

Barcelona's Agenda 21 10 Years of Citizen Commitment to Sustainability

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In 2002, Barcelona established its Local Agenda 21 in a document broadly supported by its citizens and unanimously approved by the City Council: The Citizen Commitment to Sustainability. It is an educational and inspiring text, setting forth ten objectives and inviting each and every individual and organization in the city to willingly take them on.

In order for everyone to be able to join in this collective effort to create a more sustainable city, operational instruments were developed to help stimulate, guide and evaluate the various processes underway. Of note among these is the School Agenda 21 Program that received the Dubai International Award for Best Practices to Improve the Living Environment administered jointly with UN-HABITAT.

As the Commitment's time frame (2002-2012) will soon be coming to completion, it is evident that both the positive results obtained and the process itself have shown it to be an excellent opportunity to raise citizen awareness of environmental issues.

The expression "Agenda 21" was coined at the Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) to refer to the plan of action that States would have to implement in order to transform the current model of development, based on the exploitation of natural resources as if they were unlimited and unequal access to the benefits of those resources, to a new model of development capable of covering the needs of present generations without compromising the capacity of future generations. This is what is known as sustainable development, i.e. development that is durable, efficient and rational in the use of resources and equitable in the distribution of benefits.

The final document produced by the United Nations ten years ago contained a chapter (Chapter 28) dedicated to the role of cities in this ambitious resolution for change. It recognises both the responsibility of cities and their capacity for transformation. As has been observed on several occasions, seldom have a few brief lines of a formal document provoked such an enthusiastic reaction. At present, over 10,000 cities around the

world are drawing up their own Local Agenda 21s through mechanisms involving participation by the local community.

One of these cities is Barcelona, which ushered in the 21st century by signing the Citizen Commitment to Sustainability, a document that is the result of a participatory process involving hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals.

Citizen Commitment to Sustainability: A City Project

Barcelona's Citizen Commitment to Sustainability is a framework for shared action and a city project that addresses the issue of sustainability as a transversal paradigm, combining the social, economic and environmental dimensions.

It is not the outcome of the work of experts or of a specialized laboratory, but rather of the contributions and visions of many people and groups with different interests that were negotiated and eventually agreed upon by consensus in a joint commitment. The document consists



A convention of signatories of Barcelona's Citizen Commitment to Sustainability.



Volunteers checking the water quality of the Besos River, near Barcelona.

of a preamble stating the principles that the city stands behind in this Commitment, and sets out the 10 main objectives with 10 lines of action for each, to be acted upon between 2002-2012.

Ever since the project was put in place, it has served as a reference point for the City Council as well as for all organizations in Barcelona that wish to play their part in shaping a more sustainable city.

The City Council signed the Commitment in May 2002 (following a preparation period that began with the creation, in 1998, of the Municipal Council for the Environment and Sustainability) and since then it has been signed by approximately 800 citizen organizations. These include large and small businesses, community groups, professional associations, unions, political parties and numerous educational centers ranging from the kindergarten to the university level. The signatories pledge to actively contribute to meeting the set goals and make public the concrete steps they have voluntarily chosen to take in working towards that end. As stated in the Commitment's preamble, sustainability also means shared responsibility: the Barcelona plan of action is the

sum total of all of the plans of action, with more or less ambition, that the city, organizations within it and its citizens have been able to put into effect.

Each signatory has something specific to contribute to this transition process but it is the larger whole, the overall network of citizens, who have the power to bring about the necessary changes. Thus, the City Council not only provides assistance and training to each of the organizations involved to help them carry out their specific plan of action, but has also invested a great deal of energy in strengthening the network through a full program of exchange activities, visits and shared projects.

It is important to note that almost half of the organizations committed to the project are schools (currently 382 schools have signed the Commitment). They are an extremely important element in shaping more sustainable cities, both because of their role in educating students and for the ripple effect within the community, particularly through families. Given that fact, right from the start, schools were especially invited to take part in the process of defining the Commitment and putting it into action, through a specific program: the

KEY DATES

1992	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro) - The Rio Declaration / Agenda 21
1994	European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns (Aalborg) - The city of Barcelona signed the Aalborg Charter (and in 2004 it took on the Aalborg commitments).
1998	The Municipal Council for the Environment and Sustainability was established as a participatory and consultative body to promote the development of Barcelona's Local Agenda 21.
2000	The first steps were taken in setting up the School Agenda 21 Program to bring schools into the process and give support to those that chose to take on the objectives for sustainability. This first went into effect in the 2001 school year. 2002 The Municipal Council for the Environment and Sustainability approved Barcelona's Citizen Commitment to Sustainability - Agenda 21.
2002-2012	Action 21 Phase: Development and implementation of plans of action. Conventions of signatories were held in 2005 and 2010.
2012	Evaluation of the process and results of the initial stage and creation of a New Commitment.

Schools Agenda 21. More than an invitation, it was also a recognition and gesture of support for the work that many schools were already doing in environmental education, and another opportunity to reinforce ties between the school and the city.

The School Agenda 21 Program

Barcelona's School Agenda 21 Program (PA21E) is an initiative focused on schools and operating within the larger framework of the city's Agenda 21. It was put into place in 2001 and last year celebrated its tenth school year in operation. Through this program, educational communities become involved in identifying environmental problems, suggesting solutions and taking on commitments leading to a more sustainable city.

