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Educating Cities

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EDUCATING CITIES
FOR A BETTER WORLD

Educating City Award on Good Practices on Civic Education through Participation



We are living times in which the citizens request a more direct participation in the decisions that affect them, claiming to be heard and that their voice is taken into account. Likewise, the problems that the local governments are facing, are becoming more and more complex, and require cooperation and collective intelligence to be tackled. For all of this, it becomes necessary to open up the municipal decision-making processes to the citizens, and to advance towards a more deliberative model of democracy. On the other hand, through citizen participation the commitment and civic responsibility is regenerated and the feeling of belonging to the city is strengthened.

Faced with this reality, the second edition of the **Educating City Award on Good Practices on Civic Education through Participation** was called with the aim of recognising and providing international visibility to the initiatives that the IAEC cities carry out to include citizen participation as an educating and structuring element of the local policies.

With a total of **62 candidatures, from 49 member cities of 12 countries and 3 continents**, yet another year, the cities of

the IAEC have highlighted their enormous capacity to positively influence and improve the life of the citizens. After an arduous process of deliberation, an international jury selected three initiatives that stand out for their innovative dimension, capacity for mobilization and transformative impact.

In this sense, the three award-winning experiences offer complementary views when it comes to defining a concept such as citizen participation, both broad and polyhedral.

The **Urban Regeneration Plan of the Historic Centre of Gunsan** (Republic of Korea), is a holistic rehabilitation project of the urban centre that has managed to harmonize past and future by linking residents to the territory, empowering citizens and reactivating the local economy.

Women Free of Violence Networks of León (Mexico), is an initiative to empower women in favour of gender equality and the fight against violence that has managed to raise the awareness of women's rights, as well as weaving networks of solidarity and mutual support between them.

And, **Our Neighbourhood, Our City of Setúbal** (Portugal), is a programme of transformation and improvement of the quality of life of a degraded area of the city through participation in the identification and resolution of problems and the promotion of community life.

From the IAEC we would like to pass on our congratulations and recognition to Gunsan, León and Setúbal. Their experiences will undoubtedly be a source of inspiration to other cities in the network. Likewise, we would like to convey our congratulations to the seven finalist experiences, as well as to all the candidatures received. We are convinced that, beyond the awarded experiences, all of them contribute to building more participatory and educating cities.

The Secretariat of the IAEC

c/ Avinyó 15, 4th floor
08002 Barcelona (Spain)
Ph. + 34 93 342 77 20
E-mail: bidce@bcn.cat

Gunsan (Republic of Korea)

León (Mexico)

Setúbal (Portugal)



Gunsan

Urban Regeneration Plan of the Historic Centre

The Korean city of Gunsan is located on the banks of the river Geum, approximately 200km south west of the capital, Seoul. Currently it is notable for being an industrial city of high technological manufacturing and an important port of international trade.

From 1910 to 1945 Gunsan was under Japanese rule and was an important administrative, financial and commercial district. In 1990, a new urban centre would concentrate a major part of the economic activity of the city, causing an unstoppable depopulation and the consequent degradation and abandonment of the old historic centre.

In 2009, Gunsan City Council proposed rehabilitating its old historic centre and managed to turn it into a dynamic neighbourhood, capable of retaining its population and attracting initiatives of innovative economic development, taking advantage of the Japanese cultural inheritance as a focus of touristic interest and historic memory. It therefore opted for a way contrary to that of other Korean cities, that is to say, for the conservation of the Colonial legacy.

Within the framework of the efforts of Gunsan City Council to place people at the centre of the municipal actions, the Community Council of the Residents of the old historic centre was constituted, as a space for generating a shared vision of the rehabilitation project, collecting the different opinions and channelling the agreed proposals. This process led to the design of the Urban Generation Plan, which was structured in 4 major axes: empowering the citizens, the preservation of the historic heritage, the improvement of the urban surroundings, and support for the local economy.

