



CHARTER OF EDUCATING CITIES

2004

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The cities that were represented at the 1st International Congress of Educating Cities, held in Barcelona in November 1990, set forth in the initial Charter the basic principles that were to constitute the educational driving force of the city, theirs was the conviction that the edification of their inhabitants could not be left to chance. The Charter was revised at the 3rd International Congress (Bologna, 1994) and in Genoa 2004, in order to improve and adapt its concepts to the new challenges and social needs we face.

This Charter is based on the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); the World Declaration on Education For All (1990); the Convention, which was adopted by the World Summit on Children (1990), and the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001).

PREAMBLE

Today more than ever the city, large or small, offers countless opportunities for education. However, the city can also be influenced by educating forces used in a negative way. In one way or another the city contains within itself major elements for integral education and training that makes it at one and the same time a complex system, object of educational attention and a permanent, plural, multi-faceted, educating agent capable of counteracting inimical educating elements.

The educating city is a city with its own personality, forming an integral part of its nation. Therefore, its identity is interdependent with that of the country it belongs to. The educating city is not self-contained; it has an active relationship with its environment, with the other urban centres in the nation and with cities in other countries. The goal of this relationship is to learn, exchange and share experiences and thus enrich the lives of the inhabitants.

The educating city must undertake and develop this function while undertaking its traditional functions (economic, social, political and as a purveyor of services) with its sights squarely on the education, promotion and development of all its inhabitants. The educating city will give priority to children and youth, but with a commitment to including persons of all ages in lifelong learning.

The reasons which justify this function are social, economic and political; orientated especially to an efficient, coexistence-based cultural and educational project. These are the great challenges of the 21st century: firstly, "investing" in education, in each individual, to increase his or her ability to express, affirm and develop his or her own human potential, with its uniqueness, creativity and responsibility. Secondly, promoting the conditions for full equality so that everyone can feel respected and can be respect of others, capable of entering into dialogue with others. And, thirdly, unifying all these factors so that we can create, city by city, a true knowledge society that does not exclude anyone, for which we will have to provide, amongst other things, easy access for all the population to the information and communications technologies that can allow everyone to achieve their potential.

Educating cities, with their formal educational institutions, non-formal interventions (for educative purposes external to the formal education system) and informal interventions (neither intentional nor planned) will collaborate either bilaterally or multilaterally in the exchange of experiences. In the spirit of cooperation, educating cities will aid each other in supporting study and investment projects, either in the form of direct cooperation or in collaboration with international bodies.

Humanity is not only living through a stage of changes, but also an authentic change in stages. Persons must educate themselves for the sake of their critical adaptation to and active participation in the challenges and possibilities opening up as a result of the globalisation of all economic and social processes, so that they can intervene, through their local world, in a complex international scenario, and in order to remain autonomous subjects in the face of a flood of information controlled by economic and political power centres.

On the other hand, children and young people are no longer passive subjects in the life of their society, and, therefore, their city. The United Nations Convention of November 20, 1989, which further developed and considered binding the principles of the Universal Declaration of 1959, made children citizens with full civic and political rights. Thus, they can enjoy the rights of association and participation that are suitable to their level of maturity.

The protection of children and youth in our cities no longer consists merely of protecting them as such. It is also important to find them a proper place next to adults who have the civic virtue of finding satisfaction in inter-generational coexistence. At the beginning of the 21st century, all generations are clearly more and more in need of life-long learning opportunities that are constantly being updated.

Global citizenship is now in the making even though we still lack a global democratic structure, even though many countries still have not been able to attain and constitute a democracy that is effective while being respectful of their genuine social and cultural patterns and where democracies with a longer standing democratic tradition can feel satisfied with the quality of their democratic systems. In this context, cities in all countries must act, in their local dimension, as platforms for experimentation and consolidation of a democratic citizenry, as promoters of peaceful coexistence through ethical and civic values education, respectful of the manifold nature of the possible different forms of government while acting as the drivers of widely representative, participatory mechanisms.

Diversity is inherent in the modern city and the feeling is that it will increase even more in the future. Accordingly, one of the challenges facing the educating city is to foster a balance and harmony between identity and diversity, taking into account the contributions of the communities of which the city is comprised and the right of all those living in the city to feel that their own cultural identity is being recognised.

