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Policy initiative U- Impact. Fundación Ciudadanía.

Introduction:

As a result of our national debate we concluded that today more than ever education is a need for changing the opportunities of an important part of the social, economic, political and cultural life of our societies.

In this policy initiative we would like to share the positive ideas and innovative initiatives we reached in our national event. Education is the only way to build equal and truly democratic societies.

We must not forget that beyond teaching theoretical knowledge, we need to focus on the way new generations conceive the current society, on how they develop values such as associationism, teamwork and empathy, aimed at building genuine and global citizen participation.

Education for citizen participation is the main route of access to the creation of democracy values. We can distinguish two levels: explaining what is/should be education for citizen participation and democracy, where procedural mechanisms can be taught; but also turning educational institutions into a space for living democracy daily, creating spaces for participation, dialogue and the creation of joint responsibility, etc.

We have built modern education systems which create selfish, competitive, empty beings, afraid to tenderness, factors that lead to school failure. It is noteworthy that before secondary education was compulsory, school failure was lower.

In order to get students participating in the society is not enough to study theoretical concepts such as "the origin of European citizenship". Students must leave the walls of the classroom and share experiences with **elderly people**, with local associations, with people with few resources. We cannot keep kids in a bubble and expect them to become citizens in their first general elections. They should learn first-hand how works the labor market, what it means to be a social entrepreneur and what is a learning community, among others concepts.

We must also keep in mind that an important part of effective citizen participation is linked to getting a **proper employment**. Students live disconnected from the labor reality that they will live once they finish their studies.

Many teachers believe that by creating a role-playing about how to run a business in a limited 50 minutes class, is enough to solve real-world problems, but the fact is that students need to carry out practical workshops while studying at schools. The classroom and the workplace shall be dumbed down into simplified fragments.



Main objective: Regenerating community life

The necessity of developing **new formal and non-formal** educational models strengthens the necessity of creating trainings in democratic principles that become habits through which everyone can observe, analyse, reflect, question with critical criteria and interpret reality, and that of his/her equals, whether it is family, the immediate community, institutions, companies or the rest of society with which he/she interacts, and act accordingly.

1. Living in a democratic education?

One of the most repeated objectives in the proposals for reforming the educational system is to achieve a democratic education.

In order to get this, on one hand, some subjects are intended to address the need to know which is the meaning of democratic citizenship in the twenty-first century.

On the other hand, the school is a space for citizen participation that seeks a reproduction of the parliamentary system. The school has its own democratic institutions, however, almost the entire school life is regulated by state political institutions.

It is a scaring fact that the ways of participation in school do not worry excessively and by voting in schools, professors only get a delegation of their voices.

We must not forget that the concept of delegation means learning to normalize we cannot decide how to learn.

If teachers do not have good democratic tools, it is difficult for them to guide students towards active citizen participation.

We propose to have a look at anarchist educational projects that allow the decentralization of the capacity of vote of professors. To make such decentralization happen, we propose to create assemblies, which must be used to decide together on the relevant aspects related to teaching and learning.

In order to provide you with some examples, we can see that in the event that a student 10 years old is curious to know how a piece of furniture is constructed and intended to be taught on how to do it, he will find that the system of education is rigid and depending on finding its own convenience instead of the student's one. Therefore, the proposal of our little carpenter would not be accepted.

2. Building learning communities:

The idea of improving schools by developing *professional learning communities* is currently on rise. We use this term to describe every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education—a grade-level teaching team, a school committee, a high school department, an entire school district, a state department of education, a national professional organization, among others. In fact, this term has been used so indistinctly, that it is in danger of losing its meaning.

Learning communities at schools are trying to break the duality between school and the society by generating processes of dialogical learning where all the educational community and the socio-cultural fabric of the neighborhood are involved in the construction of an educational project. In an effective learning community, each person brings their knowledge



and skills. That's how an exchange of knowledge is possible. In that way, cultures and abilities that promote social transformation can be generated.

3. e-Participation: Education and ICT:

E-participation helps people in general to engage in politics and makes the decision-making processes easier to understand, thanks to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Public administrations need to adapt to keep up with the rapid transformation of our society. The increased connectivity of citizens and businesses leads to new expectations as regards the quality, transparency and efficiency of public services as well as access to public figures and institutions.

In order to connect e-participation with education, we must bear in mind that through ICT, teachers can easily explain complex instructions and ensure students' comprehension.

Furthermore, through ICT, teachers are able to create interactive classes and make the lessons more enjoyable, which could improve student attendance and concentration.

Schools cannot be separated from a society that is immersed in a technological revolution. Schools, with their characteristic conservatism do not always use ICT tools for democratic access to culture.

Both in formal and informal education, teachers need much more than digital blackboards to explain how to use e-government tools.

In our **impact report** we will share some interesting initiatives aimed at improving the use of open government by students.

4. Working on digital inclusion:

Digital inclusion must be schools' effort to ensure that every student benefits from the digital society in order to make an effective citizen participation.

Some schools make possible digital inclusion through some activities such as making ICT more accessible for all and fostering new methodologies for technology development. However, it is needed to empower citizens to fight marginalisation and social exclusion by increasing the participation rate of disadvantaged people in public, social and economic activities through social inclusion projects.

Digital exclusion is part of the overall challenge of exclusion, a widespread and growing phenomenon which carries with it a series of deteriorations in life paths like poor health, poor lifelong earnings and an increased risk of marginalisation. There are many who are currently excluded for reasons of low income and education, location, culture, trust and confidence levels or various disabilities.

According to recent studies, 80 million Europeans never use internet either because they don't have a computer or it is too expensive. Another reasons might be that they find it too difficult or not relevant to connect digitally as observed in the Digital Scoreboard. An



important factor is the type or level of cognitive or physical disability that prevents those affected to use ICT and Internet.

Also, regardless of use technological tool sthe functional diversity in the classroom it is not always taken into account, therefore, citizen participation these pupils is reduced.

In our policy impact, we will expose some activities practical launched by Fundación Ciudadanía in order to improve the situation of students who suffer social exclusion because the needs of their functional diversity are not met.

5. Skills and Jobs:

A strong digital economy is vital for innovation, growth, jobs and European competitiveness. The spread of digital is having a massive impact on the labour market and the type of skills needed in the economy and society.

Therefore, formal and non-formal education initiatives must take into account the need of increasing the training in digital skills for the workforce and for consumers; modernising education across the EU.

-We need to change the structure of employment, leading to the automation of "routine" tasks and to the creation of new and different types of jobs.

-Nearly all jobs will need ICT as complement.

-Every citizen must have at least basic digital skills in order to live, work, learn and participate in the modern society.

The full potential for improving education through ICT in Europe remains yet to be discovered and this is why the European Commission is developing policy and supporting research to make learners fit for 21st century life and work.

Fundación Ciudadanía Works closely with organizations which prepare students to develop their technological skills. Through a close collaboration with universities and other educational institutions, Fundación Ciudadanía is creating training courses for young graduates and young professionals in order to tackle the digital skills deficit in Europe.

In relation to employment opportunities in our national event we concluded that it is important to have **social entrepreneurs** to help us improve society. As we will see in the policy impact, NGOs, public institutions and educational centers, from formal and non-formal education, can build great networks that promote citizen participation through social entrepreneurs.

Social entrepreneurs are individuals who rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, find what is not working and solve the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution with innovative solutions to society's most pressing social problems.



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