

SYRACUSE, EDUCATING CITY: SOCIAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND POLITICAL PROJECT

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With the premise by Antonia Criscenti - Università di Catania

This paper aims to provide an overview of “Siracusa Città educativa, a political-institutional project launched in 2014 in the capital of the eponymous province in South-eastern Sicily. Part of the international network “Educating Cities” (IAEC) established in Barcelona in 1990, the social and pedagogical aims of “Syracuse, Educating City” work towards the concept of “global inclusion”. The project is based on a founding charter drawn up by a joint committee comprising the Department of Educational policy of Syracuse town council, the Prefecture, the Local Health Authority (Syracuse), the University of Catania, the Territorial Department of Education, the Syracuse Social Services, the “Defender of Children’s Rights”, of Syracuse City Council, and the Student Council, Province of Syracuse. The committee has the task of directing and monitoring educational planning within the territory and has already produced an additional document, “The Collaborative Charter of Syracuse, Educating City”. The charter serves as a civic pact supporting the development of an educating community within a systemic perspective of active citizenship that works towards change and improvement. Stemming from this project is a program of work entitled ‘città come sistema educativo’ that focuses on the development of citizenship from infancy to adolescence. The new responsibilities given to the local authority, such as the planning of educational initiatives across the territory, enables the introduction of fundamental educational policies essential to the strategies for the development of the city and its inhabitants.

Questo contributo intende dar conto di un progetto politico-istituzionale dai contenuti pedagogici e sociali di “inclusione globale” che Siracusa (capoluogo di provincia della Sicilia sud-orientale) ha avviato, entro la rete internazionale “Città educative” (Associazione Internazionale Città Educative, istituita a Barcellona nel 1990, con 474 adesioni in Europa). Il Progetto «Siracusa Città Educativa», sostenuto da una Cabina di Regia con funzione di indirizzo e di monitoraggio della programmazione educativa del territorio, fondato su un Documento Istitutivo, condiviso con tutti gli attori della Cabina di Regia, ha già prodotto un ulteriore documento, la “Carta Collaborativa di Siracusa Città Educativa”, che funge da patto civico per supportare il percorso della Città verso l’orizzonte di “Comunità Educante”, nell’ottica sistemica di cittadinanza attiva protesa verso il cambiamento. Dal Progetto prende avvio un programma di lavoro della città come sistema educativo, il cui focus è dato dall’infanzia e dall’adolescenza. Il nuovo ruolo attribuito all’Ente Locale, ritenuto in tale veste responsabile dei processi di programmazione degli interventi educativi territoriali, consente l’avvio di politiche educative fondanti per le strategie di sviluppo della città e dei suoi abitanti.

Key words: educative system; IAEC (International Association of Educating Cities), global inclusion, citizenship, infancy and adolescence.

Parole chiave: Sistemi educativi; Associazione Internazionale Città Educative (IAEC), inclusione, cittadinanza, infanzia e adolescenza.

1. *Premise by Antonia Criscenti*¹

Educating cities started as a movement in 1990 based on the 1st International Congress of Educating Cities, held in Barcelona when a group of cities, represented by their local governments, set for themselves the common goal of working together on projects and activities for improving the quality of life of their inhabitants.

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¹ Member of the “Cabina di Regia” [permanent technical desk] of the project “Siracusa Città Educativa” and Full Professor of *Social History of Education* at The University of Catania. The important role of the Professor in the project has allowed us to start a reflection on the comparison between different educational systems and territorial educational politics.

For this purpose, the cities set out the basic principles in the initial Charter that were to constitute the educational driving force of the city. Some years later, in 1994, the movement was formalised as the International Association of Educating Cities at its 3rd Congress in Bologna.

