

Sustainable Mobility in Xàbia, a step in the right direction

Is urban mobility in Xàbia sustainable? Circle the option you judge appropriate.

1. "The pedestrian has the right to live in a healthy environment and freely to enjoy public space in adequate safety conditions for his/her physical and psychological well-being." Is it safe, both for adults and for children, to cycle or walk along the streets?

YES NO

2. "The pedestrian has the right to live in urban or rural centres arranged for people and not for the car, and to have available infrastructures which he/she can access easily on foot or by bicycle." In Xàbia does the pedestrian have priority?

YES NO

3. Children, the old and the disabled have the right for the town to provide a place for socialising and not for making worse their position of weakness." Can old people walk along the pavement or children play in the street in safety?

YES NO

4. "The disabled have the right to have measures taken which allow them full mobility, such as the removal of architectural barriers and making public means of transport suitable for them to use." Are the pavements, entrances to shops and offices, or public transport suitable for the disabled to use.

YES NO

These are some of the articles from the European Letter of Pedestrian Rights, from the Resolution of the European Parliament dated 12th October 1988. That is to say, it is the commitment which member states of the EU undertook to ensure the quality of life of their citizens with regard to the use and enjoyment of public spaces in cities.

In all probability, there will have been more "NOs" than "YESes" circled in the case of Xàbia, which leads one to believe that, despite calling itself a tourist town which seeks to export an image of quality of life and well-being, deep down it is far from meeting the minimum requirements, as regards pedestrian rights. And the fact is, according to the forementioned letter, that "the pedestrian has the right to full and free mobility". In particular, he/she also has the right:

- to a public transport service that is integrated and properly equipped for able and disabled citizens.
- to the setting up of urban zones, as broad as possible, which are not mere "islands of pedestrians", but which are set up coherently in the general organisation of the city.
- to the implementation of cycle lanes.
- To the availability of car parks which do not provide an obstacle to the mobility of pedestrians and to the possibility of enjoyment of architectural values.
- To the creation of "green lungs", including works of urban tree replanting.
- To speed limitation by means of structural reorganisation of roads, so that pedestrian and cycle traffic is guaranteed.
- To effective signalling systems taking account also of those with defective sight or hearing.

• To specific measures to facilitate movement of pedestrians: non-slip paving, wide pavements, arrangements to enable the crossing of busy roads, etc.

• To the generalised incorporation into public transport of vehicles which are not a source of atmospheric or acoustic pollution.

Unfortunately, few countries have taken pedestrian rights seriously: in Spain we still think that cars have preference over pedestrians, and only two days ago we thought going by bicycle was for the poor. For that reason, in the Aalborg Letter, signed in the Danish city in 1994 at the European Conference on sustainable cities and which serves as a basis for inclusion in local Agenda 21, we are reminded:

"We, European cities & towns, signatories of this Charter, state that in the course of history, our towns have existed within and outlasted empires, nation states, and regimes and have survived as centres of social life, carriers of our economies, and guardians of culture, heritage and tradition. Along with families and neighbourhoods, towns have been the basic elements of our societies and states. Towns have been the centres of industry, craft, trade, education and government.

We understand that our present urban lifestyle, in particular our patterns of division of labour and functions, land-use, transport, industrial production, agriculture, consumption, and leisure activities, and hence our standard of living, make us essentially responsible for many environmental problems humankind is facing.

We are convinced that sustainable human life on this globe cannot be achieved without sustainable local communities. Local government is close to where environmental problems are perceived and closest to the citizens and shares responsibility with governments at all levels for the well-being of humankind and nature. Therefore, cities and towns are key players in the process of changing lifestyles, production, consumption and spatial patterns."

And more precisely, the Aalborg Letter declares on the Patterns of Sustainable Urban Mobility the following:

"We, cities & towns, shall strive to improve accessibility and sustain social welfare and urban lifestyles with less transport. We know that it is imperative for a sustainable city to reduce en-forced mobility and stop promoting and supporting the unnecessary use of motorised vehicles.