We live in a world of uncertainty that is giving ground to a quest for security, which is often expressed as the negation of the other and as mutual mistrust. The educating city is aware of this and does not seek simple unilateral solutions: it accepts this contradiction and puts forward processes of knowledge, dialogue and participation as the best way forward of living and coping with uncertainty.

Therefore, the right to an educating city is hereby affirmed. This right must be understood as an effective extension of the fundamental right to education. There must be a true fusion, in the phase of formal education and adulthood, of the resources and educational power of the city with the ordinary development of the educational, labour and social system.

The right to live in an educating city must constitute a relevant guarantee of the principles of equality for all, social justice, and territorial balance.

This emphasises the responsibility local governments in the sense of developing all the educational potentialities that the city has within itself, incorporating the principles of the educating city into its political project.

PRINCIPLES

1. THE RIGHT TO AN EDUCATING CITY

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All the inhabitants of a city have the right to enjoy, in liberty and equality, the means and opportunities for education, leisure and individual growth that the city offers. The right to an educating city is understood as an extension of the fundamental right of all to education. The educating city constantly recommits to the lifelong education of its inhabitants in the most varied ways. And to make this possible, all groups, with their own particular needs, must be taken into account.

In city planning and government, suitable measures will be taken to overcome every type of obstacle that restricts the exercise of the right to equality, including physical barriers. This will be the responsibility of both the municipal government and other levels of government that affect the city. The citizens themselves will also be committed to this task on an individual basis as well as through the various associations to which they belong.

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The city will promote education in diversity as well as understanding, international solidarity and cooperation and world peace. This is an education that fights against any form of discrimination. The educating city will foster freedom of expression, cultural diversity and dialogue in equal conditions. It will also avail itself of both avant-garde initiatives and those of popular culture, no matter what their origin. It will contribute to correcting inequalities that arise from cultural production based solely on mercantile criteria.

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An educating city will foster dialogue between generations, not only as a form of peaceful coexistence, but also as a way to seeking out common projects shared by groups of persons of different ages. These projects should be orientated towards civic initiatives and actions whose value consists precisely in their cross-generational character and in the use of the respective skills and values of the different age groups.

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The municipal policies of an educational character shall always be understood as referring to a broader context inspired by the principles of social justice, democratic community spirit, quality of life and the edification of the individual citizen.

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The municipalities shall undertake to exercise their powers effectively in matters of education. No matter what the scope of these powers may be, they shall put forward a broad and integrated education policy, in order to include all the modalities of formal, non-formal and informal education and the different cultural manifestations, sources of information and paths of discovery of the reality of the city.

The role of the municipal administration is, on the one hand, to set down local policies that are seen to be possible and evaluate their effectiveness, in addition to obtaining the legislation required from other central or regional administrations.

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In order to undertake appropriate action, the persons responsible for municipal policy must obtain accurate information on the situation and needs of the inhabitants. Thus, the city shall undertake studies and surveys, which it shall keep up to date and make available to the public and shall establish channels that are constantly open to individuals and groups that allow the formulation of specific proposals and general policies.

Furthermore, the municipality in the course of its decision-making in any area of its jurisdiction shall bear in mind the educative and training-related impact of the decisions made.

2. THE COMMITMENT OF THE CITY

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The city must know how to discover, preserve and display its own complex identity. This will make it unique and provide the basis for a fruitful dialogue with its inhabitants and with other cities. Its customs and traditions must be compatible with international ways of life. In this way it will be able to offer an appealing image without spoiling its natural and social environment.

At the same time, the city shall promote the knowledge, learning and use of the languages that are spoken therein and use them as an integrating element and factor for social cohesion.

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The transformation and growth of a city must be governed by a harmony between its new needs and the preservation of buildings and symbols of its past and of its existence. City planning must consider the enormous impact of the urban environment on the development of all individuals, on the integration of their personal and social aspirations, and resist the segregation of generations and the segregation of people from different cultures, who have much to learn from each other.

The organisation of the city's physical urban space shall meet the requirements of accessibility, encounter, relations, play and leisure as well as a greater closeness to nature. The educating city shall pay special attention to the needs of the handicapped, the elderly and children in its town planning, facilities and services, in order to guarantee them a city environment that is friendly as well as respectful of the limitations that they may have, without their having to renounce their maximum independence possible.

