

Educating cities in Latin America

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Abstract This article considers the development of educating cities from a political perspective, illustrating in detail the diversity of organisations and individuals involved and the challenges they are facing. Bearing in mind that educating cities were established from the 1990s onwards in Europe and spread to other continents from there, the purpose of this article is to demonstrate how this proposal was adopted in Latin America. After discussing the basic aims of educating cities, the paper focuses on the Latin American experience, giving examples of existing projects within the educating cities initiative. The authors are particularly interested in the contrast between the political intentions of educating cities on the one hand and the social, economic, political and cultural world on the other hand. They observe that in this context there is a danger of the individual being forgotten, which contradicts the actual intention of the educating city concept. They also discuss the problem of who should carry out the realisation of educating cities and how the various stakeholders might coordinate their actions. Contemplating new directions at the end of their paper, the authors sum up a number of guidelines and offer recommendations for action in developing educating cities.

Keywords Educating cities · Learning cities · Latin America · Practical experience · Mexico City · São Paulo · Medellín · Rosario

Résumé Cités éducatives en Amérique latine – Cet article présente l'évolution des cités éducatives dans une perspective politique, illustrant en détail la diversité des organismes et des individus impliqués et les défis qu'ils rencontrent. Sachant que les

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viles éducatives sont apparues à partir des années 1990 en Europe pour gagner d'autres continents, le présent article vise à illustrer comment ce concept a été adopté en Amérique latine. Après avoir présenté les objectifs de base des cités éducatives, les auteurs se penchent sur l'expérience latino-américaine en citant des exemples de projets menés dans le cadre de l'initiative des cités éducatives. Ils s'intéressent en particulier au contraste entre les intentions politiques des cités éducatives et le monde social, économique, politique et culturel. Ils observent que dans ce contexte, il existe le risque que l'individu soit occulté, ce qui s'oppose à l'intention originelle du concept de cité éducative. Ils abordent par ailleurs la question des personnes chargées de la réalisation de la cité éducative, et des possibilités pour les diverses parties prenantes de coordonner leurs actions. En envisageant de nouvelles orientations, les auteurs récapitulent plusieurs lignes directrices et énoncent des recommandations sur les actions à déployer pour la création de cités éducatives.

Resumen Este artículo analiza el desarrollo de las ciudades educadoras desde una perspectiva política que ilustra con detalle la diversidad de organizaciones e individuos involucrados, así como los retos que enfrentan. Considerando que las ciudades educadoras se establecieron en la década de 1990 en Europa y de ahí se extendieron a otros continentes, el propósito de este artículo es mostrar cómo esta propuesta fue adoptada en América Latina. Después de presentar los objetivos principales de las ciudades educadoras, el artículo se centra en la experiencia de América Latina, ofreciendo ejemplos de los proyectos existentes bajo esta iniciativa. Los autores están particularmente interesados en el contraste entre las intenciones políticas de las ciudades educadoras y el mundo social, económico político y cultural. Observan que en este contexto, existe el peligro de que las personas queden olvidadas, lo que contradice la intención real del concepto de ciudades educadoras. También dialogan sobre el problema de quién debe implementar el desarrollo de las ciudades educadoras y cómo las diferentes partes interesadas pueden coordinar sus acciones. Al final del artículo, los autores vislumbran nuevas orientaciones, resumen una serie de directrices y ofrecen recomendaciones para la acción en el desarrollo de ciudades educadoras.

Introduction

The idea of the “educating city” aims to improve citizens’ quality of life in present-day society. A metropolis is a ready-made network waiting to be tapped and put to use in terms of formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities such as, for example, youth participation programmes, environmental education, value education, the practice of democratic citizenship etc. In this context, the question arises as to what conditions are necessary for a city to be educational, as well as concerns about the social and political processes that threaten it.

This article takes stock of the development of educating cities through an exploratory analysis of the concept and its practical implementation. After discussing the basic aims of educating cities, the text focuses on the Latin

American experience. Giving details about four cities, namely Mexico City, São Paulo, Medellín and Rosario, this paper illustrates the diversity of organisations and individuals involved, and the challenges they face. Unresolved matters and long-term schedules as well as some recommendations for action in developing educating cities are also presented.

