Tampere presents: “Adopt a monument”

In order to encourage citizens to actively engage in the “adoption” of these forgotten yet culturally and historically significant monuments, Tampere launched a project known as “Adopt a monument” in 2008, run by the Vapriikki Museum. The aim is to take care of these monuments or landmarks, make them visible and, in some cases, give them a new lease of life.

The “adopters” are responsible for the care of archaeological sites, historical constructions and little-known buildings such as windmills, train stops, pavilions, chapels, kiosks, bridges, hills, burial mounds, historic or prehistoric fortifications, etc. in need of maintenance works because they are derelict or unused.

To take part in the experience, the volunteers receive basic training to carry out their tasks. Their work as such involves researching the history of the monuments, creating action plans and carrying out maintenance (cutting back vegetation, painting surfaces, repairing windows, cleaning roofs and gutters, removing waste, etc.). They can also act as local cultural guides; organise visits, workshops or presentations; collect scientific data about the adopted site; or design information panels for the promotion of cultural heritage. However, tasks requiring specialised skills are carried out by professionals (archaeologists, restorers, expert curators, etc.). Volunteers can be individuals, communities, associations, companies or public entities, such as a school.

The enthusiasm of everyone involved in the initiative, together with the know-how of the professionals, has resulted in a highly effective experience that has had a great impact. So far, approximately 40 sites or monuments have been “adopted”, with more than 3,000 thousand participants involved in the project. 22 towns in the Tampere Region have signed up to the initiative, which has also been extended to other Finnish cities.

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An initiative to foster volunteer work in order to upkeep, conserve and promote local heritage.
Commitment to the principles of the Charter of Educating Cities is a holistic political choice, far from pro–party interpretations, to the extent that it entails commitment to a city model governed by inclusion, equal opportunities, social justice, participatory democracy, cross–cultural coexistence, intergenerational dialogue, the promotion of a healthy and environmentally–friendly lifestyle, the planning of an accessible and interconnected city, cooperation and peace, among other aspects. All these principles are aligned with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Almost thirty years after it was first drafted, the Charter has culminated in procedures which at different paces and with different scopes have delivered outstanding results in each city.

This is exactly why the Executive Committee of the International Association of Educating Cities (IAEC) thought it would be useful to provide guidelines for the application of the Charter. Hence, the publication of “From reading the Charter to constructing an Educating City”, a methodological guide to be tailored to each city, depending on its course, characteristics and context.

The idea of this tool is for member cities to renew or reaffirm their commitment to making headway in the construction of an Educating City and consolidating their advances in order to prioritise education on the municipal agenda. What’s more, it sets out to encourage new cities to embark upon this fascinating process of constructing an Educating City, either at the initiative of their leaders or encouraged by the community.

The guide suggests two ways to approach the municipal government: the internal route, which underlines the need for true coordination and exchange between the various municipal departments and services, i.e. the famous idea of cross–institutional cooperation; and the external route, which consists of genuine engagement and teamwork between the city council and citizens. Only by talking with people, sharing problems, visions and ambitions, and creating empathies will we construct an Educating City based on the values of social inclusion and cohesion, which the Charter fosters.

We recommend using the guide as a starting point, from which each city can map out its own course, and not as an ending point or closed purpose in itself.

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Being the first woman elected to the Mexico City government is a commitment to the defence of women’s human rights, the fight against misogyny and all forms of gender violence, and the creation of an inclusive city. This is essential to reduce inequalities and provide development opportunities for everyone.

Mexico City is at the forefront of the promotion of women’s rights and the recognition of diverse families. We will also continue working hard on the eradication of gender violence, justice in the event of femicides, educational programmes for the prevention of teenage pregnancy, and the financial independence and empowerment of women in today’s society.

That’s why we hope to overhaul the current Women’s Secretariat to give greater status and scope to its actions, along with improving access to resources and operational capacity. What’s more, the make-up of the government cabinet itself is a clear sign that there’s a firm conviction to working towards an equality-based society.

You have raised the need to build a new relationship with citizens and government that engages inhabitants. How is this open and participatory government materialising?