We shall give priority to ecologically sound means of transport (in particular walking, cycling, public transport) and make a combination of these means the centre of our planning efforts. Motorised individual means of urban transport ought to have the subsidiary function of facilitating access to local services and maintaining the economic activity of the city."

These commitments towards a more sustainable world and towards more accessible towns and cities offering a greater well-being for their citizens were obtained by the member states of the EU more than ten years ago. Nevertheless, we continue to be the most polluting country in the Union, and only recently has the Agenda 21 process begun to be implemented in a widespread manner. On the other hand, the appearance of cycle lanes and pedestrian zones seems to have at its root citizens' protests, instead of being due to forward-looking initiatives from those who plan urban spaces. Fortunately, this tendency is changing, and in the last two years social and political conscience appear to come together on the path of sustainability. Anyway, the road sometimes faces difficulties in a country which believes that the size and price of one's car is an indicator of social status, quite the opposite to what is happening in the rest of Europe, where privileged people are those who do not need to use the car. Bit by bit, this post-war mentality will have to adapt to the European and global reality.

Unsustainable Mobility in Xàbia

During summer, as well as every Thursday market-day morning, it is obvious that Xàbia has an urban mobility problem: the main roads in and out of town get congested, the three urban centres become saturated and parking the car turns into an impossible task. Catching a bus is not a good option for many, not only because there is only one route, but also because when they run is a total unknown. On top of that, parking places have disappeared in inverse relation to the growth of the population. As for the pavements, mothers with push-chairs know how impractical most pavements are, either through being narrow or badly made, or because there are cars on them. Xàbia is a town intended for cars, but there is no longer room for them.

The Xàbia of the 21st century, tourist Xàbia, will have to solve the problem of urban mobility, and move away from a model of saturation by cars to another sustainable model. Fortunately, the Town Hall has already taken note of the problem and a variety of initiatives has been set in motion: urbanisation and widening of the ring roads, the improvement project for Avenida Juan Carlos I, the parking plans for the three urban centres, creating a footpath along the Gorgos river, installing speed humps and the faint-hearted appearance of a cycle lane in Avenida Augusta.

In addition, through Local Agenda 21 and in view of the revision of the Town Plan (PGOU), special emphasis is being placed on the problem of urban mobility, and on the importance of the contribution from citizen participation to create a more sustainable transport system. These important steps in the right direction do, however, give rise to one criticism, and it is that the underlying motivation seems to be only modernisation and the economic benefits which it brings, when in fact it should be the quality of people's life both now and in the future.

Mobility problems and possible solutions

Based on the information compiled in Local A21, both in the forum and in the lecture on Sustainable Mobility and Transport, and on the CIVITAS initiative from the EU, we have decided to analyse some of the main mobility problems in the town, and to propose a package of measures for Xàbia, which we hope will serve as an inspiration for the debate in the citizen participation forum.

Problem: Excess of traffic coming into Xàbia and of heavy vehicles and lorries within the town. The urban layout of Xàbia, with narrow streets and small roundabouts, is not the most suitable for the movement of large vehicles. Obvious examples can be seen on the bend outside Correos, where lorries and buses

often cause traffic jams as they try to negotiate the curve. It is also difficult for lorries going to the fish market (la lonja) or taking boats to the Club Náutico.

Solutions: In the Local A21 it was proposed to create an integrated goods centre, where, for example, the large lorries would come to pick up the fish which would be carried there in small lorries or vans. From CIVITAS it is recommended to create clean zones which only non-polluting transport vehicles can enter. From the Town Hall, there is a plan in existence to create a by-pass to the entrance to the port, an extension of the northern ring road (ronda norte), although continuing urbanisation makes this plan more and more difficult. The promised transport interchange (bus station) and public transport routes between the towns of La Marina and the main cities in the Valencian Community, could make it easier to get to Xàbia, both for tourists and for workers, avoiding the use of cars.

Problem: Lack of public transport in most parts of Xàbia area.

