

Innovation and social challenges in Catalonia seminar

Palau Macaya

Secretary for Universities and Research; Director of "La Caixa" Social Department; ladies and gentlemen; President, in your absence,

A fortnight ago, renowned British journalist and historian sir Max Hastings published a forthright piece in the Financial Times criticizing the Tory party's weak handling of anti-European attacks in the United Kingdom. If the country faces disaster and irrationality, a significant part of the blame can be attributed to its indifference and its increasingly apathetic approach to combating mendacity. And what would he say about the state of affairs here?

Hastings' criticisms are particularly relevant for who they are made by – a stalwart of the conservatives – as well as how they are made and where. They are exceptional because it is never easy to speak up against your own, calling them out for the groundless nature of some of their arguments, or going against certain shared beliefs that are based more in ignorance and self-satisfaction than in knowledge or integrity. Again, some of this sounds familiar to us here.

The agenda we are presenting here today seeks to take a similarly candid approach, making clear that our current knowledge society and the fourth economic and industrial revolution is no guarantee of social cohesion and well-being for all.

«The transformation of our societies is a task of such immense dimension that we must do more than simply replace cogs in our social mobility systems or rely on the strengths of our leading research and knowledge transfer centres and our industrial and academic sectors.»

The British Empire of the 19th century or the Catalonia of 1992 are nothing more than hideaways for those wanting to indulge in nostalgia. Lessons from our past can provide

analogies or help us to understand processes happening around us, but we cannot sit in hiding waiting for our problems to fade away; either we take responsibility ourselves or we let the decisions be taken for us. I find the absence of informed decisions regrettable.

Today we set off on a future path with new coordinates based on a clear and determined belief in innovation, knowledge, cooperation, education and inclusion. Some fantastic concepts!

But the problem is not the concepts – shared ideals on which we can easily agree. The problem is how to activate the concepts, to bring them to life.

Let's be clear: examples are best given first-hand, and this applies to us as a society in general but particularly to the institutions we are here to represent.

I would therefore like us to take this 2019-2021 Catalan Social Innovation Agenda as a prescription. It's not a Christmas wish list, we're not expecting everything to be handed to us on a plate. What it is, is a road map for today's society to arrive at the country we want for our future.



«This agenda is a starting point, an initiative that aligns Catalonia with other nearby societies facing similar challenges; it diagnoses globally relevant problems at a local level, here and now.»

As the current Prime Minister of Iceland, Katrin Jakobsdottir, recently said, if everything is interlinked, then that includes the threats we face. In her words: «Human rights, social justice and gender equality are all intrinsically connected to the fight because climate change affects the poor more than the rich, the underprivileged more than the privileged, and women differently than men».

In other words, social justice must embrace everything if we really want to guarantee our citizens' welfare and unity. Innovation must embrace everything: from education and training to research, from climate change and human rights to equality.

Now we have it on our agenda, let's get to work!

Thank you very much.

Josep A. Planell