Educating cities: the basic aims

Educating cities were originally associated with educational and social aspirations that involved lifelong learning, regarding society as a space for learning and the growing autonomy of local government (Yang 2011). The specific event that inspired them was the decision of a group of local councils that met in Barcelona for the First International Congress on Educating Cities in 1990 with a view to improving the quality of life of Barcelona's inhabitants. Around the preparation of that congress, the term "educating city" was coined and a process of institutionalisation started to grow, evolving into the establishment of the International Association of Educating Cities (IAEC) in 1994 and the adoption of the Charter of Educating Cities (IAEC 2004).

It is important to acknowledge that the concept of an educating city is a collective proposal, a work in progress involving the public; a project which is in itself unfinished and complex (Rodríguez 2007). Furthermore, the notion of an educating city is related to the democratisation of social life and to the possibility of creating a community from or within an urban space, given certain conditions. An educating city "is a project for creating citizenship and democracy" (Rodríguez 2007, p. 30).¹ Hence it corresponds to political proposals that defend the notion of a community of individuals who are talking and negotiating as equals (Rancière 2006; Espósito 2003).

Coincidentally, the idea of educating cities is not a new one (Yang 2011; Rodríguez 2007). Indeed, the notion of an educating city is linked to the idea of a learning society, which originated in the 1960s, when Robert Maynard Hutchins (1968) created this educational category in response to inadequate educational systems which did not meet with general demand. He not only referred to people's increased leisure time and to the pace of change, which made alternative ways of education necessary, but also to the fact that it is possible to regard education as part of social life as a whole and not as an activity, separate in space and time and with rigid institutional divisions. For Hutchins (*ibid.*), Athens in ancient Greece was the educational and social model whereby the city, regarded as *polis* [city state] and public space, educated the citizens through *paideia* [human education] and culture. *Paideia* is associated with virtue which cannot be taught but can be learned (Jaeger 2006), since it entails divine mediation; a spiritual training that does not involve

¹ This article was originally written in Spanish. Translations of quotations such as this one were made by the translator of this article for the purpose of its publication in English. The page references given refer to the Spanish-language source listed in the reference section.

manual activities or specific preparation and makes a social, artistic and political rite of passage possible simply through living a city life.

The education reports to UNESCO of the Faure Commission (Faure et al. 1972) and the Delors Commission (Delors et al. 1996) reaffirmed the value of a lifelong education that is not confined to a specific period of life but goes “from the cradle to the grave”. They also thought that learning should be not confined to school; but that it can extend to other spaces such as the home, the community, the workplace and to other life experiences, enabling the development of multiple skills and creating an environment that is conducive to educating cities. Likewise, the notions of a “knowledge society” and “education for all”, that are now widely used, have become a frame of reference for this proposal.

Within a “landmark” framework for change, the Charter of Educating Cities (IAEC 2004), which is in line with and supports earlier key international agreements,² highlights the fact that the city has both educational opportunities as well as “educating forces used in a negative way” (ibid., p. 2). Furthermore, the Charter mentions the creation of a “global citizenship” that is taking shape without democracy itself having become fully developed. Thus cities should act as “platforms for experimentation” for democratic citizenship whilst respecting diversity (ibid., p. 3).

The Charter explicitly states that educating cities are projects for “persons of all ages”, with no form of discrimination even when giving “priority to children and youth” (ibid., p. 2). The rationale that forms the basis for the creation of educating cities ranges from promoting equality to enabling the development of individual characteristics, within a framework of mutual respect. Moreover, the Charter outlines the creation of “a true knowledge society that does not exclude anyone” (ibid., p. 2), as well as the construction of a space where people live with and accept uncertainty, before prioritising security at the expense of individualism and mutual mistrust.

Within this framework, the Charter establishes three fundamental principles: *the right to an educating city, the commitment of the city and serving its inhabitants*. The first principle is defined as “an effective extension of the fundamental right to education”, including education and training to achieve diversity, understanding, cooperation and dialogue between generations (ibid., p. 4). The second principle, the commitment of the city, refers to both its responsibility to “preserve and display its own complex identity” (ibid., p. 5) and for promoting “the knowledge, learning and use of the languages that are spoken therein and use them as an integrating element” (ibid., p. 5), encouraging people’s relationship with the natural environment, considering the “enormous impact of the urban environment on the development of all individuals” (ibid., p. 5). It “must guarantee the quality of life of all its inhabitants” (ibid., p. 6). The third principle involves promoting participation and association, enabling people’s integration both socially and in the workplace, and being “aware of the mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization

