

The challenge for the future of Xàbia

Xàbia faces a very serious challenge for the coming years. That is, to define a model for the future of the town, and it is the people themselves, the real protagonists, who are responsible for this future evolution. A project of a town that can only be understood with citizen participation, pluralistic debate and which takes sustainability into account.



This is the main conclusion of the interesting talk given by the director of the Strategic Plan for the future of Elche, Antonio Martinez, whose discourse stimulated a hundred people gathered at the Casa de Cultura, among whom were the mayor, several Town Hall councillors, representatives of various social groups and members of the Forum of the Local Agenda 21.

Antonio Martinez Gomez is an economist and is now manager of the company of the Elche Town Hall - Developments and Municipal Initiatives, SA (PIMESA)-, dedicated to the promotion of industrial land, low cost housing, and urban management. He is also the director of the Strategic Plan of Elche and the Centre for Urban Initiatives and Strategies, Professor of Political Organization of Enterprise and Human Resource Management at the University CEU Cardinal Herrera and Vice President of the Ruralcaja Foundation, Elche. He is the author of numerous papers, lectures and articles relating to issues of strategic urban policy, local development and business management.

The conference entitled "Xàbia and its citizens' challenges: strategic urban planning" marks the beginning of a process of reflection and discussion about current realities of the town and its possibilities for the future. This initiative was promoted by the Councillor for Economic Development, in collaboration with the Local Agenda 21, which aims to "improve the living conditions of the citizens with their involvement," according to the introduction by the Councillor responsible for the area, Jose Chulvi.

The citizens are the prime movers of their town Antonio Martinez asserted particularly that the citizen is responsible for his town. In this sense, the Town Hall is only the manager of the municipality's resources, and "we (citizens) are responsible for improving the town." The citizen has to support the councillor, working with him, and giving him ideas. Martinez acknowledged it was true that often it seems that municipal representatives have deaf ears, and explained that the politicians and municipal technicians must learn to listen.

They must be prepared because when the citizen is first given the opportunity to express himself, he brings out every negative aspect and complains about everything. More than often, the politician becomes overwhelmed and shies away from this reaction. But it is necessary for the citizen to participate, and it is imperative to have mutual understanding.

The expert economist did not fail to insist on the importance of citizens participating in the decisions of their town.

In the end, the town is the place where people live and work, therefore, "the main leaders in the city are

the citizens, when acting individually and / or collectively, they determine the model of the town, present and the future."

The town has to be thought of like a company: The town, as an area where citizens live, relate and work, is a living entity, and as such should be constantly evolving, always changing. In this connection, Martinez, an expert on organizational business policies, compared towns with businesses. Like them, towns must be in continuous development in order to remain attractive and competitive.

By way of illustration, Martinez displayed various quotes from famous economic gurus cited in the main manuals of corporate governance, in which the word "enterprise" was replaced by "town."

Thus, as a main rule he stressed that we must not be afraid of change, "towns and people have to change..., and they need new ideas, projects and initiatives- like businesses- so as not to be left behind." In these times of many changes, in all areas, in which everything is complex and unpredictable, people find it difficult to open themselves up to change. "In the urban environment everything changes, and is doing so at great speed, in a complex, unpredictable and continuous manner, creating a state of some bewilderment and confusion." "There is confusion and fear, but we have to adapt," insists Martinez, and "no town is a slave to its identity."

"The future has many names: for the weak it is unachievable, for the fearful, the unknown, for the brave, an opportunity" Victor Hugo

"The future does not belong to those who wait, but to those who prepare." Manero

"The future does not exist... The future is not something that you think about; it's something that you create." Gary Hamel

"It is not enough to imagine the future, we must also create it." CKPrahalad

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." Charles Darwin

"The absurd man is he that never changes." George Clemenceau

"The past can not be changed, the future can."

"You can not run cities in the twenty-first century, with twentieth century structures and nineteenth century managers."

An exercise for the future: to think, believe and create

"Every citizen with his attitudes and his actions makes the town." "You have to be looking forward, and believe in the town in order to create it." Martinez recommends "doing an exercise to think what the future of this town will be." But then there is action, we must not stand still, "the future will be what we believe."

Urban policy of this century should "promote democratic coexistence, through the involvement and commitment of citizenship, and create an urban environment of quality with a high level of infrastructure, equipment, facilities and services, both public and private."