They were driven by the conviction that the edification of the inhabitants of a given city could not be left to chance. The Charter was revised at the 3rd International Congress (Bologna, 1994) and at the 8th International Congress (Genoa, 2004), in order to improve and adapt its concepts to the new challenges and social needs we face. This Charter is based on the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); the World Declaration on Education For All (1990), and the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001).²

This is the charter's beginning: «[...] Today more than ever the city [...] offers countless opportunities for education. [...] the city contains within itself major elements for integral education and training that makes it at one and the same time a complex system, object of educational attention and a permanent, plural, multi-faceted, educating agent capable of counteracting inimical educating elements [...] its identity is interdependent with that of the country it belongs to. [...]. The goal of this relationship is to learn, exchange, and share experiences and thus enrich the lives of the inhabitants. [...] the great challenges of the 21st century: firstly, "investing" in education, in each individual, to increase his or her ability to express, affirm and develop his or her own human potential, with its uniqueness, creativity and responsibility [...]. The right to live in an educating city must constitute a relevant guarantee of the principles of equality for all, social justice, and territorial balance [...]»³.

The city is, therefore, educative, per se: there is no question that urban planning, culture, the schools, sport, environmental and health, economic and budget issues, and matters related to transport and traffic, safety and services, the media, etc. include and generate forms of citizen education. The city is educative when it imprints this intention on the way it presents itself to its citizens, aware that its proposals have attitude-related and co-existential consequences and generate new values, knowledge and skills. All areas are involved and are of concern to the entire city population.

This intention constitutes a political commitment that must be borne, first of all, by the municipal government, as a representative policy body of the citizenry, and one which is the closest to the latter, but it must also be shared necessarily with civil society. It involves the incorporation of education as a means of obtaining a more educated citizenry that feels a greater solidarity and which is happier.

For the educating city, the great challenge of the 21st century is to deepen the practice of democratic values through appropriate orientation and actions. We must introduce into the legal-political framework of any democracy the pedagogical factors that can allow us to use the information, participation and evaluation as axes in the learning and educational processes and in the process of citizen building. Charter sets out that:

« -1- All the inhabitants of a city have the right to enjoy, in liberty and equality, the means and opportunities for education, leisure and individual growth that the city

² Cfr. <<http://www.edcities.org/en/charter-of-educating-cities/>> .

³ From the *Charter of Educating Cities*, cfr.

<http://www.bcn.cat/edcities/aice/estatiques/angles/sec_charter.html>, p. 1.

offers. The right to an educating city is understood as an extension of the fundamental right of all to education. The educating city constantly recommits to the lifelong education of its inhabitants in the most varied ways. And to make this possible, all groups, with their own particular needs, must be taken into account.

In city planning and government, suitable measures will be taken to overcome every type of obstacle that restricts the exercise of the right to equality, including physical barriers. This will be the responsibility of both the municipal government and other levels of government that affect the city. The citizens themselves will also be committed to this task on an individual basis as well as through the various associations to which they belong.

-2- The city will promote education in diversity as well as understanding, international solidarity and cooperation and world peace. This is an education that fights against any form of discrimination. The educating city will foster freedom of expression, cultural diversity and dialogue in equal conditions. It will also avail itself of both avant-garde initiatives and those of popular culture, no matter what their origin. It will contribute to correcting inequalities that arise from cultural production based solely on mercantile criteria.

-3- An educating city will foster dialogue between generations, not only as a form of peaceful coexistence, but also as a way to seeking out common projects shared by groups of persons of different ages. These projects should be orientated towards civic initiatives and actions whose value consists precisely in their cross-generational character and in the use of the respective skills and values of the different age groups.

-4- The municipal policies of an educational character shall always be understood as referring to a broader context inspired by the principles of social justice, democratic community spirit, quality of life and the edification of the individual citizen.

-5- The municipalities shall undertake to exercise their powers effectively in matters of education. No matter what the scope of these powers may be, they shall put forward a broad and integrated education policy, in order to include all the modalities of formal, non-formal and informal education and the different cultural manifestations, sources of information and paths of discovery of the reality of the city.

The role of the municipal administration is, on the one hand, to set down local policies that are seen to be possible and evaluate their effectiveness, in addition to obtaining the legislation required from other central or regional administrations.

-6- In order to undertake appropriate action, the persons responsible for municipal policy must obtain accurate information on the situation and needs of the inhabitants. Thus, the city shall undertake studies and surveys, which it shall keep up to date and make available to the public and shall establish channels that are constantly open to individuals and groups that allow the formulation of specific proposals and general policies.

Furthermore, the municipality in the course of its decision-making in any area of its jurisdiction shall bear in mind the educative and training-related impact of the decisions made»⁴.