² The Charter is based on the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN 1948); the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (UN 1966); the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN 1989); the *World Declaration on Education for All* (UNESCO 1990); and the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (UNESCO 2001).

that affect [them] and of their various forms, and develop the affirmative action policies needed” (ibid., p. 7). Likewise, the Charter refers to value education, the practice of democratic citizenship, and training in new information technology, in order to avoid new forms of exclusion. In this way, policies of educating cities overlap with policies of citizenship and human rights education, as well as with policies promoting cultural and political rights. As part of the Charter, the International Association of Educating Cities endorses the principle that culture is an essential element of development.

Educating cities: in practice

With this concept of educating cities in mind, we will now take a look at how this works in practice. The process of institutionalising the International Association of Educating Cities (IAEC) has lasted for almost 25 years, whilst the number of cities which refer to themselves as “educating” and endorse its principles has grown substantially. The IAEC currently has 451 city members in 37 countries across five continents (IAEC 2012).

In order to safeguard its internal democracy, the IAEC is organised in a division of powers: it has an executive committee with coordination and executive functions; a general assembly, which is its highest governing body; and a secretariat to carry out plans approved by the assembly (IAEC 2012).

Besides aiming to fulfil the principles of the Charter, the IAEC also strives to foster exchanges between member cities, to influence the decision-making of local governments in the field of educating cities and “deepen the discourse” and “promote its direct manifestations” (IAEC 2012).

The IAEC has arranged international meetings on different matters relating to educating cities. These range from environmental awareness to focusing on education and culture and include themes such as: continuing education or multiculturalism, the role of children and young people in educating cities, citizenship, sport, and others. Since 1990, twelve international congresses have been organised, two of which took place in Latin America (in São Paulo in 2008 and in Guadalajara in 2010). In 2014 the XIIIth Congress will focus on social and educational inclusion in Barcelona. In addition, the IAEC is organising thematic touring exhibitions which present the diverse experiences of countries from different continents; in January 2013, for example, an exhibition on health and culture was presented in Lisbon. The Portuguese cities of Rosario, Sorocaba, Paysandú, Praia and Gandía took part and there were contributions on projects as diverse as a university of the third age for older people, training of municipal employees or the democratisation of sport.

The IAEC has created a databank (The Educating Cities International Documents Databank, BIDCE³), in order to add a dimension of social visibility to the experiences of the member cities. The databank comprises two complementary

³ The acronym BIDCE originates from the Spanish name *Banco Internacional de Documentos de Ciudades Educadoras*.

databases: one that contains reports of experiences and another that has essays, books and recommended reading on the subject. Furthermore, BIDCE distinguishes best practice from other experiences, in order to set a benchmark for other cities.⁴ Today, BIDCE defines current issues such as social inclusion and equal opportunities, volunteering, health promotion and culture as elements of development. In the same way, measures taken by educating cities against racism and xenophobia or against the acceleration of climate change are considered to be priorities. These themes or objectives, organised within the information databank, represent the interests of the IAEC.

The IAEC promotes working in networks, both geographical and thematic ones, with a view to exchanging experiences and theoretical and political dialogue. The IAEC's Latin American Delegation is run by the Rosario town council in Argentina. Brazil has its own network with headquarters in the city of Socoraba which are run by the Ministry of Education of the Prefecture.

According to BIDCE information, is easy to deduce that educating cities did not only originate in Europe, but that they are also concentrated there. Currently, 78 per cent of member cities are grouped into only four European countries, namely Spain, France, Portugal and Italy. By contrast, there are only 59 (13 per cent) registered educating cities in Latin America (BIDCE 2012).

What is striking is the diversity of the fields included in educating cities, which range from the environment, citizenship, coexistence, social development, culture and leisure, participation, training, health, education, road-safety, urban development, youth, violence, to social inclusion, to name but a few. Although thematic networks have been an alternative way of organising this diversity, there is still the question of the complexity of the field, which can be heterogeneous and lacking in coordination between the parts.

In short, it is important to approach the practice of educating cities as a political project that involves both an inventive or creative dimension at a collective level as well as an element of management for local governments. Social inclusion, hospitality, participation and autonomy are constant references in the educating cities debate that have resulted in specific projects.

