

CASE STUDY: Urban Renewal and Social Insertion. Opening of the City to the Sea

SECTOR: Holistic
COUNTRY: Spain

BACKGROUND

The municipality of Gijon, situated in the centre of the Asturian coast (north of Spain), occupies 182 km² and has a population of 267,000 inhabitants, 90 % of which live in the town itself.

Throughout this century, Gijon has undergone drastic changes as a result of the process of industrialisation, basically in the iron and steel and shipbuilding sectors, and their posterior restructuring. These events have especially affected urban development and human settlements. The greatest demographic expansion took place in the Sixties, with a population increase of 112,000 inhabitants (1960 -1975), a consequence of which was urban development totally lacking in planning, with the resulting chaotic spatial channelling of immigration. Peripheral neighbourhoods were created during this period without adequate facilities or infrastructures and as a final reflection of residential segregation, a number of shanty towns arose which housed the most marginal sectors of immigrants and which were established in the most socially and environmentally degraded areas, in the vicinity of local industries. Subsequently, due to the process of industrial restructuring at the beginning of the Eighties, a new situation arose with highly degraded areas situated within the urban framework which clashed head-on with the parameters of habitability and quality of life which the citizens of Gijon aspired to.

Thus, in 1972 we find that the first census of shanties reached the figure of 600, with five thousand inhabitants, distributed among seven neighbourhoods,

and up until the the Eighties, a large part of the seafront was occupied by railway, iron and steel making, shipbuilding and dockyard installations in disuse or in the process of restructuring

As a consequence of the lack of town planning and the absence of any kind of control, the town's wastewater were dumped into the sea with absolutely no type of sanitation and the quality of the air did not fall within the established limits. This situation impeded public use of the beaches and led to a demand for action to improve the quality of life in the town.

The solution to all these problems could not be undertaken unilaterally by the Town Council of Gijon, the Regional and Central Governments were obliged to intervene in their role as owners of part of the land to be acted on urbanistically and as promoters of sectorial plans (Housing Plans, Railway Station Plans, Coastal Plans, Sanitation Plans) and as channelers of the funds needed to undertake such far reaching actions. The participation of social agents was also necessary through the promotion of Neighbourhood Associations, Housing Co-operatives, and the creation of the so-called "Gestora de la Vivienda" (Housing Management Body) for citizen participation in the processes of evaluation and study of housing needs, stand out.

The Town Council of Gijon and the Municipal Foundation for Social Services assumed the leadership role of all the social, political and economic agents involved, establishing the context of this initiative with the setting up in 1984 of the Plan for the Eradication of Shanty Towns, and the approval in 1985 of the General Scheme of Town Planning, key dates in the commencement of the initiative: "Urban renewal and social

insertion. An opening of the town to the sea", the main basic aims of which are:

- The eradication of shanty towns, by means of insertion in proper housing that is integrated in the urban framework.
- Recuperation of the seafront and its transformation into new urban spaces to be used and enjoyed by the citizens.



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INITIATIVE

The process of implementation of the initiative may be summarised in the following points:

- An individualised study of each of the 600-800 families living in shanties.
- A sociological study of the phenomenon of shanty towns within the town.
- The creation of basic resources which temporarily improve the situation.
- Rigorous control over the existing shanties towns to impede their growth or that of new settlements of the mobile-home variant, factory ruins, etc...
- Involvement throughout the whole process of the people affected.
- Advancement-integration of the families affected throughout social, occupational and work projects.
- Economic incentives for the acquisition of their own housing.
- The setting up of two classrooms, a "Bridging School", a school dining room and showers.

- The implantation of a nursery school for children from shanty towns.
- The building of the prefabricated Settlement of San Juan (24 housing units) and the Advancement Town (26 housing units) and the purchase of a block of 35 flats for families previously resident in prefabricated units which were subsequently demolished so as to resettle their occupants in housing distributed among different buildings and neighbourhoods in the town.
- The elaboration and execution of the special plans for inner-city renewal of Cimadevilla and the rehabilitation of different areas of the city.
- The regeneration of the beaches.
- The Conservation Agreement for the Eastern Coastline of Gijón, the improvements and enlargement of the coastal pathway.
- The approval and execution of the Clean Air Plan for the leading industries in the Municipality.
- Implantation of an automatic network for monitoring atmospheric pollution.
- The approval and execution of the Integrated Sanitation Plan of Gijón.
- A sewage network, sewage plants and off-shore sewage outfalls.

EVALUATION

The length of this long process meant that non-traumatic and non-violent actions could be taken with the collaboration of those affected and without arousing any real alarm or fears among the remaining citizens. The following results have been achieved as a consequence of implanting the initiative "Urban renewal and social insertion. An opening of the town to the sea":

- The complete renewal of Gijón's seafront, converting industrial ruins into new urban spaces in the coastal fringe.
- The total eradication of shanty towns, resettling the families affected in the new urban spaces.

- The establishment of a context for transformation from an industrial economy towards one of a city of services.
- A Coastal Pathway has been created which starts at the eastern limits of the municipality, where the Celtic Hill Fort, the origin of the town of Gijón, has been restored. It passes by the regenerated beaches, and finished in an area that had previously been occupied by the Cantabro shipyards.
- The land occupied by the old Iron and Steel Making Factory has been rehabilitated as well as that of the surrounding industries and the spaces occupied by railway installations, which have been moved to avoid splitting the neighbourhood into two.
- The riverbed of the River Pilon, which until then had served as an open sewer for the wastewater from the iron and steel making industries and the shanties, has been reclaimed.

In the central zone of the seafront, the Local Quay has been transformed into a Marina alongside the Old Fishing Quarter and the Santa Catalina Headland. Previously, ships were scrapped here once the quay had lost its role as a commercial port as a result of the building of a new Port.

The wastewater generated by the inhabitants and industries of town of Gijón have been channelled by means of the corresponding sewage network, sewage plants and offshore sewage outfalls, these last installations being presently under construction. These actions have been complemented by active policies to reduce atmospheric pollution by means of systematic monitoring of emissions and imissions, with the installation of an automatic monitoring network, as a result of which the quality of the air may be qualified as admissible. At the same time, systems for the selective collection of domestic solid waste has been implanted. This

initiative has lead to the integration of previously marginal neighbourhoods without access to the sea into the urban framework and the opening of the town to the sea along with an increase in public spaces, green spaces, cultural and museum offers in favour of the citizens and the elimination of the housing shortage at the same time as encouraging co-operation.

MAIN DATA CONCERNING THE BENEFITS REALISED

Six thousand metres of Coastal Pathway have been built, another six thousand metres are under construction, an Archaeological Museum and a Railway Museum have been created, 1 ,860 housing units have been built (1,100 of which are housing co-operatives), the number of green spaces in the town has doubled from 800,000 m² in 1989 to 1,600,000 m² in 1998, and 2,900,000 m² of periurban green spaces have been created.



TRANSFERABILITY

The following stand out as fundamental aspects which have led to the achievements of the initiative and can be considered in other similar ones:

- Detailed knowledge of the situation before at all levels and the definition of the objectives to achieve by means of permanent actions.
- A political decision to implant the initiative through concrete plans of action
- a Plan for the eradication of shanty towns and a general scheme of town planning.

- A set of sectorial plans from other governing bodies and their funding, in conjunction with the objectives set out in the Municipal Plan.

REFERENCES

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Ayuntamiento de Gijon: Observatorio local. Annual Review with economic, social and urban data about the city.

Ayuntamiento de Gijon Web Site:
<http://www.ayto-gijon.es>