



INTERNATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
**Educating
Cities**

INTERVIEW

MAYOR OF BOLOGNA

Matteo Lepore

What are the challenges your administration faces in education?

The wealth and depth of experience that our city boasts in the educational field have helped us shape new policies to address the challenges that Bologna is facing today like many other cities. In recent years, particularly after the pandemic, we have witnessed an increase in vulnerabilities, loneliness, insecurity, and fear, not only among young people but also in many families. That is why, from day one of this mandate, the guiding principle of all our actions has been "leaving no one behind." This principle has taken shape through a series of interventions aimed at strengthening the network of local educational services, which, in coordination with schools, are working to prevent and combat school dropout rates and to make these services a point of reference for the entire community. A key example of this is the "**Radically Teenagers**" initiative, a new public policy we are implementing to care for teenagers and their families. It consists of 10 actions, supported by over 10 million euros in funding, designed to provide a concrete and firm response to the needs identified through the direct participation of young people.

Bologna has a long history of involvement with the International Association of Educating Cities.



Your city has now offered to coordinate the Italian Network of Educating Cities. What can Bologna contribute to the network?

Bologna not only has a long-standing history of participation in this collaborative structure among municipalities focused on education and training, but the IAEC (International Association of Educating Cities) was also founded as an association in Bologna, in 1994.

Unfortunately, in recent years, significant changes—partly due to the pandemic—have led to the weakening of social, family, and educational networks at all levels. To keep growing, it's always necessary to start with small steps, such as "restoring" relationships and reaffirming the commitment to maintain the Italian network, which has weakened over time but can and should be rebuilt.



As the coordinating city of this network, our first commitment is to take stock of what individual cities have accomplished so far and share a common thread to guide us toward a collective moment of exchanging experiences. In a network, we are all called upon to contribute something.

Can you share an innovative experience or project that Bologna has in the field of non-formal and extracurricular education?

As I mentioned earlier, we are innovating our extracurricular educational services through the "Radically Teenagers" program. This new public policy focuses on strengthening participation, preventing school dropouts, supporting parents, protecting health and mental well-being, and reinforcing the role of public schools as the foundation for every educational policy.

These extracurricular services are free and serve children and young people aged 6 to 18, offering a wide range of activities—from academic support to cultural, recreational, sporting, and socialization activities.

Starting in January 2025, all secondary schools in Bologna will remain open in the afternoons as part of the "Schools Open All Year" project, providing educational, artistic, cultural, and sports activities, as well as Italian language lessons for non-native speakers. Schools will also remain open during the summer, reflecting an approach that integrates school and community to better support families in balancing work and life schedules.



Your administration has made a concrete commitment to improve urban mobility. How do mobility, the environment, and education intertwine in your administration's decisions?

Bologna is the first major Italian city to implement a 30 km/h speed limit—a measure we introduced to drastically reduce pedestrian fatalities but also because we believe public spaces belong to everyone, particularly the most vulnerable, such as children and the elderly. This project is not just about reducing speed limits; it reflects a broader vision of creating a safer and more sustainable city. We are rethinking the city's times, spaces, and flows to make them more suitable for children and teenagers, ensuring spaces of opportunity and growth. That's why we have created several pedestrian school squares and transformed streets near schools into genuine social spaces, with input from young people living in these areas. We have also established guidelines for the design of schoolyards, aiming to transform them into outdoor learning environments with a focus on innovative and sustainable approaches to education.

Since 2019, and despite the pandemic, we have launched the "[Bologna Moves Sustainably to School](#)" project to promote good practices in school mobility. This has led to the creation of several pedestrian and bicycle routes with the active participation of families and local neighborhood networks.



How does your administration support and promote psychomotor and sports education for children and adolescents?

The administration has established a citywide committee with sports associations and groups to encourage initiatives that promote sports and counteract the abandonment of physical activity. We have collaborations and projects with schools, allowing access to municipal sports facilities during both school hours and extracurricular periods.

For the past two years, we have organized "Sports Day," a day dedicated to promoting physical activity as a valuable and effective tool for spreading a culture of well-being, as well as an invitation to adopt a healthy lifestyle from childhood. The event allows people to experience numerous outdoor sports activities and attend organized tournaments.

The "Parks in Motion" program is open to citizens of all ages and fitness levels, offering free sports activities in urban green spaces with guidance from instructors

Which city policies would you highlight in favour of new residents and inclusion?

In Bologna, there are 60,000 foreign residents, which represent more than 15% of the population. If we focus on the child population, the figure rises to an average of 30% in schools.

Most of the children and young people attending our schools were born here or have lived here for years, meaning that their entire upbringing and education have taken place in our city.