The point that we propose to address, focusing on Latin America, is the contrast between the political intentions of educating cities on the one hand and the social, economic, political and cultural world on the other hand that tends towards a globalisation that excludes, where environmental degradation and violence, the deregulation and fragmentation of work (Sennett 2006), urban segmentation and social disengagement (Bauman 2011) coexist in all their forms. In this context the individual is forgotten, which is the opposite of what the concept of an educating city intended.

Our other key point is the political capacity of the various governments at their different levels, and civil society as a whole, to implement educating city policies.

⁴ The structure of this information system is similar to that of other databases on educational programmes and ground-breaking experiences such as the Regional Education Innovations Network (INNOVEMOS) of UNESCO's Regional Bureau of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC).

In other words, who should carry out the realisation of educating cities and how the various stakeholders might coordinate their actions.

Finally, what are the limits of educating cities? To what extent is the visible development in an educating city part of a systematic public policy built around this field of improving citizens' quality of life? Is there an overlap with other independent policies, such as local or national governmental cultural or social programmes? In an educating city, government activity coincides with work carried out by organised civil society and private individuals, resulting in an "informal" educational development, which in some cases creates public space and in others entails privatisation or the prevalence of individual interests. Thus the question arises as to whether the inhabitants of an educating city are aware of the meaning and effect of these kinds of initiatives and, to return to a subject previously broached by other authors (Pérez 2005), whether the educating city is visible to citizens and to the outside world.

The Latin American experience

According to BIDCE records, 59 cities from 13 countries on the American continent are currently taking part in the educating cities project. Of these, 72 per cent are concentrated in three countries, namely: Brazil (15 cities), Mexico (14 cities) and Argentina (13 cities). In other countries the number of educating cities is limited (4 in Colombia; from 2 to 3 in Chile and Uruguay) and is even down to a single city in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Venezuela respectively. In terms of UNESCO regions, Canada, Puerto Rico and French Overseas Territories are not part of the Latin American and Caribbean region. So, deducting these, 56 cities in 10 Latin American and Caribbean UNESCO Member States are currently taking part in the project (BIDCE 2013).⁵

Meanwhile, each city has gone through many different experiences, with Brazil being the country with the largest number of practices recorded in BIDCE. The municipalities, the prefectures or the town halls are the predominant authorities that take charge and lead the processes that are part of educating cities' policies.

The experiences are very varied, and in response to citizen's demands they concern different areas of urban life. They can be classified as follows:

- a) Different types of *environmental education programmes*. For example, ecological neighbourhood schools; eco clubs for children and young people in the neighbourhoods; environmental education in schools; hiring the unemployed for regenerating programmes in dirty, run-down areas; spring regeneration programmes and the conservation of stream banks and waterways to encourage citizens' collective responsibility; a river regenerating programme that is central to the city, combining work on the coast with research about

⁵ It should be noted that some of the BIDCE records are not up to date, since for example, Buenos Aires and some other Argentinian cities such as Córdoba, Mar del Plata and Vicente López in the province of Buenos Aires, have been omitted from the databank.

- student knowledge, and research on the legitimate use of the river and public-user rights of the coast.
- b) *Educational programmes to promote school life and prevent violence.* For example, *Jugar en el recreo* [“Playing in the school yard”], which aims to train students to develop harmonious relationships during everyday school life; *Abriendo espacios* [“Opening spaces”], which proposes the opening of schools on Saturdays; or a *Justicia restaurativa* [“Restorative justice”] programme in schools, which aims to resolve conflicts peacefully through the restoration of family/friendship ties and trust; and also programmes to encourage students to stay on at school, through scholarships and other measures.
 - c) *Youth participation programmes in school*, such as the training of young school governors.
 - d) *Education and work programmes* such as vocational training for young people, a University for Entrepreneurs, a University of the Third Age, a tourist services training programme; schooling programmes for workers, particularly for those who carry out stigmatised jobs such as rubbish collection.
 - e) *Educational and social inclusion programmes* for young people with disabilities, both in schools and in the city.
 - f) *Digital inclusion programmes* for children, young people and adults.
 - g) *Historical memory programmes*, such as “The Living Classroom”, to convey relevant facts about national history.
 - h) Different types of *reading programmes* in the city: books in the metro, books that travel (bookcrossing), mobile libraries, storytellers and book fairs, amongst others; several of these programmes identify literacy as a medium of social inclusion.
 - i) A great variety of *cultural programmes*: craft fairs, cultural workshops for children, music festivals and others.
 - j) Different types of *sports programmes* that encourage a healthy lifestyle.
 - k) *Health programmes*, such as dental health, prevention of breast cancer for women of limited financial means, or “Fine Dining” (nutrition).
 - l) *Urban participation and coexistence programmes*, such as participatory programmes of design or remodelling of urban spaces (parks, squares etc.), in order to create a sense of belonging and ownership in the citizens and enable them to develop new relationships with the environment; also participatory budgeting programmes; and marathon cleaning projects in the city.
 - m) *Youth participation programmes* in the city, such as a child counselling service, a municipal youth counselling service, youth councillors, a cultural youth centre, thematic youth forums in the street to develop public policy on youth; a youth participatory budgeting programme that aims to strengthen links between local administration and youth organisations, as well as creating an official space where people can participate.
 - n) *Democratic management programmes* in the city, through the creation of participatory municipal councils, municipal conferences and city congresses.
 - o) *Information systems on urban planning* to establish links between providers and users.

