attention!

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