For this reason, we modified the city statute to grant honorary citizenship to all these minors, whom we consider "Bolognese from day one," as the campaign we promoted states. Moreover, our administration provides an essential service to schools and early childhood education centers by supplying Italian language teachers for foreign students, especially those who have just arrived. Through our linguistic and cultural mediation service, we help schools communicate with families who may have language barriers. During the summer, we offer intensive Italian courses to students who need to learn the language, provided in 20 schools across the city. This is a significant and ongoing investment that has already become part of the city's core services.

Additionally, in December 2022, the Bologna City Council approved an Action Plan for an Anti-Racist and Intercultural City. This document outlines the main guidelines for developing the administration's policies to make Bologna an intercultural and anti-racist city. The plan is the result of a participatory process involving communities and associations. One of its key outcomes was the establishment of shared goals across various sectors, including education, to develop intercultural competencies and strengthen actions against discrimination in schools. This approach guides the complex work of managing and celebrating diversity in a multicultural city like ours.

How does Bologna create educational and training opportunities for its residents, especially the youngest?

Bologna has always been known for offering a wide range of educational, training, and recreational opportunities for children. Many local entities (foundations, associations, and the city itself) collaborate to create important opportunities that allow children to explore the city, learn about its history, and visit significant places, fostering moments of growth and cultural enrichment.

Additionally, Bologna is internationally recognized for hosting the [Bologna Children's Book Fair](#) and the [Il Cinema Ritrovato](#) festival. To extend the reach of these major events to the wider community, we have been organizing the "[BOOM! Growing with Books](#)" festival for several years. This children's literature and illustration festival, organized by the city council and metropolitan area, takes place before, during, and after the Children's Book Fair and includes a varied program of activities such as exhibitions, workshops, film screenings, and meetings aimed at children, schools, and families. Meanwhile, the Bologna Film Library hosts "[Cinema Ritrovato Kids & Young](#)," an exclusive program that allows children to discover cinematic masterpieces and rare films from the past and present.

Bologna is one of the Italian cities that signed the Pact of Cities for Equality and Against Gender Violence. Could you highlight any actions in this area?

As signatories of the [Mayors' Pact for Equality and Against Gender Violence](#), our administration is committed to designing and promoting public policies that reduce disparities and ensure respect for differences. To address the growing inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic, one of the innovative actions we promoted at the metropolitan level is the [Gender Equality Plan 2021-2026](#). This plan defines actions and dedicates resources to promoting, raising awareness, and implementing equality across five specific areas: paid work, unpaid work, the fight against gender violence, the culture of equality, and combating multiple forms of discrimination. More recently, the city developed a tool to encourage and promote the use of inclusive language that respects gender differences. The guide, titled "[Words that Make a Difference: Writing and Communicating Respecting Gender Differences](#)," aims to make administrative language more inclusive and accessible, helping to reduce barriers between citizens and public services.



Soon, construction will begin on the Children's Museum, a playful and educational space where young visitors can learn through hands-on experiences, experimentation, and play. Why has the city chosen to invest in this project?

What is being created in Pilastro, next to the Luigi Spina Library and the Casa Gialla, will be a new cultural hub of national importance dedicated to children. This facility aims to meet the new needs of a community undergoing profound transformation, drawing on the rich pedagogical tradition of our city. The inspiration comes from Children's Museums, cultural institutions present around the world that aim to stimulate children's curiosity and foster learning through hands-on experimentation. An international design competition was held to select the winning project, which considers both the priorities of the museum's vision and the suggestions that emerged from a participatory process in the community. Additionally, through the competition "What Should It Be Called?", the city's children were invited to submit their proposals for naming this new landmark facility.

Why has citizen participation been, and continues to be, an important pillar of your mandate?

I firmly believe in a "we" politics, one that involves listening and working with everyone's contributions for the benefit of the community. I see participation as fundamental—the engine that drives our democracy. Participation means responsibility and commitment to the city and the community, working for the common good. From this perspective, our municipality has been a pioneer in Italy by incorporating a shared administration model into its Statute, which enables collaborations with social actors and local resources.

The regulation includes various forms of collaboration and supports sustainable, structured processes of joint planning and design between the administration and third-sector entities, independent associations, and other non-profit social actors. Through the New Pact for Shared Administration, the City Council recognizes the value of the active forces within the community, often represented by smaller and less structured organizations, in shaping the future development of the city, ensuring them recognition and support. Since 2017, we have implemented the Participatory Budget, a direct democracy tool that allows citizens to propose, design, vote on, and co-create neighborhood projects, which are then funded and carried out.