- p) *Teacher training programmes* that range from initial training programmes where the educating city is part of the curriculum to training programmes on “anti-racist and anti-discriminatory education”.

The above list demonstrates that Latin American educating cities are indeed tapping their networks and resources to improve their citizens’ quality of life and to provide them with a wide range of opportunities for formal, non-formal and informal learning. They aim to have healthier citizens who share “their” city peacefully and who have a sense of ownership which also moves them to exercise their right of active political participation.

Given that we are living in times of rapid change, the city should combine its efforts, pool its resources and advance in a truly democratic and participatory society, taking greater advantage of its educative programmes. In the next section we look at sample cases from Mexico, Brazil, Colombia and Argentina in detail.

Case studies

Mexico City, Mexico

Mexico City, this constantly expanding megacity of uncertain boundaries,⁶ is growing without any apparent order. Social inequality and cultural diversity go hand in hand here, an incentive to try and improve the situation by joining the educating city project. Being the capital of Mexico, Mexico City is also a multifaceted place where the indigenous city – even though only protected archaeological sites remain, its people and its languages are still very much alive – lives alongside the colonial and the modern city. The historical centre is an informal learning space in a permanent state of flux, although there are also formal spaces like the museums, where the “three cultures” converge and the government organises all types of public, free, large-scale activities, ranging from art exhibitions, book fairs and music festivals to complex recreational activities in locations like swimming pools in summer or ice rinks in winter.⁷ Another relevant feature of Mexico City is the so-called informal sector of the economy: street vendors of all types, together with cultural expressions such as traditional ceremonial dancing. The historical centre is also a large area in which people spend time together eating anything from traditional dishes to so-called *chatarra* (junk) food. This cultural diversity creates an educational space in the historical centre that influences, to a greater or lesser degree, the people who frequent those areas. In this context, the Ministry of Culture of the Federal District refers to the city as the “city of cultural rights”, alluding to the right to historical and cultural memory, the right to education and artistic

⁶ Mexico City has a population of almost 9 million inhabitants when taking into account the municipal neighbourhoods of the Federal District [*Distrito Federal*, (often abbreviated D. F.); another term for Mexico City], but between 22 and 23 million if the conurbation areas are included (INEGI 2010).

⁷ None of these activities are in fact registered as part of the Educating City programme. Some of these activities come under the Ministry of Culture of the Federal District.

training, the right to one's own identity and the right to access and participate in cultural life (MoC 2012).

It is the city council which is implementing the educating city initiative, bringing together several Federal District public organisations (the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Civil Defence, the Ministry of Rural Development and Equity for Communities and the Institute for Sports as well as universities and other civil society organisations. The programmes and activities are very varied, ranging from: a sustainable urban agriculture programme, using intensive cultivation techniques in order to create employment and improve the family and community economy; to the family cycling circuit, where streets are designated for the exclusive use of bicycles, scooters and skateboards or for people walking or jogging. It should be pointed out that some of the programmes are aimed at sections of the population with a high number of school dropouts who are lagging behind and where social marginalisation clearly exists. For sections of society defined in those terms, there are programmes such as "Living together for citizenship education" which include different modules (preventative health measures, the environment, a culture of lawfulness project etc.), or the scholarship programme *Prepa Sí* [High school, yes], organised in over 100 parks and aimed at young people who run the risk of not completing their upper-secondary education. Other programmes such as "Move by Bike" are aimed at the middle classes.