The empowerment process of the citizens led to the creation of the Centre of Support for Urban Regeneration, through which

educational initiatives were proposed aimed at strengthening citizen participation and constituting an active community fabric throughout the process. Some of the activities carried out include: sessions of debate, specialised training and the constitution of local groups of volunteers.

With regard to the preservation of the historic heritage, a total of 172 historic buildings were recuperated and catalogued, with the aim of using them as educational spaces and centres of historic memory. Furthermore, cultural initiatives were developed that joined the past and present, such as thematic festivals with theatrical performances, markets and exhibitions.

The rehabilitation actions of the urban environment to be developed were decided jointly with the residents and consisted of improvements in the sanitation systems, the rehabilitation of buildings, the improvement of degraded spaces, and the design of functional community spaces, among others.

Parallel to this, the area was promoted as an attractive economic development focus both for activities related to cultural tourism as well as for innovative business activities. In this way, infrastructures for tourists and residents were improved (refurbishment of spaces, cultural itineraries, etc.) and others aimed at boosting the local business fabric (business incubator, training programme for young entrepreneurs, etc.).

The project has achieved the fact that the old urban centre of Gunsan has stopped its depopulation and degradation, becoming a dynamic neighbourhood, full of life. Tourism has increased exponentially, from 220,000 tourists in 2013 to more than 3,500,000 in 2017; as well as the opening of new business initiatives in the area, with a growth of more than 200% between 2007 and 2017. In turn, the channels of citizen participation are still valid and have become a fundamental axis of community life management of the area.



Local government, experts and neighbours are working together to improve the habitability of the old historic centre, through the preservation of the cultural heritage, the boosting of sustainable economic initiatives and community participation.

Presented by: Gunsan City Council
Department of Human Resources
Contact: Mr. Keongseung Yang
e-mail: skysilkroad@korea.kr

León

Women Free of Violence Networks

The Mexican city of León is located in the State of Guanajuato, 384 km from the country's capital. The municipality has 1,500,000 inhabitants, making it the most populous city in the State. Thanks to its leather and shoe industries, the city is known as the "Shoe Capital of Mexico".

According to the National Survey on the Dynamics of Domestic Relations in Mexico, one out of every five women over the age of 15 who has been in a relationship has suffered violence from her partner, i.e., 20.9% (National Institute of Statistics and Geography, 2011).

Violence against women and gender-based discrimination hinders the full development and exercising of women rights enshrined in International Treaties. In order to prevent this violence and to foster the participation of women and their self-organization through solidarity groups, the León Municipal Institute of Women set up the Women Free of Violence Networks programme in 2011.

Thus, a group of activists visit educational places, neighbourhoods and communities to publicize the work of the Municipal Institute of Women and the programme, inviting women to join it. The programme provides information, discussion and training spread out over 8 sessions. Using a methodology based on popular education the following issues are tackled: gender, autonomy, violence prevention, the rights of women, legal tools, sisterhood, etc. As the sessions move forward, the women who require psychological and legal guidance are identified and referred to the Institute.

Moreover, thanks to the crosscutting work with other agencies and institutions, talks are provided, for example, on breast cancer

prevention in collaboration with the Municipal Department of Health, or support programmes are offered regarding entrepreneurship and occupational skills in collaboration with the Guanajuato Institute of Women.

On the other hand, coordination with the Department of Development has enabled the programme to spread to different neighbourhoods, and, since 2014, together with the Department of Rural Development, work has begun in rural areas and with indigenous women farmworkers in the fields in order to detect and prevent situations of violence and provide care in the areas of sexual and reproductive health.

The programme is achieving success in empowering women, fostering greater autonomy, freedom and equality. Since 2011 more than 29,000 women have participated in the programme, of which more than 3,000 have been in rural communities and indigenous groups.

In order to evaluate the change, 190 women were surveyed on their perception of relations between men and women before and after participating in the training programme. As a result of the programme implementation, there was an increase in their self-esteem and awareness of their rights, which has helped to break with stereotypes and gender-based prejudices.

One of the keys to the success of the programme is the involvement of the women, whom through their direct link to the activists and the Municipal Institute of Women, act as "multipliers", encouraging other women to join the workshops, providing information to their neighbours and referring them to specialized institutions when a situation of violence is detected.