The educating city is a new paradigm, a necessarily shared project that involves all the departments of the local administrations, the different levels of government and

⁴ From the *Charter of Educating Cities*, cfr. <http://www.bcn.cat/edcities/aice/estatiques/angles/sec_charter.html>, pp. 4-5.

civil society. Transversality and co-ordination are essential in order to give sense to actions that incorporate education as a process that exists throughout one's entire life.⁵

Syracuse has stuck to the association international educational city on 13 November 2014. The international initiative has as objective the affirmation of the ethics of the responsibility and the promotion of urban interventions through the share of the local community. The project is based on a founding charter drawn up by a joint committee comprising the Department of Educational policy of Syracuse town council, the Prefecture, the Local Health Authority (Syracuse), the University of Catania, the Territorial Department of Education, the Syracuse Social Services, the “Defender of Children’s Rights”, of Syracuse City Council, and the Student Council, Province of Syracuse.

2. The scientific project and its history

The themes discussed here are based on the socio-pedagogical concept of *educating community*. The scientific origin of this form of town planning has its roots in Italian pedagogue Raffaele Laporta’s theoretical elaborations of social pedagogy. Professor at the University of Chieti, Laporta’s ideas date back to the 1960s, anticipating by 50 years or so the contemporary model of a “smart city”.

In the 1960s, Laporta developed the theory of “*Self-education of the Community*”, defined and expounded according to pedagogical science in his volume of the same name⁶. It concerns a politico-philosophical and pedagogical vision focusing on concepts of community and freedom, synergistically employed in education. Education of the community and education towards freedom are seen as complementary, as one reinforces the other. The community dimension allows for the assertion of subjectivity because it frees the individual from the risk of isolation, simultaneously enabling the individual to participate in the dilemmas of the human condition and to exercise the freedom to share the solution. In this sense, community education becomes a powerful antidote to the risks and dangers of an authoritarian society. The dimension of freedom legitimizes and strengthens the assertion of the community. In the communitarian experience, freedom emerges and is cultivated as a practice of *self-management of citizens*. Freedom is an expansion of subjectivity and the realization of humanity of the associated subjects.

During the Sixties and Seventies the Italian approach to the *continuing education of the community* began to establish itself as theory and practice⁷ due to Laporta’s scientific contribution. Italian pedagogy in those years was still rooted in ‘actualism’, a philosophical perspective promoted by Giovanni Gentile, Minister for Education in Mussolini’s government of 1923. One of the main tenets of this perspective was that “polluting” relationships with the world outside the school were to be avoided, and that the only way one could give oneself over to developing the “absolute spirit” was

⁵ <http://www.bcn.cat/edcities/aice/estatiques/angles/sec_iaec.html>

⁶ R. Laporta (1979), *L’autoeducazione delle comunità*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze.

⁷ P. Orefice (2001), *Comunità e libertà nell’educazione e nella pedagogia di Raffaele Laporta. In margine a un ricordo*, in «Studi sulla formazione», 2001, 2, p. 33, in which the project *Progetto Mo.TER. Modello territoriale di programmazione educativa* [Territorial Model of educational planning] is discussed.

through the relationship between teacher to pupil, passing from educator to the educated. On the contrary, the secular pedagogy developed by Laporta attempts forays into social life in order to impress a new pedagogy – scientific, critical, and social – that is attentive to the territory and its educational needs arising from the entire communitarian and urban structure. Bringing education outside purely institutional contexts, especially schools, and seeking its character, dynamics, and potential in the everyday life of the people in a given territory was more than just a “difficult challenge”⁸. On the one hand, it entailed using the informal education shared within a small community as a basis on which to construct the continuing education of the collectivity. On the other, it should develop a broad and integrated epistemological spectrum on which a disciplinary synthesis of pedagogy could be founded. Such a synthesis would emerge from the positive contamination of research in education with other disciplinary perspectives that stem from the educational processes present in a territorial community.

It was necessary, then, to rethink the logic and aims of education when all citizens of a community become involved, not only during the years of schooling, but continuing throughout life; it was necessary to elaborate strategies for the development of educational systems, from kindergarten to basic education; from compulsory school attendance at the vocational and secondary schools; from higher education to continuing educational training at work and in leisure time. In short, it was, and still is, necessary to devise an overall strategy that places individual moments, institutional periods, and informal learning together in a process of education and personal development that accompanies the various stages of men and women’s lives, to facilitate enrichment. Thus, in this way (continuous) education, or *education for life*, can be viewed as an investment in human development.