The Ministry of Culture of the Federal District is conducting a series of activities that can be included within the guidelines of what an educating city does, even though they are not part of the project as such. These include: a) a network for cultural community development, which enables groups or collectives to present projects and make the most of public spaces; b) the Factory for Arts and Crafts (FAROS), which promotes cultural activities in marginalised sections of society and operates in the different districts of the city; and c) many different street activities, ranging from theatre to cultural walks, a network of museums, artistic passageways (particularly in the historical centre), as well as the annual International Book Fair which also takes place in the historical centre. The Ministry of Culture is governed by accountability and submits a citizen's report on its work to the population (MoC 2012). Significantly, it coordinates its activities with some educating cities programmes, such as *Prepa Sí*, whilst it actually belongs to another network, the World Federation of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), which includes among its members cities considered to have a high level of cultural activity, namely: Montreal, Buenos Aires and Lille.

São Paulo, Brazil

A super-city of 11 million inhabitants (in 2010), or even 21 million if one includes its conurbation areas, São Paulo is a location that is marked by inequality and poverty. Despite many initiatives to improve the situation, it still is a violent, unequal city with a significant mass of young people who are excluded from society. In this context, a series of measures aimed at social inclusion are being developed mainly through education and sport. The objective is to reclaim the street for

educational programmes, such as *Calles de ocio* [“Street leisure”]. This programme, targeting young people, aims to preserve popular forms of recreation in the streets. With regard to sport, an annual 24-hour sports festival is organised, with 2,000 different activities and 2.5 million participants. Similarly, the Young People’s Cultural Centre aims to be a reference point for young people, providing information, cultural services, workshops etc., as well as enabling them to express themselves. Thematic youth forums are meeting places that enable public policies to be developed and allow projects to be adapted. Furthermore young people and adults are encouraged to produce their own blogs which then empowers them technologically. The *mensajeros de São Paulo* [São Paulo reporters], who presented their experiences on the Internet, are a good example of this.

What is remarkable is how São Paulo encourages the development of a society without prejudice, used to living with difference, with initiatives like the *Parada del Orgullo Gay* [“Gay Pride Parade”] that brings together millions of people every year in the Avenue Paulista. Another of the many examples of how São Paulo articulates public policy, using the concept of the educating city, is through the *Virada Cultural* or White Night art festival. The inhabitants of the capital can attend, continuously for 24 hours and free of charge, over 350 events in 80 different parts of the city (Kassab 2008). Other activities include hiking and cycling excursions.

Medellín, Colombia

Medellín is a medium-sized city, the second-largest city of Colombia, which had almost 2.5 million inhabitants in 2012. It, too, continues to be a centre with high levels of inequality and violence (DANE 2012) despite many initiatives to improve the situation.

Due to rapid urbanisation, in the early years of the 21st century Medellín resembled a fragmented city, with vestiges of fear left by drug-trafficking networks (Jurado Jurado 2003). However, even back then, the sculptures by Fernando Botero stood proud in the streets of the city centre, whilst some parks looked like enclosed urban backwaters behind bars. Today, the mayor’s office (Fajardo 2007) talks about important social changes which are linked to a policy of promoting participation and a sense of belonging. As an educating city, Medellín has had significant experiences with positive results, namely: a network of residents in the outskirts of the city, a programme entitled *Aula abierta: escuela en la calle para los de la calle* [“Open classroom: a street school for street people”], designated jogging tracks and walkways, restoring programmes for parks in order to turn them into living spaces, library parks, children’s playgrounds and a sports observatory.⁸ City council policy allocates a central place to education. The programmes provide care for the displaced population, people living on the street and people deprived of their liberty, as well as giving priority to children, young people and the elderly (BIDCE 2012, city of Medellín).

⁸ The sports observatory is a centre for diagnosis, consultation, analysis and opinion for the public provision of services in sports, recreation and physical activities.