In short, "Urban policy must progress in balance with social, economic and land policy"

As for the politicians, it no longer makes sense that these lead, command and dispatch as before, since it should be the different social groups of a society which suggest the actions to be undertaken. To do this, politicians must learn to listen. At first it is difficult because everything consists of complaints from the people; but this is the first step in developing a strategic plan for the town. And once it has been developed, "any politician who is up for election and puts forward the Strategic Plan, will have secured an absolute majority." Indeed, this is precisely what happened in Teulada.

Strategic urban management

The Strategic Plan must show a local development strategy that takes advantage of the town's own resources and assets in order to create jobs and wealth, to improve the level of welfare of all the people and to guarantee quality of life. We must analyze the present, looking for solutions for those weaknesses of the town, while exploiting its strengths as an asset. With this in mind, we must look to the future and outline a plan which avoids possible threats, while seeking new development opportunities.

Martinez gave the example closest to him. Ten years ago the shoe industry was the large "monoculture" of the city of Elche. The rise of the Chinese market directly threatened the shoe-making industry, and hence the stability of the city's economy. Fear of change produced reactions as extreme as the burning of a container of shoes from the Asian giant. Through the Strategic Plan Futur Elx (www.futurelx.com), promoted by the City Council and headed by Antonio Martinez, Elche changed. It improved its weaknesses and took advantage of its strengths ultimately to serve as an importer of Chinese shoes. In the process, some had to leave the enterprise they had previously developed and convert to another area, but others simply adapted to a new market.

The key was to define a model of the city through a vision of the future, "creating an exciting goal, shared by all citizens." The basic principles for developing such a plan for the future imply that there is citizen participation in a common area where multilateral discussion can be developed, and where, despite differences between various sectors, a consensus is achieved and together key issues are jointly defended.

It is imperative that the entire society be united, and that everyone shares the same common goals, in order to guide all actions which can steer the city into the future. A strategic plan must propose an urban policy with the goal of progressing while maintaining a balance between society, the environment and the economy. We cannot attend to only one of these aspects while neglecting the other.

The town should be a place where citizens can enjoy public spaces that facilitate their social relations, where the environment and its values are not compromised for future generations, while enabling the

proper development of economic activities. A town must be sustainable in all its facets.

The end of monoculture

Xàbia, in a way, is in a situation similar to that of Elche a decade ago. The crisis in mortgages, plus the bursting of the housing bubble is forcing the construction industry to adapt to a new reality.

Antonio Martinez acknowledges that confronting this reality is not easy, but it is necessary in order to change and evolve. This requires a good dose of creativity, "we must be mobilized and be creative, think positively, participate, collaborate and improve." In addition we must be original, not copying ideas from others, and diversify the economy, both within the town and in relation to other municipalities.

We must not be afraid of ideas. We are in a society in which the creative idea is usually punished with a lot of opposing views, which lists thousands of reasons not to implement it, without even really having thought about the proposal. But it turns out that "some stupid ideas are great," and Martinez puts forward as an example the initial negative reaction of municipal technicians before the Bilbao Guggenheim museum project.

The way forward for Xàbia

Xàbia must chart its own strategic plan for the future. It is the Town Council which is responsible for promoting the development of this plan, encouraging citizen participation, via a method of reaching maximum consensus among all citizens, taking into account social life, the environment and the economy, ensuring sustainability and balance between the three.

Antonio Martinez repeated again and again the importance of social cohesion, the elimination of selfishness and individualism, "we must combine our efforts and the perspective of all." Must we must also be clear of the role of the citizen and that of the politician.

In this context, he gave an example of the problem of traffic congestion in Elche, which resulted in a lack of parking and excessive noise. Martinez explained how he faced the situation with clarity and a bit of humor: "the problem is caused by the people themselves and therefore one could not expect a councillor to solve it."

And everyone should be clear about their responsibilities. We shouldn't ask the Town Hall to solve all our problems, but citizens must also be involved in their town and the solutions to their problems.

Antonio Martinez ended his speech by proposing to Xàbia some objectives to be taken into account in developing its Strategic Plan:

Xàbia, an innovative town: More cohesive

More competitive

More modern and avant-garde

More respectful of its traditions and environmental values

More open

More participatory

More humane
More habitable
More caring
More sustainable

[Ver artículo original \(177 lecturas\)](#)