

# The City: Grazing Lands for Our Schools

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translated by James Rogers

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**D**ays of educational reform all over Europe - days of meditation and reflection. Is this not, then, a good time for hope? It occurs to me that it could be an appropriate time for the every-day professionals to voice some of our hopes, some of our dreams for the future.

Education has always been my main interest. By decision or fate, who knows? I arrived in the world of education through the traditional route of teaching, and much to my surprise, the more I enjoyed my work the more distanced I became from schools. For some years now, I have been observing schools at arm's length, first from a research institute, then from the educational service for a museum, and now as a freelancer.

I must admit that it has been difficult for me to see it clearly, but after such coming and going through the intricate alleyways of institutionalized education, I now think I know that schools are for digesting what is eaten outside of them.

This is what makes me so happy to think that these days of reflection about the future of the schools will in fact discuss the future of the European citizens. Because it is precisely in the tangled terrain of the relationships between cities and schools where I truly believe that a certain kind of change is taking place for the future of our youngest citizens. What would change if we were to see the cities as the true supplier of fodder for their citizens, or as the varied sustenance ranging from popular celebrations to university lectures, from art exhibits to the cinema, from strolls through primarily pedestrian areas to the advantages traveling by metro, from churches to bars, from the privacy of home to the solidarity of public space? And what would happen if we were to consider schools, in turn, as the place in which to ruminate? Would it not be, then, that instructors and books, computers and chalkboards, papers and easels, telephones and directories, faxes and e-mail would be nothing more than a few of the cushions upon which to lie, while what we eat outside of the school walls initiates its journey from the belly to the fourth stomach, so continuing until its absorption?

In this case, the opening of flowing streams between the city and the school could bring us an enviable comfort, among other things, because if the city were seen as the true grazing lands of the people, we would all become animals looking for nourishment. Then, among many other innovations, the difference between adults and children, for example, would cease to be a *difference of type* to merely be a *difference of degree*. This would not be half bad for a happier coexistence.

Clearly, children would demand to eat larger portions. But this would not mean that adults, already having learned how to eat, could stop doing so. Contrarily, once the first few daisies are digested, we would be ready for a juicy steak with an aged Rioja. What if the cursed discipline required by all learning had some grace-that should be the pleasure that hides the subsequent exercise!

And if that were the case, education would cease to be a question of teachers dominating children, and would become a theme of permanent and common attention. We would no longer hear, once and for all, that the real problem with the lack of civics in our youth lies in the fact that the teachers do not teach them with sufficient force, that we need to forfeit our seats on the bus to seniors. This is not a problem for teachers, and children will never learn civics if they do not appropriate the city.

That is to say, involving the museums, libraries, civic centers, theaters, cinemas and concert halls in the new educational programs would benefit everyone, since either the pastures remain fresh or there will be war (in other words, we should forget the damned mania of taking the students out of the classroom ... just to better examine them). Likewise, involving the educational system in certain urban development programs, civic and cultural settlements of barrio life, for example, would stop some of the unwanted processes of desertion (that is, school transportation substituted by pedestrian itineraries between one's own kitchen and the classroom, for example, as housing complexes can be located wherever we so propose).

The city, then, cannot be blocked off, nor can education be reduced to educational time and space. In the exchange of projects between both sectors lies the possibility of their mutual development.

This reflection leads me to a future that I conceive as pastorally citizen-oriented. Given the modern stabling that utilizes the similarity among the cattle as a criterion for classification and regimen for life, pastures allow for free wandering. Each animal stops where it finds the best conditions for it, which in turn allows ruminant animals of different generations and occasionally even members of other species to be seen together combing through the same field.

In our urban environment, which, in addition to being ours, configures the development model for modernity -our world is inconceivable without cities-, we often corral more than we liberate.

Perhaps now is the time to begin to discover that the exercise of citizens has to do more with the relationships between people of different ages and conditions than between perfectly equal beings. Has

the moment arrived in which the new conceptual maps legitimize this? We, as cultural teachers and administrators, should be more conscious of this. Perhaps it is only a fantasy that has dawned on me for having passed from one group to another without having lost interest in the future of our grandchildren.

I dream that the city is the place, and schools one of the modes.

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