A democratic government must include channels of communication and citizen participation in decision-making processes that have an impact on their living conditions. Public hearings are an example of this, forming a space permanently open, in which as the Mayor I welcome, listen to and personally support the demands and requests of citizens.

In parallel, strategies and tools for citizen services have been bolstered, in order to improve the services provided by government agencies and mayor’s offices to the population, in terms of complaints, requests and applications. In this sense, the government of Mexico City, via the Digital Agency of Public Innovation, has created the Unified Citizen Attention System, which will operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and allow citizens to follow up their requests and applications.

The use and enjoyment of public spaces by citizens is an indicator of the perception of security in the city. What lines of action are you implementing to reduce insecurity and give the streets back to the people?

The Patrol Neighbourhood Programme (Programa de Cuadrantes) is a strategy to fight crime and foster closer proximity between citizens and the security forces. It was aimed at creating more effective police responses, as well as a more effective control of the police forces, with a view to improving security for everyone living in or visiting the country’s capital city. What’s more, the “Yes to weapon surrender, yes to peace” strategy sets out to reduce the high rates of violence by raising public awareness about the risks of carrying weapons. We’ve also implemented series of transformations in the Centre for Command, Control, Computing, Communications and Citizen Contact of Mexico City to foster the prevention and control of criminal behaviour. That said, it’s essential to implement a comprehensive training and professionalisation strategy for the security forces that gives them more appropriate and sensitised security elements in the care and protection of citizens, as well as for a more effective fight against crime.

Which values do you want to convey through the actions of your government?

Values are positive characteristics of great importance that help us to be better as individuals and as a group. Priority action plans have been set up in Mexico City, such as a) equal rights; b) the sustainable city; c) zero aggression and more security; d) more and better transport options; e) the idea of the cultural capital of Latin America; and f) innovation and transparency. We intend to materialise these plans in government actions to convey a culture of values that are key for harmonious social coexistence. Without values as a reference for how we act individually and towards others, human relationships are weakened due to not harbouring common criteria for life in society. This is based on the principle of fostering and guaranteeing respect, justice, tolerance, fairness, honesty and well-being, among others, as essential basic conditions for the healthy and peaceful coexistence of our society.

More information at www.edcities.org

Photo: EneasMx – CC BY-SA 4.0
Thanks to this initiative, progress is being made in the modernisation of public administration aimed at a greater transparency of institutions and greater citizen engagement with them.

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With 250,051 inhabitants, Vitoria-Gasteiz is a city in northern Spain, nestled in an environment of major biological wealth and with a high quality of life. Proof of this is that the city was nominated European Green Capital in 2012. Its economy has a strong industrial focus and an outstanding development of advanced services.

In 2016, the City Council launched the Citizens Open School as a meeting place to provide training with the aim of fostering citizen engagement, promoting the various participation channels and bringing the institution closer to citizens.

The Citizens Open School sets out to reach the maximum number of people with different profiles: social organisations, municipal staff, policymakers and individual citizens. Therefore, the programme is developed by and for them.

It works on a flexible and creative methodology that combines various formats. Some activities are aimed at training, while others are focused on experimentation, research, communication, evaluation or the proposal of new ideas. All of them are considered as meeting points where it’s possible to share ideas, work together and reach agreements.

Some examples of activities are participatory dynamics; talks or conferences; round tables; experience sharing events; practical workshops on social skills that foster coexistence; talks and workshops for associations to promote membership and streamline the management and implementation of administrative procedures; etc. Another key activity is the “Knowing Your City Council” initiative that sets out to bring citizens closer to council operations and citizen engagement channels by means of open days, appointments with technical managers, and information sessions, among others.

The Citizens Open School is managed by the Civic Engagement Department with the help of a technical secretary’s office. Partners include 24 municipal services, other public and/or private institutions, various associations and leading members of the academia.

Participants in the activities have shown a high level of satisfaction. What’s more, the range of courses has been extended to respond to different interests, which has helped diversify and multiply audiences.

A proposal that fosters the engagement of citizens committed to their community and who play a role in municipal policies.