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The educating city shall encourage citizen participation from a critical, co-responsible point of view. To do so, local government must provide people with the information they need and foster, from an integrated perspective, orientation, and educational activities in ethical and civic values.

At the same time the educating city shall use its institutions and civic and social organisations to stimulate citizen participation in the collective project, taking into account private initiatives and other forms of spontaneous participation.

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The municipal administration must equip the city with spaces, facilities and public services that are suitable for the personal, social, moral and cultural development of all its inhabitants, paying special attention to children and youth.

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The city must guarantee the quality of life for all its inhabitants. This requires creating a balance with its natural surroundings, providing the right to a healthy environment, as well as the right to housing, employment, leisure and public transportation, amongst others. At the same time, the city shall actively promote health education and the participation of all its inhabitants in the best practices of sustainable development.

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The educational project that is explicit and implicit to the city's structure and system, the values it promotes, the quality of life it offers, the celebrations it organises, its campaigns and projects of all types, must be the subject of reflection and participation, together with the necessary means that can help people grow personally and collectively.

3. SERVING ITS INHABITANTS

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The municipality will assess the impact of all cultural, recreational, informative, advertising-related and other types of activities offered, and of the realities which make a direct unmediated impression on children and youth. In such cases, the municipality will take non-authoritarian action in an attempt to provide a rational explanation or interpretation. The municipality will ensure that a balance is struck between the need for protection and the need for the autonomy necessary for discovery. The municipality will also provide educational forums and debate, including exchange programs between cities, to enable all inhabitants to fully accept the changes generated by the urban environment.

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The city will make an effort to provide parents with the education they need to help their children mature and make the city their own in a spirit of mutual respect. In the same vein, projects will be developed for educators in general and people (private individuals, or public service personnel) who undertake educating functions often without being aware they are doing so. The educating city will also assure that the police and civil protection forces that depend directly upon the municipality act in concert with these proposals.

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The city must offer its inhabitants the perspective of occupying their place in the society: it shall provide them with the necessary counselling for personal and vocational orientation and make it possible for them to participate in social activities. In the specific area of education-work, we should underline the close relationship that should exist between educational planning and the needs of the labour market.

Thus, the city shall define training strategies that take into account social demand and shall collaborate with trade union and employers' organisations in job creation and in formal and non-formal life-long training.

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The city must be aware of the mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization that affect it and of their various forms, and develop the affirmative action policies needed. Special concern is needed for newly arrived persons, whether immigrants or refugees, who have the right to freely feel that their adoptive city is their own. The city shall strive to foster social cohesion amongst its neighbourhoods and inhabitants of all walks of life.

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Intervention that minimises differences may take various forms, but it must always be based on a comprehensive view of the person, on a model shaped by the interests of each individual and the rights to which all are entitled. Any meaningful action must guarantee coordination amongst the various administrative bodies involved and between the services provided by these bodies. The city shall also foster the cooperation between administrations and its citizens freely and democratically organised in institutions in the so-called tertiary sector, non-governmental organisations and similar associations.

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The city will encourage the formation of associations as a form of participation and civic co-responsibility, in order to channel action that provides service to the community and to obtain and divulge information, material and ideas in order to promote the social, moral and cultural development of the individual. At the same time, the city shall contribute to educating activities so that people can participate in decision-making and planning and in the management processes involved in the life of associations.

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The municipality must guarantee sufficient, comprehensible information and give incentives to its inhabitants to inform themselves of what is going on. Taking into account the value involved in selecting, understanding and treating the large flow of information currently available, the educating city shall establish resources within everyone's reach. The municipality will identify the collectives that require special attention, and will place at their disposal specialised information, orientation and help centres.

At the same time, the city shall establish programmes for training in information and communications technology for all ages and social groups in order to fight against new forms of exclusion.

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The educating city must offer all its inhabitants, as a necessary, growing objective for the community, education in the values and practices of a democratic citizenry: respect, tolerance, participation, responsibility and interest in things public, its programmes, heritage and services.

This Charter expresses the commitment of the cities undersigned to all the values and principles expressed herein. It defines itself as being open to revision and expansion in respect of all such aspects that swift social evolution may impose in the future.