Rosario, Argentina

In terms of its population (around one million), Rosario is the third-largest city in Argentina. It is located in the Humid Pampa region, the most prosperous area of the country. One of the most interesting experiences to come out of the educating city project is *La ciudad de los niños* [“The Children’s City”], a programme based on the idea of the teacher Francesco Tonucci (2003), that if the city can be thought of from a child’s perspective, it will be adapted to suit both adults and children. The aim of the programme is to restore public spaces for games, communal living and encouraging plenty of social exchange, whilst looking for new links between the public and private sectors. Other programmes include: a) *Árbol de vereda* [“Pavement trees”], a manual providing information for local residents to take responsibility for the care and conservation of trees planted on the public thoroughfares; b) participatory budgeting for young people, in order to involve this section of the population in local government; and c) a cleaning marathon, to promote city hygiene and encourage residents to take part in a local cleaning routine (BIDCE 2012, Rosario).

Relevance and effectiveness of the experiences

The programmes and approaches described above, and a number of others analysed by the authors of this paper, include some features that account for the social and cultural significance of educating cities:

- a) They are intended as *a response to critical situations*, such as school violence, vandalism in school grounds on weekends, dropping out of school, learning difficulties with reading, environmental pollution, amongst others.
- b) They are *locally-based* and reflect needs of specific socio-economic development, for example tourism training is carried out in areas where it is required.
- c) They aspire to stimulate *cultural memory and a sense of social belonging*, for example the programmes that aim to reclaim Afro-American or indigenous cultures.
- d) They seek to *include citizens through active participation*, using a variety of methods which advocate that citizens take an active role rather than being passive users.
- e) They are mainly *promoted by local authorities*, with the support of universities or civil society organisations as well as other stakeholders.
- f) They are *adapted to different population groups*, in particular groups which have become marginalised or at risk, for example, and to whom a social debt is owed. In some cities programmes are adapted to migrant or displaced groups, or disabled people; in other cities the emphasis is placed on poor populations with low levels of education, unemployed youth, or people who have been subject to conditions of imprisonment.

- g) They aim to *make the output of the city inhabitants visible*, particularly that of young people, encouraging their independence and their status as productive citizens.
- h) They *promote the setting up of groups or collectives*, both in terms of exchange as well as production of goods; with learning communities and working in networks being part of their main objective.
- i) In societies where *community and family ties* have been broken, these programmes aim to create different types of welcome centres.
- j) They appeal for *voluntary work* and particularly youth volunteering.
- k) They *combine a gender approach with the pursuit of equal opportunities* and the elimination of different types of discrimination (ethnic, cultural, generational and others).
- l) They aim to *reclaim previously-used routes and thoroughfares* or create new ones to improve accessible roads. One example is the retrieval of the urban coast around the Rio de la Plata [River Plate] on which, historically, Buenos Aires had turned its back.

In general, the Latin American educating city programmes have relied upon a number of conditions that facilitated their emergence and development, such as for instance:

- a) The *juxtaposition of formal educational opportunities with the less formal and the informal*, resulting in a type of blended learning that has already been acknowledged, since the 1990s, as the great educational potential of cities (Trilla 1990); together with the growing value afforded to the principle of lifelong education and the knowledge society.
- b) The *rise of local government*, particularly in some capital cities or large cities which managed to obtain political and administrative autonomy from the 1990s onwards (Mexico City, Buenos Aires).
- c) A *greater presence of organisations from civil society*, to complement the roles played by city authorities.
- d) *Spontaneous and supportive practices of citizens*, together with a mindful and caring attitude to the space that the city provides.
- e) The growing debate around *the need to democratise social life* and the crisis of representative democracy.
- f) The public articulation of *a rights-based approach*, particularly the belief that “we have rights”.

Summing up the above description of various programmes of developing learning cities, it is possible to say that the achievement of opening public spaces, together with the establishment of educational processes, has made changes in people’s daily lives.

But the obstacles to educating cities becoming a reality in the region continue to be significant. One of these obstacles is globalisation, the excluding nature of which reveals itself in Latin American cities in different but interrelated ways. On the one hand, there are deep socio-economic divisions which have led to a coexistence in

urban belts of the closed neighbourhoods of the upper classes, the middle-class neighbourhoods, and the slum areas in conurbations which sometimes even lack the most basic facilities. On the other hand, a process of *angelinización*⁹ has taken place in some cities, where the historical centre loses its predominance and many local centres are created which then become alternative spaces for public life (Cabezudo 2006).

