

## The A21 unanimously rejects Port expansion

Agenda 21 convened an extraordinary meeting to discuss the proposal by the Ministry to expand Xàbia Port. The Forum as a whole rejected this and any other project which would affect the landscape of Xàbia; its biggest tourist asset.



The citizens gave many arguments supporting their negative response, and claimed that the people of Javea must be those who decide their own future.

The meeting began with the screening of the Ministry's proposal, and an explanation by the technician from the company managing Ag21, that there was no additional information other than the images displayed, and that the proposal did not include an environmental report, nor any other technical document.

She then summarised all the technical decisions and references to Xàbia port that at the A21 Forum had taken over its four years of existence.

From the Action Plan and contribution to PGOU, to the socio-economic report, and qualitative and quantitative analyses of the town, each document agreed on the importance of preserving the landscape and environment as being of primary value and the means toward a sustainable future, and highlighted that sustainable development is incompatible with the expansion of construction. Also, the activity of fishing stood out as vital, both for its role in the local economy as its value for tourism. On the other hand, there was only a single mention by a single individual on the need to expand the port.

The assembly hall of the Casa de Cultura was full, and although it was initially feared that there might be some public disorder, as had happened on previous occasions in which this sensitive issue had been handled, interventions were made with absolute cordiality. All citizens who wanted to were able to contribute their arguments. This fact was noted upon appreciatively more than once: "finally we can speak about the Port in an open manner."

A project that does not benefit its citizens in any way

Many raised peoples' doubts about a proposal they saw as too vague, and in any event, which seemed only serve the interests of a private company rather than the Javienses.

A participant who presented himself as a port engineer, explained that in his experience it was a job that would prove too costly and with too much disruption. "For how long? Who pays?" How is it to be financed?, were other concerns. But this information has not been provided by Conselleria. The citizens did not hide their discomfort about the impression that someone was trying to defend private interests ahead of the public good, "there is no project, only a trial balloon which the Conselleria sponsors on behalf of a private individual, so that we would consider it ", reproached a participant.

Despite much going round in circles the people could not ascertain: "how the people of the port will benefit by the project", and claimed that many gaps in infrastructure and services have never been the interest of the regional government, starting with the run down state of the port, without lights, without waste bins and dirt. At the same time, the expert diver who made these statements denied that the sea wall may suffer a fracture, in reference to comments that had been made public a few days ago.

Citizens put the conservation of the unique nature of Xàbia first. Above all, the prevailing idea was that the most important asset Xàbia had for tourism and for its future sustainable development is its landscape and environment, without which there would be nothing to distinguish the town from any other.

A lady from the Port said: "Xàbia is thanks to its landscape, its people; what we must do is conserve the wonderful natural environment that we have; Xàbia is unrepeatable." And showed her indignation because of attempts to privatize an area which is public property, "a piece of land is privately owned, but the sea belongs to everyone." At the same time she did not hide her fears because not only is there no benefit in expanding the port, but it will be residents of Aduanas who must suffer all the negative consequences.

Also a bid to try and make citizens take the reins of the matter became clearer: "we must discuss what to do with the port, speaking clearly and with planning."

And that's because "we, the citizens, must initiate the debate about what we want", we are the people who will have to analyze all proposals, known and new, and "we decide what we want."

The region is like a large town: Denia already has port

The consideration of the region as a large municipality is something that is becoming increasingly important in the thinking of citizens who see clearly that, "in the same way that we go to Denia to the hospital", our neighbouring town can be the regional Marina.

And, as reasoned another citizen with a simple yet overwhelming logic, "I have a business (restaurant), and when the place is full up, no more people can come in."

But the rejection of the port is not a pig-headed attitude, since people recognize something must be done to the port harbour, re-organising moorings, and always respecting the fishermen.

Some recalled that there are several projects proposed by users of public moorings and the Yacht Club, which increase the number of berths, while supporting the fishing industry and ceding the use of the petrol station.

Citizens are the ones who should decide on their future

For their part, the residents of the Old Town gave a warning, invoking their bad experience with the privatisation of parking spaces in their urban centre, and warned others not to fall into the same trap, while again insisting that, "we must support each other to decide our future."

At the end of the meeting, it was decided to vote on the port. The proposal of the Ministry and also any expansion of Xàbia Port harbour was rejected unanimously.

The meeting of the Forum had been attended by all kinds of citizens, among the more than 100 participants were native javiense, adopted javiense, nationals and foreigners, representatives of neighbourhood associations of the Port and of the Old Town, members of the Council of Tourism , The Platform for Entrepreneurs, Traders and Residents, the Federation of the residents of Xàbia, the Civic Platform, activists of all political parties, etc.

Nobody gave an argument in favour of enlarging the port, nor in favour of the Ministry's project.

translated by Chris-Bttertton Jones

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