INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY THE PROFESSORIAL CHAIR OF *SOCIAL SPACES AND PLACES OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING* FROM THE INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH (FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES) OF THE RUHR-UNIVERSITY BOCHUM (GERMANY) ON:

THE SPATIAL TURN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON (IN)FORMAL LEARNING CONTEXTS

08 - 09 MARCH 2018 IN BOCHUM, GERMANY
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INTRODUCTION:

There is a vision and indeed a growing awareness that learning in a fully digitalised, networked and knowledge-based future society will be drastically different from today's digitalised and networked formal, non-formal and informal learning. But this fully digitalised and networked future society is *already* an established and undeniable common fact – learning has drastically changed in the past two decades. More than 40 years of technological developments have provided the scope for significant changes in education and an extension of the curriculum to include innovative ways – such as mobile learning (Seipold, 2014) – of teaching and learning in (in)formal learning environments (Cox, 2012). The introduction of laptops and other portable digital devices has enabled students to learn outside the formal classroom and beyond institutions. The expansion of mobile hand-held technologies has offered more opportunities for learners to be able to carry around their e-learning devices and to use them informally in their search for information. Present-day students and learners are often portrayed as generation Y, generation M (for media or millenial) or generation V (for virtual) on account of their seemingly infinite use of technology in any situation in life (Selwyn, 2009). This use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and its tools, such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Snapchat and – on a more formal level – EDUCAUSE, MOOCS, Moodle, DOCEBO or ILIAS on computers, tablets and smartphones, give rise to new learning opportunities, but these also require users to acquire the new skills and competences necessary for education, self-employment and participation in society, such as a reflective and critical attitude towards media (Punie & Ala-Mutka, 2007). Blogs, wikis, podcasts – as the most vital web 2.0 applications, globalisation and demographic changes – on a more socio-economic level – and institutional or educational innovations affect future digital and physical lifelong learning in our societies. The digitalisation of our societies and lives as a new form of the spatial turn influences learning spaces and places – in every imaginable different form - and creates new (in)formal learning processes where learners are their own producers of the learning environment (ibid.). On the contrary, use patterns and intentions from private and everyday life may be in opposition to the use and intentions in formalised learning environtments (Seipold, 2014). Every teacher, lecturer, trainer, tutor, student and learner in a future society – if it is not already the case – will have a personal digital learning space or environment – a virtual work desk – where all relevant learning resources are accessible via multiple devices and media – anywhere and anytime, without limitations, through Open Educational Resources (OER) (Brown, 2006). But as the boundaries between private, public, working and learning life are becoming blurred, learning spaces need to be flexible providing links between formal, non-formal and informal learning (Punie & Ala-Mutka, 2007, Cox, 2012 & Seipold, 2014).

The spatial turn itself reflects much broader transformations and shifts in the economy, politics, culture and education of the contemporary world as well as thematising shifts in identity and subjectivity (Warf & Arias, 2009,). Space and place matter, not only for the trivial reason that everything occurs in spaces and places – sometimes referred to as locus. Where events unfold are essential to how they take shape. They are an active participant of social and cultural trends. As modern societies are evolving towards fully digitalised and networked societies, the views on learning and the spatial turn evolve as well (ibid.). Hence, four major possible subjects dealing with (in)formal learning and the spatial turn could be extracted for contributions, however contributions are not limited to the following topics.

POSSIBLE SUBJECTS:

