


# ***DUTCH CITIES OF LEARNING STRATEGY***





In 2020 and 2021, Cities of Learnings and about 700 young people from 8 European cities [depth qualitative research](#) with the aim of better understanding young people's future stories about learning, civic engagement and career opportunities. What role and influence do young people want to have in creating the future they envision?

The Dutch Cities of Learning would like to make a structural and sustainable contribution to the wishes and visions that young people have for their future. For this reason, a strategy matrix has been set up to visualise the desired impact for the next 10 years. This strategy matrix is based on the qualitative research conducted among 700 young people involved in the European Commission's Cities of Learning Network and European Youth Goals. At the end of this document you will find the strategy. In the following paragraphs you will find our learning path towards this strategy. We will first explain the concept of Cities of Learning, then what we see as 21st century skills and how to recognize them within Dutch Cities of Learning. We will also look at how young people relate to these 21st century skills, how 21st century skills are embedded in the EU Youth Goals, and last but not least, an overview of what we want to achieve and contribute as Dutch organisations of Dutch Cities or Learning.

This strategy document aims to connect the different learning communities in the Netherlands that use a Cities of Learning platform, to integrate and improve different forms of learning, to equip young people for the challenges of an ever-changing society in the 21st century. century and to support people who want to learn lifelong through non-formalized learning pathways.

Arnold, 30 years old: *"I like it when I can combine theory and practice during my studies, that's how I prefer to learn. Bringing all the qualities and learning principles together is good for me. I didn't finish my MBO, but now I'm doing a HBO study and I'm finding my way around it. I like challenges and the MBO didn't give me enough. Since 2015, I have already earned Open Badges, but when I talk about it with others, Open badges still raise many questions. I seek a lot of recognition for the things I do and the Open Badges help me put into words what I have actually learned. I want to make a difference in life and it starts here! I allow young people to get recognition, I missed this at the age of 17 to 18 years."*



## Cities of Learning

Cities of Learning is a territory-based web platform that enables cities and regions to create unique learning pathways for their youth using interactive maps, online learning playlists and digital Open Badges. The benefits for learners of using the Cities of Learning platform includes access to learning opportunities, recognition of practical experiences and skills and achievements, professional support for future careers and unlocking new learning opportunities. Benefits for learning providers are better visibility so learners can find learning activities, having data on the impact and achievements of learning, creating connections between various types of learning in the learning ecosystem. For businesses and employers the benefits can be that learners have a better job readiness, real overview of skills in the territory and a new channel to search for talents. Benefits for a city and regional administration are an open and inclusive learning infrastructure, data for policy decisions, means to achieve strategic goals and lifelong learning opportunities.

Cities of Learning started in the Netherlands in 2019 and has several platforms in 2022, all have their own specific function. Dutch Cities of Learning has been set up as an umbrella platform and aims to:

- integrate and improve different forms of learning,
- equipping young people for the challenges of an ever-changing life in the 21st century ([Quality Learning European Youth Goal #8](#)), and
- to provide and support people via non-formal education to become lifelong learners in civic and career opportunities (Quality Employment for all [European Youth goal #7](#)).

## 21st Century Skills, what are they

There are several ways to describe 21st century skills and many different 21st century skill models. Within Dutch Cities of Learning, young people and professionals choose to view 21st century skills as 'deepening learning skills' that are a combination of hard and soft skills. We refer to 21st century skills as skill zones necessary for a person to learn, live and work happily, meaningfully and effectively in a constantly and rapidly changing society. We want each person to work toward the right set of 21st century skills that align with that person's needs. That set of 21st century skills is different for everyone. Dutch Cities of

Learning works with youth workers who support young people to thrive in the world of the future and that future starts today.


## Young people and 21st Century Skills

Our research and experience with young people shows that young people see creativity, critical thinking, empathy, and flexibility, as the most needed 21st Century skills. Whilst we have a conversation about how to acquire those competences, the conversation often turned over to “building” a variety of learning spaces and opportunities for young people, so they can learn, practice and apply these skills in their daily life. The young people we spoke with don’t feel prepared (both at an educational and personal level) to enter the labour market since they lack practice and “real life” experiences which they feel could be gained through formally stated activities and programs together with their peers, co-creating and learning together. Young people are aware that besides the specific needed hard skills, the 21st Century Skills are needed to fulfill the life they envision.