3. The pedagogy of ‘Educating Cities’, the social project and international programme.

From this historical premise, however, translating Laporta’s original tenets to the contemporary project under discussion requires the redefinition of a number of relevant categories: the educative city; its members; their relationship to one another; collective wellbeing as political and social objective.

Cities have become enormous territorial habitats; in which ways do they respond to the needs of children and adolescents, of families, of citizens? Are essential spaces provided for their requirements? More specifically, are there places that are meaningful for a child’s physio-bio-psycho development? Which complex network of relationships can be usefully employed to improve the quality of life in childhood in its most important aspects? Are there architectural structures, urban landscapes and itineraries that stimulate the child’s imagination? Furthermore, as our transcultural contemporary societies produce new media and communication systems, children, adolescents and their families need to engage with new modes of knowing, feeling and conceiving of the system-city. It is therefore necessary to compare educational attitudes, cultures and civilizations with experts from various parts of the institutional and social world; an

⁸ R. Laporta (1971), *La difficile scommessa*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze.

interdisciplinary approach that stimulates debate on the emergence of the new urban civilizations. Thus inflected towards relationality in urban contexts, this pedagogical model focuses on the younger generations in particular, and humanity in general as its point of reference. It is a model for the future, of the real and the possible, transcending the paradigm of existing urban realities with a markedly *relational* concept of citizenship.

At the heart of this hypothesis of a new social reality is, indeed, its bond with this notion of relationality: relations between inhabitants, between inhabitants and institutions, and between family and children. The city is viewed as a space for the exchange of projects and ideas aimed at the wellbeing of the community and the improvement of living conditions for all citizens. This presupposes their active participation in social and institutional life.

3.a The socio-pedagogical project

Within this logic of social reconsolidation, the international network IAEC (International Association of Educating Cities) is contextualised. IAEC is a non-profit organization made up of local governments. It is a permanent structure for cooperation between cities that undertake to respect the principles laid down by the Charter of Educating Cities. Today, IAEC counts 598 Administrations from all over the world that work co-operatively on the development of policies that give impetus to the quality of life, together with the spirit of citizenship, and of the values of a participatory and solid democratic system. Its aims are: to encourage awareness of the concept of an Educating City; to support its aims in local government policies; to encourage exchanges, meetings, conferences and all activities and initiatives that converge on common projects; to strengthen ties between the Associated Cities, forming partnerships with other associations, federations or networks of Cities and Local institutions, as well as with international organizations.

What follows is an overview of the structure, organization and aims of IAEC. The Association is organized in *Territorial networks*. Groups of cities belonging to a particular geographic area undertake to work jointly on issues of common interest. Each network establishes its own organization and function in accordance with the Statute of IAEC, and is coordinated by one or more cities.

The *Italian territorial network* was established in January 2000; IAEC nominated the City of Turin as the National Secretariat with the following tasks; linking and coordinating the 30 Italian Educating Cities with the headquarters of the General Secretariat based in Barcelona; ensuring that the Italian cultural and educational reality is present, in all its diversity, at IAEC's International Conferences; coordinating the presence of the Italian Educating Cities in a joint stand during IAEC's international conferences; organizing meetings between the Italian Cities who are members; informing, promoting, and advertising IAEC to other Italian Cities that are not members.

Furthermore, there are *Thematic Networks* created with the aim of promoting the exchange of ideas and good practices, joint work and collaboration between the Cities of IAEC is organized around defined themes. The themes can be proposed by the

Executive Committee or by a group of Cities. Each Thematic Network is coordinated by a City⁹.

Also the world organization *UNESCO* plays an active role in the project. In fact, since 2004 the Secretary of the IAEC has collaborated with *UNESCO* on the launch and promotion of an *International Coalition of Cities against Racism*, to establish a network of cities interested in sharing experiences in order to improve their policies to fight racism, discrimination, xenophobia and exclusion.

