



### *The political forum*

## City's Leadership in Environmental Education

Led by Normand Brunet, associate professor at the Institute of Environmental Sciences at UQAM, the "local community" component of the Political Forum brought together four speakers: two elected officials from the twin towns of Montreal and Lyon, the Director of the Department of Education for Sustainable Development from the City of Madrid and a Spanish university student, member of the Research Group in Environmental Education at the autonomous University of Madrid.



### In Spanish cities

Urban ecology researcher, Mr. Diego Garcia-Ventura, started off by putting forward a framework for assessing the degree of municipal involvement in environmental education. In recent years, his team applied a relatively simple methodology to nearly 70 municipalities in Spain, with populations ranging from 25,000 to 3 million people. Initially, city managers met to identify key environmental challenges they face as senior municipal officials. Three issues emerged: **urban growth** (with its paradoxical effects of **densification** and **sprawl**), **mobility** (covering both issues of **transport** and **pollution**) and **resources squandering** (linked to *waste management*).

Subsequently, for each urban centre analyzed, EE actions and investment were identified and classified into eleven categories:

1. Municipal spending (*per capita*) on environmental education;
2. EE managerial experience (how many years);
3. City Council Training in EE (how many years);
4. Training of municipal EE centers (number of years);
5. Diversity of EE tools (number);
6. Variety of topics (number);
7. Diversity of target audiences (in order of importance);
8. Variety of communication resources (in order of importance);
9. Duration of special projects EE (days / year);
10. The awarding of scholarships;
11. Citizen participation (*per capita*).



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In compiling and cross-checking all these variables (PCA or ACP Analysis - Principal component analysis), researchers found that Spanish cities are primarily concerned with the **"programming (or design)"** of their environmental education activities. First they attach importance to the diversity of target audiences, the number of topics and the variety of educational and communication tools developed. The second object of concern is the **"consolidation"** of their corporate EE guidelines. For researchers, this category includes training managers, municipal employees and elected officials. Finally, dedicated budgets and citizen participation complete the picture. This is the category **"funding and participation."**

Researchers have also established "stages of development" in municipal EE strategy. Initially there is the city with virtually no educational project; this is the case of a minority of cities surveyed. Then follows the start-up phase which is the city acknowledging the role it can play in EE. In the third stage, the municipality takes action. It can do so in "classic" fashion, in "innovative" or in "experimental - or daring fashion." Most Spanish cities fall into the first of these three categories. In conclusion, Mr. Garcia-Ventura notes that:

- almost all environmental education programs implemented in Spanish cities are inspired by the traditional approach that focuses on children as the target and deals almost exclusively with the issue of "nature." If we want to articulate a version of urban environmental education in terms of the main issues identified by the managers interviewed in this study (growth - mobility - resources), the focus needs to shift;
- the (11) ) subjects selected to describe environmental education practices can be useful to position a city along the continuum of strategy development for environmental education, but more needs to be done;
- the officials and professionals operating within the municipal structures (who represent the link between political authority and citizens) are the first to be involved in developing a municipal EE strategy;

The importance given to environmental education in cities depends on the answer to the basic question: **do we want a city shaped by its citizens or citizens conditioned by the city imposed on them?**



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## Lyon

Mr. Bruno Charles Bruno is the Vice-Chairman of the *Conseil d'agglomération du Grand Lyon* in charge of the Education Plan of Action for Sustainable Development (French acronym: EDD). For this community of 1.3 million inhabitants, an estimated € 1 (euro) *per capita* budget is devoted to environmental education. The city employs about 80 educators

From the outset, Mr Charles positioned the EDD plan as the reflection of a fundamental change in policy. Adopted in 2006 following a participatory process mobilizing the whole education community and all environmental resources of the Lyon community, the Action Plan is the reference roadmap for both the municipal sector and the institutional sector and associative network (community bodies). This Action Plan is part of a set of basic texts underpinning EE interventions in the city and its 57 municipalities. Alongside the Action Plan, two urban ecology charters and Agenda 21 were adopted. The Agenda 21 is updated every two years.

In its internal operations, the city has set up in each major administrative unit a respondent system to relay information and ensure awareness raising and possibly, staff training on all environment-linked issues.

The proposed strategies advocate citizen empowerment. Some examples follow. Wherever possible, citizens are involved in planting trees, helping to reduce vandalism significantly. To increase citizens' awareness of waste management, a teaching circuit was created that includes a visit to a sorting center for recyclable materials. The school component of Agenda 21 has inspired the establishment of a network of walking buses providing safe routes to encourage active child transport by focusing on parental involvement. Among the strictly educational products developed for children aged 8 to 11 years, Mr. Charles discusses the eco-citizen passport, jointly produced by the *Inspection académique du Rhône (Éducation nationale)* and the *Agglomération du Grand Lyon*.