On a European level most young people indicate that learning is happening (in a large part) outside of formal educational institutions. They pointed out the importance of non-formal learning recognition and lack of recognition for youth organisations, apprenticeships, volunteering, international mobilities and other youth programs and learning opportunities they participate in.

Devyn, 22 years old: *“I don't like making summaries, making reports. I like to be really busy and get things done. When I have to learn from books, nine times out of ten I do nothing. Where I learn best and how I learn best is by doing it, because by doing I will also be able to understand it. As a result, I dropped out of school without a basic qualification and am now studying through practical education at level 2 at Marlijn Academy. From the moment I became involved with Cities of Learning, I have followed an international leadership training where we really got to work through non-formal learning. That suited me much better and after that I was able to help with international projects. I was able to earn Open Badges that demonstrate what I learned when I did micro-learning activities. At first I couldn't do that, I didn't see the point. With help I started anyway and reached my first milestone this week, I achieved my first 50 Open Badges. And now on to 150!”*

Besides differentiating types of learning they are also very much aware of different learning spaces and communities – both offline and online, local and global. Though on the level of The Netherlands, none of the young people responded in the in depth interviews that learning is happening outside formal education. On the question ‘how’ they learn, the Dutch young people were naming almost all “memorising facts to pass exams for your diploma”. 100% of



the Dutch young people surveyed in the qualitative research gave this answer. What does this mean for the Lifelong Development that will be expected of every Dutch citizen? How can we ensure that young people take a broader view of the places where learning takes place? Does learning only happen at school? Or also beyond?

Based on these and other results of research on European and National strategic youth field documents and experiences, we built this strategy-document to support different learning communities within The Netherlands that are using the Cities of Learning platform, to integrate and improve different forms of learning, equipping young people for the challenges of an ever-changing life in the 21st century and to provide and support people via non-formal education to become lifelong learners.

To better understand the substantiation of the strategy matrix subtracted from this document we will first explain the concept of Cities of Learning, what the 21st Century Skills are and how to value them within Dutch Cities of Learning. We will also take a look at how young people relate to the 21st Century Skills, how 21st Century Skills are embedded in the EU-Youth goals, and last but not least, an overview of what we want to achieve and contribute as Dutch Cities of Learning.

The need for intercultural and especially intergenerational dialogue in all aspects of life was voiced by a group of young people. Especially for communities with a higher percentage of elderly people who can pass on old traditions and skills. Reverse mentorship was also discussed, with young people being both apprentices and mentors. They said that *“The diversity of friends is more important than the number of friends in order to encourage one’s own tolerance and to be regularly confronted with other points of view”*.

Many participants expressed a clear need for better access to digital resources, as well as to learning opportunities specifically related to ICT competences and foreign languages. Digital tools have an important role in young people’s lives. They use them to find like-minded people online and also for their independent learning but they see the danger in “false” friends and fake news, too. They would like to have digital tools more integrated in the school system to know how to use them best for learning, find reliable sources and be aware of the dangers. In their experience, digital tools are helpful for the learning of things they have already been taught about but it is more difficult with totally new topics as it is difficult to find guidance in this process.

Our research among young people has shown that young people’s personal development, young people talked about communication and social skills have a high priority for their personal, civic and career pathways. During activities within the Cities of Learning Network young people were setting goals to reach for success and these young people pointed out the importance of understanding popularity as only one of measures for success. These

young people are worried that popularity is often based on traits and values that aren't always a good indicator of someone's trustworthiness and authority on different subjects.

Young people are also very aware of the importance of health and a healthy environment, so they stated that working on stress management, preventing burnout and improving mental health is important, as well as caring for the environment and being aware of different threats present in that area.