1. **SPACES and PLACES**

   Why not use the more specific terms "classroom" or "seminar room" instead of "spaces" and "places"? Decades ago classrooms and seminar rooms were the primary locus for learning in (higher) education. Other physical spaces may have included the library or the café in town, but classrooms were by far the most important spaces for learning. A great deal has changed, since then: Nowadays the availability of network access has emerged as the primary factor for most people determining whether they use the internet and applications for learning in virtual spaces (Peacock & Pratt, 2011). But are physical spaces and places doomed to vanish from our educational systems? An entire generation of learners has grown up using computers and other networked digital devices for their own purposes and these developments impact the locus and environment of learning in (higher) education (Punie & Ala-Mutka, 2007). The notions of the classroom and seminar space have evolved and expanded and virtual spaces have taken their place alongside physical spaces, because of technology´s progress (Brown, 2006). These changes, catalysed by technology, make it essential that the term classroom – in its traditional sense – can no longer encompass where learning takes place (Peacock & Pratt, 2011). That is why the distinctions between learning spaces, places and environments have to be reworded, transformed and modified.
   Botanical gardens, museums and science centres – for example – are non-school settings in which learning takes place actively. But which other categories can be distinguished – along with these settings? Are there examples of passive learning spaces and places? How can (physical) (in)formal learning *places* deform and reform themselves? How can virtual and physical (in)formal learning *spaces* deform and reform themselves?

2. **LIFELONG LEARNING**

   The idea of lifelong learning is a well-known theme which has been widely proclaimed for decades by international organisations – such as UNESCO, the OECD and the EU – as an organising principle for a new approach to teaching and learning in formal, non-formal and informal conditions since the 1960s (Slowey & Schütze, 2013). But it is more than adult education, it is a process that starts at an individual's birth and continues until death and occurs in everyday life (Mutlu, 2015). Today's humans are flooded with more information than they can handle and tomorrow's workers and employees will need to know far more than they can learn today in schools or other institutions. Therefore, living and learning in the 21st century results in modified circumstances and perspectives. Lifelong learning creates the intellectual challenge to understand and explore essential dimensions of learning – such as learning on demand, self-directed, collaborative and organisational learning (Domik & Fischer, 2011). Programs in and outside of institutions have to be flexible and easily accessible for learners. Digital technologies – now used on a day to day basis – play an integral role in teaching and learning across life-wide learning, but not everyone has access – or only limited access – to digital devices and therefore to Open Educational Resources (OER). Social disparity as a phenomenon in social strata cannot be ignored or brushed aside and has to be discussed and consequently depleted, thus. Often, in today's educational system, only

those with adequate finances can afford to learn from the best scholars and afford to purchase required textbooks that are unacceptably expensive. OER's used for learning, teaching and research belong to a public domain with intellectual property permissions allowing others to use and adapt OER documents freely (Xiu, Tutaleni, Baker & Fulgencio, 2017).

It is especially the last decade that has seen a massive growth in informal online environments and traditional learning environments have had to be transposed (Facer & Selwyn, 2013). Students and learners have to be prepared to move beyond traditional academic settings and to contribute knowledge to a world which is characterised by technological and social changes and uncertainty (Domik & Fischer, 2011). How can lifelong learning programs be embedded into web 2.0 application projects and programs? Which premises have to be developed and abolished?

3. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

When people acquire skills they are able to produce more output for a specific amount of time and effort – is what economists say. For over a decade, a number of employers have been sounding warnings to the (higher) education sector that a 'skills gap' was emerging at the employer/graduate interface. In an age where technology and requirements for workers and learners change rapidly and globally these better educated people do have an advantage in relation to others. Skills relating to digital online work, socialising and learning are essential in addition to basic skills – such as information searching, computer and application usage skills – in order to support creativity and innovation. It is also important in the case of digital competences that further learning of these digital skills is supported and enhanced after the basic elements have been acquired (Punie & Ala-Mutka, 2007 & Janssen et. Al., 2013). Learning spaces need to support updating and improving skills for people during and after their formal basic education. After acquiring sufficient skills, the learner can adapt the mode of learning according to his or her interests. Connectivity to other learners, resources and communities are essential for keeping up to date with the most important advances and for recognising new learning needs (Brown, 2006). Hence, knowledge of behavioural norms for socialising in online environments is important for effective interaction. For those entering the learning spaces, it is necessary that a positive attitude towards collaboration with members of the peer group and experts is learned and practiced. Self-management skills in terms of timing and concentration on the most relevant learning topics – among the abundance of information and opportunities available in learning spaces – are skills that also need continuous development (Punie & Ala-Mutka, 2007 & Janssen et. Al., 2013).