These various initiatives, geared towards all citizens adopting responsible behaviour, inspired several other major metropolitan policies including the *Climate Plan*, the *Urban Transport Plan* and *Policy for the Protection and Management of Agricultural and Natural Areas*.

In conclusion, Mr. Charles took time to highlight the importance of coherence so that meaningful change can take place. As these changes are needed in the global environmental situation, citizens need to grasp the urgency and take action. To this end, the municipality has to set an example if it wants to transform "voting citizenship" into a "citizenship of action."



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## Madrid

Mrs. Sol Maria Mena Rubio's position at this forum was that of a senior manager in Madrid's municipal government. The Spanish capital has a population of 4 million inhabitants and the public administration counts 26,000 employees. The speaker is the Service Director (*Departamento*) of Education for Sustainable Development.

She first reported on practical achievements attributed to progressive policies adopted in the areas of air quality, improved energy performance, promotion of active transportation (cycling), sustainable development, etc.

For the younger audience, the municipality has worked closely with school officials to develop a scholastic Agenda 21 which recognizes the importance of "learning communities" and which provides a methodological guide to support efforts. Municipal stakeholders, especially the police, have been invited to become involved in school projects, drawing on the theories of Francesco Tonucci, renowned pedagogue, in which a safe and welcoming city for children is naturally the same for all citizens.

However, the achievement of all this is compromised by the persistence of all types of obstacle: resistance to change, lack of budget, mistrust and difficulties in working transversely, fear or limited knowledge of participatory processes, etc.

Ms. Mena Rubio believes that the approaches developed in EE may help develop public policy stemming from transversal work. This represents a new culture and generates new areas for deliberation, promotes information sharing, builds knowledge, fosters trust, maximizes resources, promotes the distribution of costs and benefits, helping to overcome difficulties and at the end of the day creating the conditions for genuine participatory management in order to bring together people's expectations and the plans put forward by officials. Transversality is a tool that helps us work and live together. It creates alliances, networks, and collective ways of tackling problems and finding solutions.

For the head of environmental education in Madrid, the municipality must develop EE tools and planning and management forums based on interconnection and interaction among municipal stakeholders. And depending on the nature of actions and programs to be developed, it must ensure a proper way for citizens to be involved.



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## Montreal

Mr. Alan DeSousa is a member of the executive committee of the City of Montreal and is in charge of environment and sustainable development, parks and green spaces and Blue Montreal. From the outset, he positioned the role of environmental education in the municipal setting as a preferred tool of accountability. Modern cities can no longer be managed in authoritarian fashion and thus we need to develop dialogue mechanisms to reconcile multiple interests and ensure we all live better while respecting the ecological balances around us. In this regard, environmental education for sustainable development represents one of the cornerstones of the Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development adopted in 2005.

Mr. DeSousa reviewed the many avenues EE takes in the City of Montreal, starting with the educational activities of the Nature Museums. The four scientific institutions such as the *Botanical Garden*, *Insectarium*, the *Biodome* and the *Planetarium* are under the purview of the City of Montreal and all have educational missions, both inside and outside their walls. The Montreal area also has 17 parks, some of which have “nature park” status. In these places, education projects are conducted in partnership with community organizations which greet and present to various groups (schools, associations, general public) and adjust programming according to site characteristics (discovery, preservation, heritage development, etc.) whenever the objective is to improve the relationship between urban human beings and their environment.

A final form of environmental education supported in Montreal involves what Mr. DeSousa called eco-citizenship education. At the heart of this approach: the *Éco-quartier* program. Under this program, which celebrates its 15th anniversary in 2009, the city provides financial support to community organizations working at neighbourhood level to help citizens become more responsible for their environment through re-appropriation of their living environment. Initially, the *Éco-quartiers* activities mostly concerned issues of cleaning up, beautification and waste management (recycling). Over time, the scope of concern became broader but remained true to the realities of the neighbourhood. *Éco-quartiers* bodies are also active in installing community composting sites and developing green lanes, and providing active support for local campaigns to eliminate pesticides; each summer since 2005, *Éco-quartier* agents have been running environmental awareness patrols.



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## Conclusion

In the short time remaining, the elected officials were invited to comment on a participant's question decrying the lack of bold political leadership initiatives for "core" initiatives such as organic waste recovery and composting in a city like Montreal. On this issue, the first speaker, Mr. DeSousa mentioned the citizen mentality which is still not ready to change habits. He concluded on the importance of education before, during and after the introduction of environmental programs.

The facilitator thanked all contributors and speakers. He stressed an important difference between the Canadian and the European context: European cities usually manage school organization directly, which is not the case in Canada. This explains many of the differences observed in targets favoured by the cities represented today, Madrid, Lyon and Montreal.