Leonie, 33 years old: *"I learn through life itself, all of life is a classroom. I like reading and the thrift store. I look for things with a history there. I am the founder of an open platform where stories can be told about mental health. We want to connect. Not everyone is made for the current school system. I got my HBO but never felt comfortable doing that. You are never too old to learn, I would like to see a difference in that. Learning only stops when you are no longer there. That's what badges give, recognition for this learning in all kinds of places in life. I dropped out due to depression 4 years ago and it is now difficult for me to get a job again. I notice that many people, when they are on a waiting list for a treatment, experience that the world has come to a standstill. We can give much more recognition to the strengths, ambitions and life lessons that we gain at those moments. If a badge system can contribute to this and help you find a suitable volunteer position, job or other activities, then we have made great progress. I grant that we can experience the world again as a large practice room and that we will play again. I needed my depression to find out."*

## EU and 21st Century Skills

We found in our research that topics shared by Cities of Learning young people align with the outcomes of European Youth Dialogue processes, where Another very important research that we use 50.000 young people were giving their voice for developing the EU Youth Strategy. For example young people want more emphasis on opportunities to access non-formal education but also feel that formal education alone perhaps cannot really provide the sort of education they need.

The youth dialogue processes held to create the EU Youth Strategy also resulted in 11 Youth Goals. The European Youth Goals [#8 Education and Learning](#) and [#7 Quality Employment for all](#), are leading goals for the Dutch Cities of Learning Open Platforms within The Netherlands. The Dutch Cities of Learning platforms who are connected with specific organisations and businesses will follow their own vision and missions.

Dutch Cities of Learning aims to integrate and improve different forms of learning, equipping young people for the challenges of an ever-changing life in the 21st century ([European Youth Goal #8](#)) and supports people via non-formal education to become lifelong learners in civic and career opportunities.

## **Structured Dialogue Cycle VI Thematic report:**

### **Education and Learning**

#### **What are the challenges young people are facing?**

Young people feel the current education system needs modernisation and change in focus. They believe whilst it is effective at providing basic knowledge such as maths and literacy, it does not focus enough on:

- Transferable skills and competencies such as critical thinking and communication skills.
- Practical life skills that enable young people to live independently such as managing money, health education and knowledge of the political system.
- Relevant technical competencies for the future labour market.

Some young people believe the current emphasis on formal education means they lack the opportunity to access non-formal education. It was questioned by some if formal education alone could really provide the sort of education they needed.

Some groups of young people emphasised different things to others. One working group identified that young people in social/ youth care facilities prioritised acquiring life skills more than others. Other working groups identified that young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds placed more emphasis on life skills. Finally, whilst many young people emphasise the importance of learning foreign languages.

#### **What is young people's vision for the future?**

The main trend is that young people want an education that provides a wide variety of learning, and that is much broader than just preparation for employment.

Based on the working group reports, the competencies that young people desire are:

- Basic general knowledge (literacy, numeracy etc)
- Foreign languages (particularly to enable freedom of movement)
- Media literacy and ability to evaluate news sources and information
- Communication and leadership skills
- Digital and technological skills
- Understanding of the civic and political systems, including the EU

- The ability to manage your own learning - 'learning how to learn'

### #7 Quality Employment for all

- Ensure equal opportunities for all young people to develop the necessary skills and gain practical experience in order to smoothen the transition from education to the labour market.
- Guarantee the recognition and validation of competencies acquired through internships, apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning, as well as volunteering and non-formal education.
- Ensure involvement of young people and youth organisations as equal partners in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of employment policies at all levels.
- Ensure equal access to quality information and adequate support mechanisms to prepare young people for the changing labour market and future of work.


## Dutch Cities of Learning as a fair, sustainable and inspiring role model

As Dutch Cities of Learning we see that the reality of young people is uncertain and changing fast due to Pandemic, development of technology, and the need to have environmental solutions. Therefore we focus on the development of new or innovative learning opportunities and infrastructure that will support young people, non-formal learning organisations, formal education and employers. We want to support the growth of awareness of changes in the learning ecosystem and educate how people can develop themselves on a continuous basis.

We see the following trend and weak signal to create qualitative learning for everybody happening right now:

- (Trend) More and more technical developments are surrounding people at home, at work and in public spaces. This makes people more and more technical, but also creates an opportunity to develop technical skills. At the same time, people who are not following these technical trends can become more excluded. Within The Netherlands we experience that more educational organisations are aware of the





need of developing digital competences. On a European level there have been competence models developed to support recognising digital, green, life and entrepreneurial skills development. The use of digital platforms has increased in almost all jobs.

