EDUCATION AND CULTURE IN THE CITY: COMMUNITY, CRITICAL THINKING AND CREATIVITY

It is important to build inclusive and diverse communities, where the sense of belonging reflects the coexistence of different cultures, religions and languages. We recognise that diversity is an opportunity for enrichment, but it also presents challenges such as exclusion and inequality, which is why it is essential to promote genuine bonds, personal contact and narratives that strengthen the social fabric based on respect, equality and active participation. We also highlight the importance of forming a critical and unrestricted citizenry, capable of participating in the construction of their local future. To this end, it is necessary to promote critical thinking in the face of populist discourse, sectarianism, simplifications and manipulation on social media, which often spread false and biased information. We also want to point out that on the internet, although seemingly free, we actually pay with our data and attention, it also influences our decisions. On the other hand, educating creativity has been undervalued, often seen as something only for artists, when in fact it is an innate ability of all human beings. Educating for creativity involves developing skills to generate new and valuable ideas that can transform and promote change in different areas. The ability to create and innovate is essential to meet the future challenges of cities, so it is crucial to address the cultural and educational needs of citizens by promoting programmes that strengthen their creative capacities and thus strengthen social capital.

FIRST PILLAR– CITY/COMMUNITY

The construction of the city/community in increasingly complex contexts.
The construction of an inclusive and open 'US' that defines the feeling of freely belonging to the city. Everyone's city.

Our cities are now more diverse than they were twenty years ago.

Over the last two decades, this has been one of the most significant elements in the transformation that has taken place in urban areas. These areas are increasingly diverse and pluralistic, and in turn are home to many communities: cultural, religious, linguistic and so on. This diversity is a gateway to great opportunities and generates great wealth, but at the same time it also generates great complexity. It can also lead to processes of exclusion.

Meanwhile, community life is not without tensions and conflicts. Knowing how to address them and find ways to engage in dialogue is crucial to establishing agreements that can improve civic coexistence. In this sense, conflict can become a tool for community building.

One of the challenges that local governments have to face is how, while respecting each constituent community, we can build an inclusive and open 'COMMON US', something that makes us feel that we are part of a community where we all fit in, which is the city. A community of which we are part of - through bonds that we build from a position of freedom. Where the individual can develop their essence, in harmony with community life.

We need to know and recognise each other. We need to have contact and establish bonds precisely with those who are not like us, with those who think or believe differently from us.

In a world that is highly interconnected through technology, we can see, however, that personal contact with physical people, presence, is lacking more than ever.

On the other hand, inequalities are growing disproportionately. These inequalities generate exclusion and call for policies that recognise them and, above all, act to reduce them.

In our municipalities, identity conflicts are present. And contrary to those who preach about multiple identities and their virtues, there are

those who preach about identity essentialism. Some act in favour of cross-cultural relationship, while others do so in the opposite direction, to preserve the 'purity of the original essence'.

Everything we have mentioned so far converges in the 'right to the city' — a right that belongs to every individual and group. A right that David Harvey considers to be not simply the right of access to what already exists, but the right to change it based on our deepest desires.

In these 'new' scenarios, we will necessarily preserve old traditions and old myths, but perhaps it is time to think together that we need to build new narratives that represent us all and allow us to create a community fabric.

We therefore call on the member municipalities of the IAEC and any others that wish to join us to share their experiences in this area, specifically:

1. Actions that promote intercultural dialogue, creating spaces for dialogue and conversation between different cultural, religious and linguistic communities.

2. Initiatives that build a sense of 'us'. Experiences that contribute to building a sense of inclusive community, where differences are recognised and respected, and a feeling of shared belonging is fostered.

3. Projects that celebrate diversity and plurality, showing how these characteristics enrich urban life and contribute to the identity of the city.

4. Educational and cultural experiences that address and seek to reduce inequalities and processes of exclusion and segregation, and promoting policies and actions that benefit the community as a whole.

5. Experiences that facilitate personal contact and physical interaction between individuals from different backgrounds, counteracting the dehumanisation that can arise in a digitalised world.

6. Proposals that take cultural diversity into account and invite reflection on identity conflicts, promoting an approach that values both multiple identities and the need for a cohesive community fabric that reinforces the sense of belonging.

7. Interventions that address the concept of the 'right to the city,' allowing citizens to actively participate in the transformation of their urban environment.

8. Programmes and projects that seek to create new myths and narratives that represent all communities, contributing to the construction of a richer and more diverse collective identity.

The development of critical citizenship and freedom to participate in building local futures. Training and promotion of CRITICAL THINKING to acquire tools against sectarianism, populist discourse, simplifications and information manipulation.

The development of critical citizenship and the freedom to participate in shaping the future of our cities involves the training and the promotion of critical thinking as a key tool to counter sectarianism, populist discourse, oversimplification, and the manipulation of information.