Within a context of unbridled capitalism, where people work only piecemeal and are forced to rely on scraps of work, one of the major obstacles is that the inhabitants of the city begin to lose sight of the overall picture: some live nearby, others travel from one end of the city to the other to get to work; and thus immersed in their daily routine, they have little empathy for their fellow human beings or lose sight of reality. According to Moacir Gadotti (2002), there is a tendency to turn one's back on the city, to deliberately ignore things, by adopting an out-of-sight-out-of-mind approach to avoid being affected or moved by things. Equally, there are those who do not get involved with the city or with other people and yet contribute to the destruction of the city in different ways. The piles of rubbish in the parks after a weekend and dogs let loose by their middle-class owners destroying the flower beds are like metaphors for this grab-all approach of individuals. However, urban hostility cannot be understood by appealing to the individual characteristics of the city's inhabitants but by trying to observe the structural conditions that created them in the first place.

Despite relevant experiences which highlight the value of education, there are still very few systemic evaluation mechanisms to gauge the benefits of developing learning cities. In some cases, even people who benefit from these experiences, as well as the general public, do not associate the benefits they are enjoying with the educating cities initiative. In this context, the measures implemented by educating cities in Latin America are still barely visible to the average citizen. It is worth recalling the words of a homeless woman from Porto Alegre, who held the social status of a passive beneficiary of welfare practices, "I live on people's charity and I don't even know what you mean when you talk about educating cities" (Pérez 2005, p. 138). These words could have been uttered by any of the many inhabitants of Latin American cities which are part of the educating cities network. Therefore, the need to make the results visible in order to raise awareness of the value of educating cities is currently an issue which still needs to be addressed.

In the same way, it is clear that educating city programmes are as diverse as they are scattered in different city areas and sectors. Even the IAEC itself, and BIDCE, seem more like information sources than a meeting place for study and training where people build up theory and practice together.

Finally, due to the dearth of quantitative information on the financial budget cities have spent on programmes relating to building educating cities, and a lack of data on the impact of these programmes, it is very difficult to determine their effectiveness in terms of cost and benefit. By the same token, it is also not possible to analyse the effectiveness of coordination among governmental agencies, civil

⁹ This term refers to the city of Los Angeles, California, which experienced the loss of its historical centre (Cabezudo 2006).

society organisations and other stakeholders in promoting the development of educating cities.

New directions

Contemplating new directions reaffirms some of the guidelines that have been in place since the creation of educating cities. The *first* one is to develop and implement the formal, the non-formal and informal learning opportunities in a more systematic way (Trilla 1990). The *second* one is to assess the slogan “learning about the city, for the city, in the city” and cultivate a critical eye and a productive routine among the inhabitants (Trilla 1997) through training in and out of school. The *third* guideline is to illustrate the progress an educating city is making in the various thematic areas of interest. This could be done by using a system of indicators that reflect the value and the priority of the measures carried out; as exemplified in some cities in other regions like Victoria (Canada) or Kakagawa (Japan).

In addition, Patricia Pérez (2005) brings two central aspects to the debating table that can help to break new ground. On the one hand, there are those who can be seen and heard in the city. They are expected to take part in an educating city initiative and are authorised to do so. On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that there is a bustling life in urban communities and that there are consequently many hidden educational opportunities, which the state cannot and should not control and which go beyond the limits of the educating city as a local government proposal. Furthermore, Pérez (ibid.) reminds us that it is necessary to foster a dialogue between the programme, in this instance the institutional proposal of an educating city, and its beneficiaries, on ways of learning in the community. This will prevent the educating city from becoming a “top-down” proposal from the state to civil society, and avoid reducing citizens to being mere service users.

It is certainly possible to make recommendations for action in terms of creating or strengthening networks, technical committees, support groups, learning and practice communities and training spaces. However, as in the case of citizenship education,¹⁰ of which the educating city is a part, the question is neither technical nor is it about strategy; rather it is a political question since it involves a community of equals.¹¹ Within this framework, a more radical approach from local government is required, in dialogue with national government entities and with organisations from civil society, which recognises that “anybody”¹² can participate and contribute to the city as an educational space with their knowledge.

¹⁰ The term citizenship education refers to teaching people about justice and how to make decisions for the common good and giving them the competence to undertake initiatives to improve the quality of the environment.

¹¹ This stance on the political status of citizen education is supported by Henry Giroux (1983, in Chapter 5 on Critical theory).

¹² “Anybody” is a classification of French philosopher Jacques Rancière (2011) that has been taken up again.

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