- (Trend) Micro-credentials like Open Badges are increasingly seen as useful for personal and career development. Micro credentials can be earned for small experiences, training, membership, and work that are earned over hours, weeks or months, not years. These credentials can show the evidence of achievement about why it has been earned and they can be tracked by readers of the credentials.
- (Weak signal) Young people more and more want to think about their own mental and physical well being, working culture and the earth's well being above earning money. This can change the work mentality of people. At the same time employers already lack employees, e.g. Schiphol airport, public transport, educators and within the health care sector. Shall this change the meaning of work? How can we as Cities of learning support young people to be ready to step into these disruptions and transformations. How can we support young people to create their futures?

## What kind of impact and change do we envision

When we speculate about the future to support young people, non-formal and formal learning organisations, and employers to become 21st century future ready, this means a learning paradigm shift of young people, non-formal learning organisations, formal education and employers and employees.

# DUTCH CITIES OF LEARNING STRATEGY

## TARGETS

### YOUNG PEOPLE

01

### NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

02

### FORMAL EDUCATION

03

### EMPLOYERS & EMPLOYEES

04

## DUTCH USERS OF CITY OF LEARNING EXPERIENCE AN INCLUSIVE, OPEN AND DIVERSE LEARNING EXPERIENCE TO BECOME 21ST CENTURY READY

## IMPACT (ABOVE 5 YEARS)

1. For young people that are using Cities of Learning Lifelong Learning has become a natural habit
2. Young people using Cities of Learning see formal and non-formal learning outcomes as equally valid for their personal and career pathways

1. Organisations using the Cities of Learning Network see 21st century skills development as essential for personal wellbeing and careers
2. Non-formal learning organisers using the Cities of Learning Platform know better how to validate non-formal learning activities relevant to formal education and employers

1. Formal education organisations taking part in Cities of Learning are also offering bits of their curriculum so their learning pathways become more fluid and easier to blend with non-formal education
2. Formal education organisations taking part in Cities of Learning grow towards more integration of non-formal education and see them as equally valid

1. Employers and employees have created personal learning paths that support them in fostering more sustainable careers and relationships within their organisations.
2. Employers and employees are aware of the skills development possibilities via open badges and foster (demand) new learning opportunities for their new needs as a result of the changes in future work

## SHORT TERM IMPACT (2-4 YEARS)

1. Young people using Cities of Learning are aware of the importance to develop 21st century skills
2. Young people using Cities of Learning take part in easy accessible learning opportunities that are connected with their interests and preferences
3. Young people feel a space of belonging within the Cities of Learning network

1. A network of non-formal education organisations is a relevant community for Cities of Learning
2. Non-formal education organisers know how to create inclusive, open and diverse 21st Century learning activities on the Cities of Learning platform
3. Cities of Learning platform is an easy accessible platform for engaging, empowering and connecting learners within formal and non-formal learning
4. Cities of Learning organisations are aware of the importance of integrating the development of 21st century skills in their non-formal learning activities

1. Formal education organisations can more easily blend non-formal learning opportunities into their curriculum and acknowledge learning achievements of their students
2. Formal education teachers are increasingly inspired to use and integrate learning pathways in their educational activities / curriculum.

1. Employers and employees recognise how they can support each other to get into lifelong learning via Cities of Learning
2. Social entrepreneurs can use Cities of Learning 21st Century skills learning pathways to develop their entrepreneurial skills
3. Employees looking for job opportunities are using open badges to support their professional resume
4. Employers and employees are able to easily identify relevant learning opportunities which foster (lifelong) learning via Cities of Learning

IN 50 % OF THE DUTCH LEARNING ACTIVITIES ON THE CITIES OF LEARNING PLATFORM 21ST SKILLS ARE RECOGNIZED

DUTCH CITIES OF LEARNING PROVIDES PROVIDES EXPERTISE AND EXPERTS IN LIFELONG LEARNING THAT IS AWARE OF THE LEARNING PARADIGM SHIFT

## OUTPUTS (ACTIVITIES)



21<sup>ST</sup>

ONLINE 21ST CENTURY  
SKILLS EDUCATION



Erasmus+