4. The political project for the city and the citizens of Syracuse

This, then, is the historical, cultural, and social context into which the civic project “Syracuse, Educating City” is placed. It is a model of Best Practice referred to as “Educating Community” in the literature of social pedagogy, as discussed above¹⁰. Following its subscription to the IAEC, the project “Syracuse, Education City” was set up, supported by a governing body nominated by the mayor of the city, with the task of directing and monitoring the educational programme of the territory. The Governing body of the project “Syracuse, Educating City”, is thus composed: department of Educational Policy of the Syracuse city council; prefecture; Provincial Health Authority; University of Catania; Territorial Educational Office; Social Services, Syracuse City Council; Ombudsman for the rights of minors, Syracuse City Council, Provincial Student Council.

The project articulates a programme of work for the city that is increasingly an educational system, focusing on the dimension of growth and training/education of citizens, particularly the youngest, enabling the interaction of a plurality of social subjects and institutions, each with a precise functional value and educational responsibility: institutions, associations, social services and authorities, groups operating in the urban context. Local authorities, with their newly conferred role, become responsible for and facilitator to the processes involved in planning territorial educational initiatives in the belief that nowadays educational policies must occupy a primary role in developmental strategies for the city. It is in this dimension that education really can be a crucial element to the creation of *another possible city*.

Specifically, the project “Syracuse, Educating City”, through its own governing body, defines the organisational structure and the priority of the strategic objectives in the “Collaborative Charter of Syracuse, Educating City”, for the development of educational principles to which the city should aspire; it identifies, furthermore, the

⁹ From the Charter of Educating Cities: " [...] Today more than ever the city [...] offers countless opportunities for education. [...] the city contains within itself major elements for integral education and training that makes it at one and the same time a complex system, object of educational attention and a permanent, plural, multi-faceted, educating agent capable of counteracting inimical educating elements [...] its identity is interdependent with that of the country it belongs to. [...]. The goal of this relationship is to learn, exchange and share experiences and thus enrich the lives of the inhabitants. [...] the great challenges of the 21st century: firstly, "investing" in education, in each individual, to increase his or her ability to express, affirm and develop his or her own human potential, with its uniqueness, creativity and responsibility [...]. The right to live in an educating city must constitute a relevant guarantee of the principles of equality for all, social justice, and territorial balance [...]". http://www.bcn.cat/edcities/aice/estatiques/angles/sec_charter.html

¹⁰ R. Laporta, *L'autoeducazione delle comunità*, cit.

actions in favour of organisational change, and normative management; it chooses the methods with which to carry out and achieve its goals and the evaluation of the same; it puts the institutional authorities in contact with the political actors of the educative project, establishing ever closer links between citizens and the governing bodies. Thus operators at various territorial levels are kept informed on the progress of the new system; ensure and promote the general coherence of all the planned initiatives. It is thus a planned document shared by all actors directly or indirectly involved in education, almost a “pact of citizenship” between administrators and citizens that directs the city towards the objective of an “Educating Community”, in the perspective of a systemic network. The project thus encourages the interaction of all agencies who are engaged in education, from the family and schools to peer groups, the world of work and all the other environments in which children, adolescents, youths, and adults of a shared urban space experience and live through exchange and assimilation.

The projects currently being carried out in Syracuse.

The concrete interventions put into practice since the beginning of the project are outlined below. They concern three micro-areas of interest: *educational inclusion and support; sustainability and wellbeing; participation and cultural heritage*.

What follows, then, is an overview of the various initiatives.

1. Title of Project: *Towards a slow school: Environmentally conscious and respectful of children's time*.

Premise and Objectives: A salubrious city is conscious that health issues are related to urban policy and numbers amongst its aims that of allowing people to exercise greater control of their own health in order to improve it and achieve a state of total wellbeing. In this context the project “Piedibus” has been launched, a human vehicle composed of a train of children in movement accompanied by two adults, with a terminus, stops, timetable, and a fixed route. By setting up a network between local authorities, schools, citizens and service industries, the project aims to promote the experimentation of “slow motion”, an initiative promoting experimentation with “slow mobility”. By establishing the foundations for educative and informative action, the project starts from the role of the citizen / child in forming a sense of citizenship to establish the ideological basis necessary to rethink and rebuild the territory.

