



INTERNATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
**Educating
Cities**

INTERVIEW

MAYOR OF TORRES VEDRAS

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You are the first female mayor in the history of Torres Vedras, does this imply any changes in the municipal agenda?

Investment in Education, in its different aspects, is one of the areas that I consider a priority for the construction of a more qualified social and economic fabric. My career as a teacher and, later, as Councillor for Education provided me with a set of fundamental tools to achieve the goal of transforming the territory of Torres Vedras into an Educating City.

Also, being a woman makes you have different life experiences, not least because women have traditionally been more excluded from places of power. This awareness gives me a more inclusive vision, in the sense that I immediately realise that everyone has to have access to everything.

You know Torres Vedras well because you have had various responsibilities in the municipal government since 2009. How would you describe the city? What are its strengths and challenges?

The municipality of Torres Vedras has exceptional conditions, we are very well located geographically and have excellent resources at our disposal. The diversity of landscapes, with countryside and coastline, the proximity to the capital and the strong business fabric, especially in the food sector, mean that this territory has a wide range of resources at its disposal.



The people of Torres Vedras are also very welcoming and entrepreneurial. Our entrepreneurs are deeply resilient and drive their businesses forward.

Torres Vedras promotes citizen participation through open governance to foster active and engaged citizenship. May you explain any concrete experience and the response it is getting from citizens?

One of the experiences that the municipality has been carrying out since 2015 is the Torres Vedras Participatory Budget: a participatory methodology of a deliberative nature, through which citizens present, discuss, prioritise and choose the projects they consider most important to improve their quality of life.

This methodology, which is intended for joint learning, aims to contribute to an informed and responsible involvement of the population in the processes of local governance.

We assume participation as a structuring pillar of the sustainable development project of Torres Vedras in its various areas of activity.

In this year's edition, more than 600 citizens participated in the sessions, reflecting the work of proximity that has resulted in the implementation of numerous projects - 17 projects were implemented last year alone. As advocated by the European Democracy Action Plan (2019- 2024), democracy embodies a form of power-sharing that values the interests and needs of all citizens, giving them a voice and a choice.

This year, we went further and established the youth participatory budget, which surprised us with the quality of the proposals presented by the young people.

The "Programme of Support for the Promotion of Ethics in Sport" received the ethics flag by the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth. What is this programme about?

Sport without ethics is not sport, it is something else that cannot be normalised in our society.

Since the promotion of physical activity and sports practice is another of our city's flagships, we were one of the first municipalities in the country to work in partnership with the National Plan of Ethics in Sport of the Portuguese Institute of Sports and Youth.

This programme at local level is carried out with the support of clubs to develop actions aimed at all sports agents (athletes, managers, coaches, families, etc.) involved in the promotion of the values of fair play, respect for others and ethics.

In turn, we are always attentive to promoting these values in municipal sporting events, the most recent example being the introduction of the white card in municipal football competitions. Showing a white card to a sport agent (player, coach, spectator, etc.) aims to reward distinctive behaviour in terms of solidarity and respect, putting ethical values in sport above rivalries or competitive interests.

We believe that this is one more way of reaffirming itself as a truly Educating City in its most diverse aspects.





The City Council has promoted circular economy initiatives in the field of public procurement, among other initiatives to promote the 2030 Agenda?

The City Council is highly committed to the development of circular economy activities in public procurement. An example of this is the work on the School Food Sustainability Programme, which aims to promote local economy and environmental sustainability, stimulating local agri-food chains and reducing emissions in food transport by providing high quality school meals through the purchase of local and seasonal food for school canteens.

The promotion of territorial dynamics, through a local collaborative network, fosters cooperation and intersectoral participation with the involvement of civil society, typical of an Educating City.

Inclusion of the migrant population is one of the challenges of many cosmopolitan and multicultural cities. Could you explain the "Migrant Entrepreneur" programme?

The "Migrant Entrepreneur" is one of the measures of the Municipal Plan for the

integration of Immigrants 2020-2023 and aims to provide a personalised service to immigrant citizens, offering advice and support for the creation, implementation and management of their own businesses. This programme aims to encourage entrepreneurship among the migrant community, thus guaranteeing opportunities to promote their integration in the territory. It involves the Torres Vedras City Council, the Commercial, Industrial and Services Association of the Western Region with funding from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Torres Vedras City Council.

The first step consists of completing a registration form in person, by the beneficiaries, with the support of a municipal technician, in order to clarify some basic issues (personal data, experience as an entrepreneur, idea of business, motivation). This allows to assess whether referring the proposal to the technical team responsible for the ACIRO association is feasible or not.

Since September 2022 and until now, this project accompanies migrants of various nationalities (Brazilians, Poles, Belarusians, Italians) with various business ideas in the area of baking, traditional ice creams, consulting and digital marketing, cosmetics, and educational crafts.

One of the objectives set in the field of education is the prevention of school drop-out and educational exclusion. Knowing that this is an issue that concerns many cities of the IAEC, could you highlight some successful actions that have been developed?

Torres Vedras has no problems that can be considered significant in terms of educational abandonment and/or exclusion. However, we believe that the networking we do with the educational community and the associative network is the greatest secret to prevent them.

There are totally decentralised pedagogical projects in the municipality that favour access to innovative educational experiences (surfing, robotics, swimming, etc.); we have fifteen municipal educational services totally dedicated to educating beyond the four walls of the school; a very strong commitment to excellent school nutrition, pedagogical innovation through a six-monthly organisation of the school year and we have introduced changes in pedagogical and evaluation methods, all of which are a guarantee of the recognition of the importance that school assumes in the life of children and young people.

"Educating Cities, cities for children, cities for all!" is the theme of the 9th National Congress of the Portuguese Territorial Network of Educating Cities. Is it safe to play in the city of Torres Vedras? Which initiatives are being promoted to make public space a friendlier place for children?

Torres Vedras is a safe city, where public space can be enjoyed safely. However, in recent decades we have witnessed a profound change in the play activities of children and young people.

The groups of children who used to play in the streets of our neighbourhoods have given way to children isolated in their rooms, in front of digital screens. Playing outside of school is becoming less and less common, becoming more and more a space and a time of solitude.

Torres Vedras has invested in public space to change this scenario. The pedestrianisation of large areas of the city and the construction of cycle paths, which aim to connect residential areas with schools, are an invitation to enjoy urban space as a space for coexistence and intergenerational sociability.





The implementation of specific play programmes in the urban space and in contact with natural elements are another characteristic of our city. "O Rei Manda Brincar" ("The King commands to play") is a programme that has already reached more than 10,000 children in Torres Vedras, with the aim of giving them back the urban space by cutting off traffic at certain times of the year from the city centre, replacing cars with play areas. On the other hand, conditions are regularly offered every week in a central garden of Torres Vedras, so that children can play freely, with loose materials and in contact with natural elements (water, earth, grass, etc.).

For us it is clear that having children playing in the street is synonymous with happy children and an increasingly educating city!