Solutions: In the Local A21, it was proposed to increase the bus routes, as well as replacing normal buses by minibuses. It would be necessary to introduce routes for the main arteries of Xàbia: Camí de Cabanes, Camí Cansalades, Benitatxell road and the Jesús Pobre road, as well as to increase the frequency of the route that goes up to Cabo de la Nao, and to include as part of the run the increasingly populated area along the Pla road (to Arenal). Bus stops with timetables and routes are essential to ensure take-up of the service. This may appear obvious, but in Xàbia it doesn't happen. To introduce the change successfully, there could be a loyalty campaign (for example, "Come to the market by bus"). CIVITAS recommends publicity campaigns in collaboration with retail outlets in the business districts, such as for example, discount offers, free offers of services or products (a cup of coffee, a glass of cava, etc.) on presentation of a bus ticket at participating retail outlets.

Problem: Difficulty of access to school areas because of intense traffic

Solutions: CIVITAS recommends making pedestrian zones round schools. So for example, in the case of the Tena and Graüll schools, Calle Ramón Llidó would be pedestrianised, and Víctor Candela, Foguerer and Virgen de la Merced would be priority for pedestrians, with access prohibited to motorised vehicles during school opening and leaving times. The other schools would have the street outside the main entrance as pedestrian only, enabling children to be dropped at each end and making it easier for cars to arrive and depart. Another measure is to create cycle lanes which connect up with the schools.

Problem: Difficulty in the use of bicycles in the Xàbia area due to the lack of infrastructures. The bicycle is an ideal means of transport for Xàbia and it's also healthy. It is not a question of everyone adopting it as a rule, but of increasing its use and popularity. In view of the roadworks process in the Old Town (Casco Antiguo), the bicycle can be a suitable way to avoid traffic jams.

Solutions: To encourage their use, bike parks could be set up (at present there is only one public one in the whole of Xàbia) and to signpost the flattest access to the town centre (along Calle Ramón Llidó). CIVITAS recommends setting up publicity campaigns to make people aware of how practical and healthy bicycles are, as well as creating cycle lanes. These lanes do not need to be exclusively for bicycles, but could simply be signposted to as having priority for them. The setting up of a network of Green Routes, and the development of a map which shows where they are, would encourage the use of bicycles, and would also constitute an ideal leisure activity for residents and holidaymakers, exactly at the time of

greatest congestion on the roads and in the car parks. In XAD we have begun a series of Green Routes which will be published every month in the section "en route". We can unite the whole area with these routes, except for the Arenal at the time of peak influx of tourists.

Problem: Difficulty for pedestrians in getting about Mothers and older people are the ones who suffer most from these problems in Xàbia. Anyone who has tried to walk around with a push-chair will be able to understand the difficulties intrinsic in pavements which have very high kerbs, or are too narrow or uneven, trees and posts which stop you getting past or parking areas which are uneven or covered with gravel. Using a wheelchair in Xàbia is practically impossible, unless it is designed like a tank.

Solutions: Fortunately, the law currently requires creation of wide pavements, but existing ones need to be brought into line. The Town Hall, with the remodelling of the streets in the Old Town (Casco Antiguo) and Avenida Jaime I will solve some of these problems. It would be sad to have to wait until the eternal project for the Montañar I promenade is approved to see its pavements brought up to standard.

Problem: Both in the Pueblo and in the zone of Avenida Augusta, to give a couple of examples, the street traffic direction is not always logical for drivers.

Solutions: One way streets should be organised taking into accounting the usual direction of traffic, and arranged alternately in and out to prevent people going down the wrong way out of frustration.

Problem: Noise from mopeds and scooters. Acoustic pollution makes its contribution to the quality of life of citizens in inverse proportions.

Solutions: The only means of coercion which is effective is fines and banning their use. The Town Hall has begun to process fines down the executing route (i.e. collecting them) and has made some space available for keeping banned vehicles. Let us hope these measures are implemented effectively.

Problem: Cars which are driven at speed mean danger and inconvenience for pedestrians and cyclists, on top of which they produce more acoustic and environmental pollution than those driven more slowly.