The features mentioned above are some of the key elements which emerge from searchers for skills or skills development in the literature. But what else is important? Which other skills can be defined and categorised in (in)formal learning spaces and places? How can skills and skills development be moulded and measured? How can the educational sciences see the acquisition of skills and the skills development from a challenging, critical and different perspective?

4. TECHNOLOGIES

Today's students and learners – often referred to as digital natives (Palfrey & Gasser, 2010) – can be described as preferring learning experiences that are digital, connected, experiential, immediate, and social - constantly connected, they seem to have no fear of technology (Lomas, 2006, Prensky, 2010 & Beetham, 2012). But does digital natives even exist? Some studies claim that students rather expect technology as a part of the learning environment and they have difficulties with learning environments that lack technology (Tapscott, 2009). Technology acts as the lever in (in)formal learning environments which makes it possible to develop both new and more effective pedagogies (Brown, 2006 & Beetham, 2012) and physical and virtual learning spaces. Thus, Information Technology (IT) offers an outstanding platform for connecting and sharing information among learners inside or outside the 21st century learning environments. Blogs, wikis, podcasts, threads, instant messaging and e-mails can extend communication in learning processes and can extend the learning process itself outside the classroom, so that it is not only the faculty that can use the face-to-face time in learning spaces for more active learning approaches (Bickford & Wright, 2006 & Beetham, 2012). Mobility and academic requirements for technology access are important considerations, since learning occurs in a variety of spaces for example with Open Educational Resources (OER). Therefore, it makes sense to coordinate and improve pedagogical and didactical approaches, the curriculum, and the co-curricular experiences of students with the goal of creating a more learning-friendly community characterised by engagement (Bickford & Wright, 2006) and the progress of technology in a formal learning space, e. g. concerning Learner Generated Contexts (LGC) (Seipold, 2014).

Is it possible to connect the newest technology in its various forms to a new curriculum in higher education with multiple projects? In which forms does the curriculum have to change – does it even have to change? And so which technology can be used? Students, technologies and learning spaces are constantly changing – so how can these changes be used to create appealing settings for lifelong learning in informal learning settings?

FORMS OF CONTRIBUTION:

The scientific committee and conference organisers hereby invite all researchers and emerging researchers across disciplines to discuss the national and international theoretical, empirical, methodical and practice-related approaches analysing the relationship between (in)formal learning and the spatial turn. The main conference language is English. All interested authors and presenters are invited to send an abstract in English relating to the thematic fields outlined above or to a thematic field linked to the conference's theme. Please select your preferred course of action for presentation:

- **A)** Implementation of a Workshop (90 minutes)
- **B)** Paper Presentation (60 minutes)
  - I. 30 minutes presentation + 30 minutes discussion
  - II. 40 minutes presentation + 20 minutes discussion
- **C)** Short Paper Presentation (15 minutes)
- **D)** Poster Presentation

FORMAL CONDITIONS:

Abstracts for **A)** and **B)** (max. 3.000 characters), abstracts for **C)** (max. 2.500 characters) and poster outlines for **D)** (max. 2.500 characters), along with a short biographical note and contact details in an additional document, should be submitted as PDF documents to the conference organisers at: informallearning2018@ruhr-uni-bochum.de
Likewise, new and unique ideas and research approaches are warmly welcomed and invited next to already current approaches. The deadline for submission of the short abstracts ends on **31st July 2017**. Notifications to the authors with accepted abstracts for the conference will be given by 1st September 2017. These authors with accepted abstracts will have to provide and submit a more detailed paper prior to the conference by 31st October 2017. Abstracts for **A)** and **B)** are than limited to max. 12.000 characters – abstracts for **C)** are confined to 6.000 characters. Poster outlines for **D)** are not narrowed to a specific number of characters. Details of the size and format of the poster stands will be attached to the letter of acceptance.

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We hope to see you soon in Bochum, Germany!

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