2. Title of Project: *Don't be a drop out: Intervention in support of educational needs in schools*

Premise and Objectives: In order to avoid creating a “two-speed school” that neglects the essential diversity of all human beings - whether child, adolescent, or adult - the principle of educability is emphasised with the possibility of educational success for all. Currently, the Italian government is looking to reform and reorganise the Italian school system via a series of interventions aimed at relaunching its effectiveness. Inspired by this national objective, the educating city of Syracuse, with this project intends to promote actions aimed at: 1) stemming non-completion of school, 2) identifying specific learning difficulties with early diagnostic intervention in conjunction with the local health authorities. The project pursued the following objectives: tackling the phenomenon of school non-completion; instilling a sense of belonging to the community within the students; developing the ability to relate to others in compliance with the rules of civil life; promoting the acquisition of pro-social

and relational skills; promoting access to levels of more competitive and dynamic knowledge in order to grow and improve; improving skills and ability in the basic disciplinary learning of all students; promoting the construction of integrated “local support networks” that can set up and implement plans of action aimed at reducing the risk conditions and helping teachers to promote basic skills.

3. Title of Project: *Coding hour: promoting knowledge of computer language with dojo coders*

Premise and objectives: The cultural-scientific aspect of computer science, defined as computational thought, helps to develop logical competences and the ability to resolve problems creatively and efficiently. The easiest way to develop this computational thought process is by incorporating it into the context of play. For this reason it is now essential to train teachers and students alike in coding and html language as a precursor to and in support of the new reform of the “Good School” [Buona Scuola], which provides for the introduction of coding as a curricular subject. The scientific-cultural aspect of information technology helps to develop logical thought and creative problem solving, skills which are crucial for future citizens. The simple and amusing way to develop these skills is via coding in the context of play. The Dojo Coder (from the Japanese translation, the place where martial arts are learned) are clubs where computer programming is taught to children. The training activities of Coder Dojos are based on play, exchange, and peer learning, according to the only fundamental rule of every Dojo: “Be yourself and have fun”. In Italy over 40 coder dojo are spread across the peninsular and have been active since 2012. The project was organized through three different lines of action: raising awareness, information, and training.

4. Title of Project: *A tin tree for each district: recycling, reuse and participation for a sustainable city*

Premise: differentiated waste collection, recovery and recycling of aluminum bring numerous benefits to the community in terms of economy, energy, materials, and environment. There are two types of goal for this project: the first is direct, intended to raise awareness to differentiated waste collection, and on the ideology of recycling and reuse; secondly indirect, aimed at promoting the recycling and recovery of aluminum before and after consumption to be used in various applied sectors.

5. Title of Project: *I eat right: towards the construction of a food policy with the representatives of the Committee for School Canteens.*

Premise and Objective: in order to guarantee an appropriate monitoring of food, and a high quality school canteen service, a Canteen Commission has been set up with the local health authorities in order to utilize school canteens as a means of supporting local and sustainable food systems. This is also a goal promoted by national and European law on public procurement contracts.

6. Title of Project: *Syracuse Children's Council: towards a city suitable for children*

Premise and Objective: responsible participation in the life of the community can be learned, and therefore taught and experienced. The organization the Children's

Council aims to give children a central role in the management of the common good, to raise their awareness as to the needs of the city, and subsequently offer appropriate solutions. This project enables them to gain experience in representation, maintaining a close relationship and collaboration with peers who trust in them. Finally, the initiative offers them the chance to experience reciprocal listening, friendship and to discover the riches of diversity.

7. URBACT¹¹ *Genius*

Premise and objective: experience a new form of *governance* that consists in breaking down the barriers of public administration to open the doors to all the social actors in the city to find opportunities for growth, and to identify unforeseen solutions to urban issues. The Relaunch has been planned for a disadvantaged district on the outskirts of Syracuse, Mazzarrona, aiming at the inclusion of its inhabitants through a new form of *governance* and with 'open innovation', a bottom-up approach to planning initiatives for change.

Partial results

About 75% (disaggregate datum) of the Syracuse school population (teachers, children and school staff) responded and participated.

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¹¹ The European project "URBACT" of which URBCT genius of Syracuse is part, supports the promotion of sustainable urban development from economic, environmental, and social points of view.

Sitografia

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