Solutions: The installation of road humps is shown to be the most effective way to reduce speed. It is the route chosen by Xàbia Town Hall. There are standards which define the precise characteristics which road humps must have according to the speed reduction required. The up-slope and the height are clearly defined so that drivers passing at an appropriate speed do not experience any discomfort, while those who are speeding do. In Spain these standards do not appear to be taken into account.

Some specific problems: There are many specific problems relating to urban mobility which call for very precise solutions. For example, Calle Canal Norte is the exit road from Avenida Augusta, and despite being a roadway in bad condition, very narrow and in frequent use by pedestrians, cars are parked in it hardly leaving room for vehicles to pass and noisy mopeds go up and down in both directions at top speed. Clearly unsustainable. The solution would be to pave it and give priority to pedestrians, to install benches and/or wooden barriers with openings to allow access to the boats. It should be completely forbidden to park along the whole road with vehicle access allowed in one direction only, and restricted to residents and canal users. Another example of mobility problems is the non-existence of a safe place for pedestrians and cyclists to cross the Carretera del Pla, all the way from the Pueblo to the Arenal, with the

exception of a couple of zebra crossings which, far from helping, are a potential accident risk. One solution would be to clean up the tunnel underpass from Camí de la Fontana to allow pedestrians and cyclists to cross underneath the Pla road.

Local A21 describes sustainable as giving priority to pedestrians.

In the lecture on sustainable urban mobility given by Professor Vicente Torres of the Polytechnic University of Valencia, organised by Local A21, it was obvious that in the long run we cannot depend on vehicles run on fossil fuels, since as well as posing a threat to the environment, oil is a scarce resource and, therefore, becoming more and more expensive. On the other hand, saturation by flowing traffic is to the detriment of the quality of life, which after all is what we all aspire to.

Urban mobility was defined as everything to do with transport in towns, parking, and accessibility for pedestrians. And it is sustainable when it can guarantee easy access and hence quality of people's life, as regards getting around the town, not only in the present day but also for generations to come. The key to Sustainable Mobility is priority for pedestrians: in the squares, from having wide pavements, through creation of pedestrian-only streets, through traffic lights with a button which changes the lights quickly, etc..

Vicente Torres explained in his presentation some of the main solutions adopted to improve accessibility in different European cities, and they all had to do with giving priority to pedestrians, and the use of bikes as the main means of transport. In contrast to the rest of Europe, where the bike is a symbol of quality of life, in Spain the car is considered a sign of social prestige, despite the fact that its frequent use carries with it many disadvantages, such as traffic jams and the growing difficulty of finding somewhere to park.

The car is a practical vehicle for journeys in the country, but in town the best way to get around depends on the distance to be covered: in order of distance this would be - on foot, by bike, by bus, by train and by car.

To achieve sustainable urban mobility it is not enough to adopt a single measure, such as to increase the number of bus routes - packages of measures have to be adopted which address action at many different levels: widening pavements, pedestrianising streets, priority for pedestrians over cars, speed-reducing humps, parking zones, creating more urban green zones, cycle lanes, improving public transport, etc..

What is CIVITAS?

CIVITAS is the acronym of "City-VITALity-Sustainability". It is a European Union initiative which aims to help cities to achieve a system of urban transport which is more sustainable, cleaner and energy-efficient, through the implementation and evaluation of packages of measures (individual measures are not enough to improve mobility). CIVITAS is co-ordinated by the same cities that are taking part in the initiative. They share their experience in trying out different measures, from the creation of a project (which could be improving the use of public transport or setting up cycle lanes), through to its implementation and the evaluation of its effectiveness, going through the methodology necessary to carry it out as well as the way publicity campaigns were run.

Each year the CIVITAS Forum meets in a participating European city. In 2006 the meeting will be held in the Spanish city of Burgos, on 26th and 27th September. Once more, this forum will reunite the CIVITAS

community, providing an excellent opportunity for creating links between cities and interchanging information on integrated strategies for clean and accessible urban transport systems, both at the political and the practical level. The forum is focused on themes relevant to implementation of strategies at the local level.

Participants can benefit from the practical experience of the main European experts on Sustainable Mobility. See the website at www.civitas-initiative.org

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