

Proposed Declaration of the 15th International Congress of Educating Cities Cascais/Portugal, 2018

The 15th International Congress of Educating Cities 2018 of the IAEC, held in Cascais, Portugal, on 13, 14, 15 and 16 November 2018, has brought together 118 cities from 24 countries on 4 continents. The central theme discussed and debated at the Congress was “The City Belongs to its citizens”, and the Congress agenda focussed on the importance of Social Cohesion in the City and fostering a feeling of belonging to the city, emphasizing the processes of personal and social development of the citizenry and the resources allocated to improving social inclusion and social harmony.

This theme was further developed around three thematic axes:

Axis 1 – The City: Reconfiguring the city based on people, their needs and aspirations

The theme of this axis focussed on “the construction of an Educating City” linked to the wish to increase the quality of life of the citizenry in the areas of civic construction and well-being, as well as upon the emotional and material plane, using as a basis the aspirations and participation of the city’s inhabitants, inclusion, and equality of opportunity. In this “construction of an Educating City” the question has been posed as to how to ensure a collective policy of transformation of the urban spaces and its surrounding areas, the environmental conditions and social practices, in a new configuration with policy responses that benefit everyone.

Axis 2 – Belonging: Living together and the feeling of belonging.

The theme of this axis centres on the importance of re-thinking the concept of citizen as subject of urban policy, arousing in the citizenry a participatory attitude through which to galvanize their feeling of belonging. With participation and social harmony acting as key elements of the Educating City in the construction of citizenship, the question is posed as to how to ensure constant dialogue between individuals and the community, between the rights and duties of all civic actors, so that everyone can develop a feeling of belonging to their city with a view toward progress and social cohesion.

Axis 3 – People: A city for its people and their life projects

The theme of this axis is centred on the paths that an Educating City must provide its residents so that they feel they are subjects with legal rights and actual possibilities of fully developing their potential. Thus, the question is posed as to what the paths are for developing the learning capacity of all the city's inhabitants, both individually and as a collective, allowing the expression and development of their talents in order to foment personal and social progress.

The theme of the Congress and its respective axis were discussed at theme-based panel discussions, along with Experiences to Debate, Experiences presented on Smart Screens, Workshops for Young People, and study visits to projects in the municipality of Cascais.

Experiences presented at the Congress reflect the dilemmas and challenges arising from the growing complexity of the contemporary city, resulting from the technological revolution and the process of globalization. These changes have brought with them the intensification of the use of urban space, questioning the quality of social relationships and, consequently, social cohesion. At the same time, they pose new opportunities for partnership, citizen participation, the construction of a feeling of belonging, all of them strategic pillars for social cohesion.

The presentations have given rise to sharing innovative proposals in areas such as town planning and urban rehabilitation, culture, schools, physical activity, play, sports, the environment, health, safety, the new technologies, gender equality, mobility, etc., experiences all of which foster growth and the development of individual and community talent and potential. At each session of the Congress, it has been possible to understand the city as a living space in which the process of appropriation and involvement of people makes them feel part of the city.

In the face of the complex changes and challenges of contemporary cities, we can confirm that everywhere at this Congress the accent has been placed on the Educating City being able to create an atmosphere of civic quality and social harmony, configuring the city on the basis of the needs and aspirations of individuals and groups, and ensuring cohesion, inclusion, equality, sustainability and education for peace.

Participation of Young People at the Congress:

The participation and involvement of the citizenry in local decisions and community life is a priority of Educating Cities, in the sense of fostering practices and activities aimed at providing young citizens with the necessary tools for them to actively participate in democratic life, exercise their rights and take on their social responsibilities in the construction of more just and sustainable societies.

The International Association of Educating Cities and the City Council of Cascais, in order to motivate and provide younger generations with the tools to make it possible for them to assume a more active and critical commitment to their city, invited young people from member cities of the Association to actively participate in the Congress.

These young people have had the opportunity to participate, together with the regular delegates, in theme-based panel discussions and study visits; they have also been able to attend specific workshops.

At these workshops young people have shared experiences and projects from their cities and focused on the themes of each of the Congress' axis. They have also had the opportunity to reflect on the future of their cities and propose new initiatives and projects to be implemented.

At the closing of the 15th Congress, the young people have had an opportunity to present the results of their work in a plenary session to the ensemble of participants.

We, the Educating Cities have ascertained that:

1. Contemporary cities are facing complex problems, due to an accelerated daily life rhythm and the flux of people and all types of products and tangible and intangible assets. One of the effects of this acceleration is the creation in the minds of our cities' inhabitants of a "culture of the moment" marked by the precarious nature of interpersonal bonds and the lack of commitment. This situation questions public democratic space and the social and territorial cohesion of the city.
2. The challenges facing local governments centre on the reconstruction of public space as a place that makes it possible to create and reinforce the links and bonds between people and groups, in order to foster social harmony, cooperation, as well as the development of the personal potential and talents of people, and promotion of progress and social cohesion.
3. Reactive political decisions are not efficient to solve the current challenges that cities face; while the anticipation of future scenarios on the basis of the knowledge of the local milieu contributes to provide better answers to people's needs.
4. Educating Cities has a large variety of tools with which to impact public space, especially through the creation of conditions for the participation of the citizenry in plans and projects, which makes consensus and progress possible in forging an active democratic citizenry in pursuit of social cohesion.

Taking into account these considerations, we, the Educating Cities are committed:

1. To articulating proposals, promoting agreements, establishing commitments and coordinating efforts in order to deal with problems that threaten social cohesion and the values and practices of democratic citizenry in the cities, such as participation, equality, respect, tolerance, responsibility and interest in the public sector.
2. To ensure a collective policy of transformation of city space, where town planning is aimed at the creation of accessible public space that fosters creativity, experimentation, play and being in contact with nature, thus promoting sustainability and a healthier life-style for all generations.
3. To foster citizens' participation so that each individual who lives in the city feels that they are legal subjects with real possibilities of fully developing their skills and exercising their right to participate; as well as to involve citizens, specially the younger generations, in the City projects and decisions.
4. To create an urban environment that involves people by prioritising public space as a citizen meeting point, creating conditions for stimulating cooperation and social harmony amongst people of different ages, cultures, backgrounds, socio-economic conditions, etc., so that everyone can feel that they are participants in their city.
5. To pool our efforts in order to maintain and strengthen community links, making possible the interaction between people and institutions, associations, companies, groups... in order to create a climate of civic quality in which everyone can find their place in society.
6. To foster dialogue and inter-generational cooperation in order to best take advantage of the knowledge and exchange of information between generations for the sake of the integration and inclusion of all.
7. To boost the learning capacity of all the city's inhabitants and develop their potential and personal and collective projects.
8. To foster consensus amongst different social actors in the promotion of lifelong learning and education that fosters a spirit of citizenship and that allows for the acquisition of the talents, skills and aptitudes required to face the challenges of our societies.
9. To enable people to enjoy, under conditions of equality and fairness, the opportunities that the city provides in the area of training, leisure, work, provision of services and personal growth.
10. To share with other cities the best practices that enable us to move forward in the construction of more educating cities as domains of social cohesion.

The IAEC is calling on all public, international, national and regional actors, and on the citizenry, to contribute in a co-responsible manner to achieving all these objectives. We wish to ensure that that we believe in, safeguard and respect the spaces of and opportunities for participation in which the voice of all generations can be heard in the construction of the cities of today and the future.

Finally, in this centennial of the end of World War I, we want to transmit a message of hope and peace for a better world.