A network of solidarity is being woven amongst women with the backing of the municipal government in order to put an end to inequality and violence against women and, therefore, transforming society through women's empowerment.



Gender-violence prevention programme that promotes the empowerment of women, fostering their equality and citizen participation through the solidarity of women's networks.

Presented by: León City Council
Municipal Institute of Women

Contact: Ms. Cinthia Aida Valenzuela
e-mail: cinthiaaida@gmail.com

Setúbal

“Our Neighbourhood, Our City”

The Portuguese city of Setúbal has a population of 121,185 inhabitants and belongs to the metropolitan area of Lisbon. Its main economic activities are industry and commerce. The programme is implemented in Bela Vista, a depressed area of the city, made up of a total of 5 neighbourhoods in which 5,769 inhabitants reside.

In 2012 Setúbal City Council proposed intervening in the area of Bela Vista, faced with the deterioration of the territory and the growing indicators of social exclusion observed. It is a densely populated area, which registered 28.7% unemployment and where 53% of the families of diverse cultures and backgrounds lived in situations of poverty. An absence of community fabric was also observed that, along with the lack of public facilities, green areas and the progressive degradation of the common spaces, which created a tension of coexistence between different groups leading to episodes of violence. Furthermore, the youth population showed high rates of absenteeism and premature school dropout, as well as a low level of ties with the neighbourhood.

So as to provide a response to this situation, the City Council made a commitment towards a model of governance that promoted the empowerment and active involvement of the citizens to set in motion collective responses to the common problems identified in their neighbourhood.

The programme began with the holding of meetings with the residents, with the aim of detecting problems, electing neighbourhood representatives, creating working commissions, establishing priorities, elaborating the action plan and defining the respective commitments between the neighbourhood and the Administration. Given the lack of the participatory tradition in the area, a strategy was implemented to empower the neighbours with the aim of strengthening their capacities in the collective planning and management of the community.

Parallel to this, a working group was established that gathered together municipal technical staff from different departments (Housing, Social Inclusion, Sports, Libraries and Museums, Culture, Education, Youth, Health, Public

Works, Cleaning and Maintenance, Green Spaces, Communication and Image, Civil Protection and the Fire Department), whose mission was to set in motion actions agreed with the neighbourhood in a coordinated way.

Initially, the actions focused on the improvement in the living conditions of the neighbourhood (rehabilitation of buildings, refurbishment of common spaces and green areas, etc.), fostering the involvement of the residents by means of awareness-raising activities and the organisation of teams of volunteers. These activities have had a strong impact on the strength of community feeling, on the consolidation of the role of leadership of the neighbourhood representatives and on the improvement of the image of the area, both towards the exterior as well as among the inhabitants themselves.

In a second stage, the residents proposed carrying out cultural, sports, social and environmental activities, self-organised for starting them up. Thus, support groups were organised for the study and “Holidays in the neighbourhood” for kids, the “Health project” was implemented in which neighbourhood health professionals participated in awareness-raising activities previously identified by the neighbourhood, and a music and dance festival was set in motion, “Changing the look”, organised by the youth population.

The programme, “Our Neighbourhood, Our City”, has had a very positive impact on the quality of life of the inhabitants of the area. The improvement of the urban landscape and the boosting of various activities in participatory and self-managed way has favoured the consolidation of a community dynamic that has strengthened the good coexistence, the ties to the territory and the fabric of associations.

In view of the good results, it was decided in an assembly to continue the programme for another 5 years by means of a joint Declaration signed by residents and municipal authorities, which includes the principles of participation and commitments by both parties. This model of action in the area of Bela Vista has received the support of a motion of the municipal Plenary as a public policy to preserve and replicate.

Programme for the improvement of the quality of life of a degraded area of the city by means of citizen participation and the fostering of the community life.



Presented by: Setúbal City Council
Department of Education
Contact: Ms. Maria Celeste Paulino
e-mail: celeste.paulino@mun-setubal.pt