

TRIBUNA

The role of municipalities in peacebuilding

Carme Barbany

Can Jonch. Centre de Cultura per la Pau

All actors are necessary for peacebuilding with each one playing their own part. From cities, people are engaged in programs to promote peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution, cooperation and support programs for other cities suffering from war and violence. This experience means that cities and their networks are becoming increasingly recognized as important players when seeking contrasted, realistic and sustainable response which contribute to peacebuilding.

In a global world, everything that happens, even thousands of kilometres from home, has an impact on our lives. The major challenges facing humanity today, such as global warming and climate change, migration, forced displacement due to war and armed conflicts, have repercussions locally. These consequences are manifest in our cities and which local governments must face up to.

At this very moment we find ourselves at a crucial point in which renewal processes are taking place framed within the context of global agenda of the major issues of concern to humanity, such as peace and security, environmental sustainability, migration and development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) approved by the United Nations in September 2015, the Paris agreement signed in December last year to combat climate change and the new urban development agenda that must surely be the outcome of the Habitat III Conference to be held in Quito, Ecuador this coming October, must pave the way to facilitate progress towards a future that improves the living conditions of the people and the planet.

This future must also be built at a local level, from our towns and cities. Local issues become global issues because cities are where the majority of the population is concentrated. Cities are where the impact from global problems is most acutely felt and where the projects are designed to address these issues. In this sense, making progress in solving the major challenges affecting humanity without the knowledge and the experience cities acquire through their day-to-day management and administration is not possible. Active participation of cities in the places where decisions are made and solutions implemented is crucial.

**“ Solving the huge challenges without
acknowledging the know-how and experience
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”**

“This is something that local governments and their networks have understood and they are working intensely on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, actively defining the lines of work to enable delivery of the 17 goals. The United Cities and Local Governments network in their report *The Sustainable Development Goals. What local governments need to know*¹ states: “All SDG contain targets that are directly or indirectly related to the day-to-day work of local and regional governments. Local governments should not be viewed simply as those who must implement the Agenda. Local governments are politically responsible, catalysts for change and the best positioned level of government to link the global goals with local communities”.

We have also witnessed the charitable initiatives from cities in the face of the refugee crisis and their willingness to provide a solution to this humanitarian tragedy unfolding in our time. Cities offer realistic solutions based on the capabilities and willingness of each municipality. The proposed solutions they offer have been designed cooperatively between local authorities and civil society through a process of networking and in

cooperation with other cities and regions. The programs to receive refugees in many cases exceed the initiatives undertaken at other levels of government and all is made possible thanks to the most valuable asset of any city; its citizens.

Why a commitment to building peace from the local level?

For the same reason that local governments are concerned and engaged with delivering the SDG, involved in the fight against climate change and in receiving the influx of refugees, they must also commit to building peace. The reasoning behind this is that municipalities provide the solutions to address the impact that global conflicts have on the lives and welfare of citizens, given their understanding that the duty of local government, first and foremost, is to work towards improving the living conditions of its citizens.

In this sense, municipalities play a key role in building peace and understanding between different cultures. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the UN, acknowledged this fact during his address to Mayors for Peace on 4 May 2010 at UN headquarters in New York: “Building a more peaceful world does not start in meeting rooms in New York or Geneva. It starts from the ground up, in neighbourhoods, in communities. It starts with enlightened leaders in cities and towns around the world. It starts with you” ².

“ To implement and deliver a peace policy, it’s important to create the appropriate structures and make sure that the values promoted by a city are shared with its citizens ”

Indeed, cities are working daily towards peacebuilding, which in a city means ensuring social cohesion, respect for human rights and the promotion of coexistence. It means promoting the peaceful resolution of conflicts and respect for differences and understanding between cultures. A city involved in peacebuilding also shares know-how and experiences with other cities, networking to identify the strategies required to

achieve a fairer world for all.

There are, in our opinion, at least two crucial elements that, if lacking, make it impossible to implement peacebuilding policy: political leadership and the commitment and involvement of society and its members. If one intends to implement and deliver peace policy, one must create the appropriate structures, with political responsibility and budgetary provisions. Furthermore, we must have the technical means available and ready to implement policy. It is also essential that projects and values promoted by a city are shared with the public.

The Granollers project: a city open to peace

The commitment to peacebuilding and reconstructing historical memory in Granollers (Catalonia) is grounded in the tragic bombing of the city on May 31, 1938, during the Spanish Civil War, causing the death of more than 200 people in just one minute. Using the basic premise that a city which has suffered bombing must be the driving force to lead the peacebuilding movement, Granollers defined its own strategy for peacebuilding, which is based on memory for building the future.

The *Centre de Cultura per la Pau* (Centre for a Culture of Peace) is responsible for promoting public policy in the field of peace. The centre is host to activities regarding the retrieval and dissemination of the historical memory from the Civil War and bombings, the development of cooperation and solidarity, the promotion of public-spiritedness and coexistence, civic mediation service, education for peace, defending human rights, networking with other cities and municipal diplomacy.

“ Mayors for Peace struggle to ensure cities and citizens never again become military targets, victims of violence or war ”

The municipal action programme 2015-2019 lists the promotion of a culture for peace as one of its strategic priorities. This means that we must integrate the values of peace in

all projects: in public spaces, highlighting memory heritage; in educational projects in schools and in the squares and communities, from the perspective of acting as an educational city; promoting knowledge of the origins of neighbourhoods and their inhabitants and fostering a sense of belonging; promoting public-spiritedness and coexistence at all levels; working with organizations in the city to create joint programs, such as volunteering projects and programs of solidarity with other regions and even plans to receive refugees.

In the same way as organisations work in promoting the culture of peace within the city, Granollers encourages participation in international networks linked to the defence of human rights, peace and disarmament. These networks operate to establish cooperation programs with other municipalities and cities and to show solidarity with urban areas suffering violent conflict. Networks such as Mayors for Peace, which struggle to ensure cities and citizens never again become military targets, victims of violence or war.

From Granollers, in conjunction with many other municipalities working in their own unique way to implement policies and programs promoting peace, we intend to continue promoting municipal action to help create a world that rejects violence and inequality, a fairer, more caring and more peaceful world.

1. *The Sustainable Development Goals. What local governments need to know*, UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments)

2. You can consult the [complete text](#) from UN Secretary General's speech.

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