Schools at all non-university levels participate in the PA21E: kindergarten (0-6 years), primary (7-12 years), and secondary (13-18 years), as well as special education schools. The PA21E is a very unique idea that is, at once:

- A program that encourages and supports educational institutions in designing, carrying out and evaluating plans of action in order to become more sustainable schools.
- An opportunity for the educational community to become involved, together with other players, in building a better city within the overall framework of the Citizen Commitment to Sustainability.
- A network of schools that share learning objectives and experiences.
- An aggregate of hundreds of environmental projects being carried out each year. There are 315 projects

underway for the 2011-12 school year of various types and covering a wide range of subjects: water and energy conservation; noise reduction; reducing paper consumption; waste prevention; composting; "school paths" and more sustainable mobility; turning courtyards and gardens into green spaces; creating habitats; organic gardening; biodiversity preservation; responsible buying; improved communication; fostering citizen participation and coexistence, and so on.

- A collective experience focused on the ongoing improvement of the surroundings with a ten-year history and a social impact on thousands of teachers and hundreds of thousands of students and their respective families. During this school year alone the PA21E has involved more than 100,000 students, 8,000 teachers, 1,500 workers in educational institutions and over 70,000 families.
- An ongoing training program for school principals, teachers and school aides.

Thanks to this program, each year more and more schools in Barcelona are incorporating the philosophy of sustainability into their practices, environmental management and curriculums. These are schools that are working to find a balance between theory and practice, where students play a principle role and which tend to draw in the participation of other groups in the community as well.

Barcelona's PA21E is a pioneer program that has been adopted in other cities in Spain, Portugal, and Latin America, which, in 2010, was awarded the Dubai International Award for Best Practices to Improve the

Following a lesson on waste management, this class group decided to bring their morning snacks to school wrapped in cloth.



Learning about capturing solar energy using photovoltaic panels and solar ovens.



Living Environment, in association with the United Nations HABITAT Program.

Results and Challenges

An on-going evaluation system is in place to reassess the program on an annual basis. In addition, two large Conventions of Commitment Signatories were held, one in 2005 and the other in 2010, to jointly evaluate the progress made since the start.

Over its 10 years of existence, the Commitment has achieved results in very different areas. Some of the challenges set out have been fully met, for example, in the 100% treatment of waste water, the shutdown and restoration of an old rubbish dump and the addition of organic waste collection containers placed throughout the city. There has been very significant progress in other areas, among these: the higher percentage of people moving around the city on foot, by bicycle or on public transportation (85% of the total); an increased interest in fair trade products; and a decrease in clean water consumption per capita, placing Barcelona among the cities in Europe that saves most water. In other cases, commendable progress has been made, but more still remains to be accomplished. Examples are the expansion of green areas, energy conservation efforts and the use of renewable energy. There are also cases of pending challenges where little progress has, as yet, been made including, among others: clean air and the reduction of noise pollution; waste prevention; young people's access to housing; and the promotion of sustainable tourism.

Creating the most participatory Agenda 21 possible not only gave it a strong foundation, but, above all, allowed a significant number of people to appreciate its importance and adopt the objectives as theirs. In this regard, throughout these ten years, the Commitment has proven to be an incredible process of citizen-based environmental education.

We now face the challenge of establishing a new commitment that, recognizing the progress made to date, aims to address the pending issues, meet the emerging challenges and set a path for the upcoming future. It is a new commitment meant to reach many families, organizations and businesses which must allow us to move from heightening awareness on environmental issues to a situation in which all citizens are increasingly committed to maintaining a sustainable culture.

For more Information

- www.bcn.cat/agenda21/
- www.bcn.cat/agenda21/a21escolar
- ICLEI (2011): ICLEI Case Studies No.125. Education for Sustainable Development: The Barcelona School Agenda 21 Program. Available at: www.iclei.org/casestudies
- Ajuntament de Barcelona (2011): En el camí de l'escola sostenible. Una nova guia per fer l'Agenda 21 Escolar [The Path to Sustainable Schools. A New Guide to the School Agenda 21 Program]. Available in Catalan at: www.bcn.cat/agenda21
- Ajuntament de Barcelona (2010): Barcelona, a City Committed to the Environment: Environmental Report

Evaluating proposals offering a broad range of options.



Pushing the sustainability wheels forward to set up a garden in the school playground.





Students participate in setting up a school garden as part of the School Agenda 21 Program.

of Barcelona 2009. Complete report. Available in various languages at: www.bcn.cat/agenda21

- Ajuntament de Barcelona (2009): Barcelona Works Towards Sustainability. Available in various languages at: www.bcn.cat/agenda21
- Ajuntament de Barcelona (2005): Publicació: 100 bones idees - Catàleg de bones pràctiques dels signants del Compromís Ciutadà per la Sostenibilitat - Agenda 21

de Barcelona [Publication: 100 Best Ideas - A Catalogue of Best Practices by the Signatories of the Citizen Commitment to Sustainability - Barcelona's Agenda 21]. Available in Catalan at: www.bcn.cat/agenda21

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