We are witnessing a surprising growth in movements that question scientific evidence. There are more and more followers of bizarre theories, sometimes with dangerous attitudes, such as the anti-vaccination movement, or 'surprising and naive' ones, such as flat-earthers, for example. At times, it seems as if the Enlightenment never happened, as if we were returning to the days of obscurantism.

In a recent article, the director of the Centre for Contemporary Culture in Barcelona, Judit Carreras, quoted Kant and recalled the three questions: What can I know? What should I do? What can I hope for? She pointed out that, three hundred years later, knowledge, action and hope are the enlightened legacy on which to think critically about the present, learn from the wounds of the past and reinvent a world that has stopped believing in the future. She went on to argue that the foundations of this future must be creativity; imagination; strengthening political and emotional solidarity, and critical thinking. We need to do this because we are at a time of extreme ideological polarisation in our societies. Uncritical convictions, attitudes and beliefs mean that many people identify absolutely with a particular group and do not question any of its decisions or actions. These groups are becoming increasingly relevant in our societies and are acting in an increasingly sectarian manner.

Another issue that contributes to this new reality is the information published and disseminated through social media. This information overwhelms us, we cannot digest it, and it is directed at us and loaded with simplifications, manipulations and falsehoods. With media that are increasingly less free, acting more as levers at the service of economic interests, and presenting some dangerous biases, such as the invisibility of certain groups and the omnipresence of others.

Apparently, everything we have on the internet is free. We browse at no cost, but we pay the price of the algorithms that personalise the commercial stimuli we receive. And this is not just commercial influences.

We must promote free-thinking and responsible citizenship so that we are not just consumers or customers, but active citizens who take part and participate in building the present and future of our cities.

We therefore call on the member municipalities of the IAEC and any others that wish to join us to share their experiences in this area, specifically:

1. Experiences that promote critical thinking and reflection on the information we consume, helping citizens to question and analyse sources of knowledge.

2. Projects that address the phenomenon of disinformation on social media and in the media, educating people about the scientific method, the importance of evidence, and how to discern between accurate information and unfounded theories.

3. Creation of programmes that analyse the impact of digital technologies on our lives, discussing both their benefits and risks.

4. Experiences that give a voice to different groups, especially those that are often invisible.

5. Initiatives that train people in active participation, promoting spaces for dialogue where people can express their ideas, listen to different points of view, and learn to argue respectfully and reasonably.

6. Projects that invite citizens to collaborate in urban, educational, cultural, and other transformative initiatives that require analysis, evaluation of options, and informed decision-making, with a view to strengthening their critical-analytical capacity and, with it, local democracy.

7. Initiatives for social conflict resolution, community mediation, and the promotion of a culture of peace through dialogue.

8. Projects that reinforce participatory democracy and the collective construction of the city.

THIRD PILLAR– CREATIVE CITIZENSHIP

The development of creative citizenship that promotes new sensibilities, strategies and tools to face the challenges of society.

Education for creativity has always been somewhat undervalued by educational systems and society in general. There has always been a misunderstood, utilitarian sense of education.

There has also been conceptual confusion between the terms innovation and creativity. And it has been simplified into the idea that creativity is 'something for artists', as if this ability were not inherent to human beings. Educating is precisely about generating abilities, one of which is creativity.

Angélica Sátiro, an educator and specialist in creative citizenship, believes that creating is generating new and better ideas. Ideas that can be applied in various fields through different languages. And these valuable ideas are what transform and promote change. The ability to create and innovate is necessary to address the increasingly complex challenges of the future in our cities.

We understand that in order to generate social capital, it is essential to develop the creative capacity of citizens. Therefore, it is absolutely essential to address their cultural and educational needs and promote programmes for their development. A strong social and creative fabric provides a good foundation for responding to current challenges.

We therefore call on the member municipalities of the IAEC and any others that wish to join us to share their experiences in this area, specifically:

1. Examples of successful educational initiatives that have integrated creativity into their programmes.

2. Models of transformative education that combine creativity and innovation in different contexts, such as community, technological, or cultural projects.

3. Projects that foster citizen creativity: workshops, activities, and programmes that allow citizens to explore and develop their creative potential.

4. Cultural events or workshops where citizens can express themselves creatively, reflect on their environment, and propose innovative ideas through art, music, theatre, or writing.

5. Collaborative platforms or spaces that facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and best practices, therefore strengthening collective creativity.

6. Co-creation initiatives between citizens and the municipality's cultural centres, where artists, young people and adults can express themselves, experiment and share their creative ideas.

7. Educational and cultural experiences aimed at responding to creative challenges that use technology and social media to share ideas, collaborate on projects and participate.