



Urban Agenda Platform

The global platform for sharing progress, action and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable urban development.

Zebras: A Citizen Culture Project

Region	Latin America and the Caribbean
Award Scheme	Guangzhou Award
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Summary

On July 24, 2015, UNESCO declared the La Paz Zebras a "cultural asset" of the world for their contribution to the development of a stronger citizen culture in La Paz, replicated in many other cities of Bolivia and Latin America. In May of 2014, the La Paz City Council declared the Zebra Project a cultural asset of the city (Municipal Law 119/2015) for its major contribution to the city's quest for better living conditions.

Actions and Implementation

The goals of the initiative are basically two: Improve the behavior of citizens on the street and public spaces in general. This should lead to lower levels of traffic incidents and increases in the levels of happiness within the city. It has been demonstrated that citizens react positively to the friendly and creative messages given by the zebras, thus building new patterns of behaviour. Minimize the number of young citizens involved in illegal activities. In essence, every young citizen joining the program is one new human being who wants to contribute to society.

Outcomes and Impacts

The project has accomplished a lot over its 15-year history. It is now a trademark of the city and even a touristic attraction. Its impact motivates better behavior from citizens in the streets and other social activities, and has been widely documented and replicated, thus helping decisively to improve the quality of life for the citizens of La Paz. So far, more than 3000 young zebras have been a part of the project, giving them a new perspective on life after a troubled childhood. Currently more than 250 zebras are actively contributing to the program. While most of its impact has been local, the fact that other Bolivian cities have replicated the program implies that the project is gradually achieving a national impact. A remarkable spin-off, a TV show called "The Z" about the life of one of these young zebras as a leader in the community, has given the project yet another scale of impact.

Sustainability and Scalability

Innovation is actively applied in the policy implementation as part of the mobility strategy of the city. As the project has evolved, it has become part of an ambitious citizen culture and participation strategy. The Zebras Project will remain a key tool for improving mobility in the city, despite the ever-growing number of cars that circulate within the city. The project will also support many other city campaigns related to social and environmental objectives, such as taking care of the elderly or learning how to recycle residuals.

Gender and Social Inclusivity

A growing number of citizens and cars circulating in the city are two major challenges, due to high immigration rates from rural areas. Migrants often do not know most of the rules related to traffic and other social activities, and thus tend to incur several related faults. That is why the innovation still needs to reinforce even the most basic ideas it promotes. The risk of over-exposing the zebras is also present, but fortunately the coaching team keeps finding innovative ways to revitalize the image of the project to keep it fresh and friendly.

Innovative Initiative

Back in 2001 the initiative was certainly revolutionary because it was a completely different way to generate changes in the behavior of people. Perhaps because of this novel approach it was immediately successful, as more and more citizens started to respect pedestrian crossings. Currently after 15 years of continuous work, it has become more evolutionary, as now the zebras have evolved from simple actors trying to defend pedestrian crossings to proper urban educators facing many issues in the city (e.g. respecting traffic lights, keeping the city clean, respecting the elderly and taking care of children).



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Resources devoted to delivery

Recognizing that poverty is one of the main issues these young citizens suffer from, the La Paz municipality hires them as urban educators on a part-time basis and pays them the minimum legal wage, representing more than 3 million (close to half a millions US dollars) per year. Also, a coaching staff of the municipality permanently trains old and new zebras, developing new and more creative techniques in order to motivate better behavior among the citizens.

Conclusion

The methodology developed by the municipality to transform young vulnerable citizens into urban educators with a high impact on the society has evolved to become a trademark institution called “The Zebra Transformational Methodology”. Aiming to inspire these people with troubled childhoods to pursue happiness and visualize a life-project, the project develops a new attitude towards life which can then be extrapolated to their interactions with drivers and pedestrians every day. This methodology is now being replicated by primary school teachers in the city.