

PREFACE

Smart Learning Ecosystems and Regional Development: contexts, practices and technologies

This special issue reports on research methods, techniques and empirical studies to enlighten how people-centered learning ecosystems are nurtured to get smarter and play a central role in regional development and social innovation. In the reported work the “Smart” concept is not simply equivalent to “technology enhanced” or “intelligent” learning ecosystems. These 'Smart Ecosystems' are instead learning ecosystems that promote the multidimensional well-being of all players of learning processes (i.e. in a smart school ecosystem - students, professors, administrative personnel and technicians, territorial stakeholders and parents). Smartness as a characteristic and consequence of the learning process, can also provoke social transformation and contribute to the increase of the social capital of a “region” also thanks to the mediation of technology.

The reader will notice a clear influence of the Timisoara Declaration and understand, in some papers, how it challenged researchers and practitioners on reflection, in the design of their research for impact, inquiring for better understanding of learning ecosystems and contexts and on strategic design to support the increase of ecosystems’ “smartness” to promote social transformation in real life well beyond technology enhanced prototypes and demos with a possible influence on policies and action plans.

The set of papers selected for this special issue addresses how technology mediated instruments can foster the citizen’s engagement with learning ecosystems and territories, namely by understanding innovative people in place centered design and development models/techniques, education/training practices, informal social learning, technology mediated experiences, namely IoT, and their impact.

The issue is organised in three main scientific topics:

- i) Influences, Relations and Models;*
- ii) Abilities, Skills and Competences and*
- iii) Techno Ecosystems.*

One of the topics proposed for this issue, “Influences, Relations and Models”, received several contributions and has some papers associated to it in the context of school ecosystems. Some authors propose and work on understanding school as a digital learning ecosystem, others study the classroom as a physical space, an enabler space with spacial semiotics and pedagogy. The future of education is also visited in a STEM cross-boarder, international, public class study. ICT is used to mediate the globalisation characteristics of this study and to foster an enriched and integrated smart school ecosystem. Game-based learning supported by gamification techniques is also explored and reported in this issue and depicts the pertinence that mobile learning can gain in a near future.

The “Abilities, Skills and Competences” and “Techno Ecosystems” are also reflected in some papers where smart city learning and smart learning in public places are preferable study contexts. These studies consider participatory design as a working reference, including social learning in multi-user environments for people

with special needs. IoT is used as a mediation instrument in a smart city learning setup to foster behaviour change with a co-Design approach.

As researchers and members of the Association for Smart Learning Ecosystems and Regional Development (ASLERD - www.aslerd.org), that supported this special issue, it was a pleasure to collaborate with all the authors and mediate the construction of this issue, a testimonial of research practice and results based on people-centered knowledge production and validation.

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