

Promoting coexistence in a multicultural neighbourhood

The plan for Terrassa's District 2 has boosted social inclusion in a neighbourhood which faced a high risk of conflict given the rapid influx of immigrants it had experienced, which jeopardised civic order. The plan, supported by the regional urban regeneration programme, integrated social actions and urban renewal in a single transformation process, reducing the district's segregation from the rest of the city and improving its reputation for tension and conflict. The plan was carried out with high level of citizen participation and adopted a transversal approach among different municipal services.

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The aim of the neighbourhood plan of District 2 of Terrassa (214 000 inhabitants) was the overall improvement of the neighbourhood to address urban and social issues. Its origin was the high potential for conflict and tension that stemmed from the fact that more than 30% of population of 17 000 had moved (mainly from rural areas of Morocco) within a short period into a poor neighbourhood. €27 million was allocated to the plan, which was executed between 2005 and 2011. The Neighbourhood Law of the regional government (*Generalitat de Catalunya*) was the framework and the instrument for neighbourhood regeneration. The plan addressed the physical improvement of streets and squares and, simultaneously, reduced social conflicts through mediation among different groups. The resolution of conflicts through communication with the affected people was a main result of the plan. A particularly important initiative was the creation and consolidation of householders' communities, which promote respect for the rules of coexistence. The improvement of Barcelona Avenue, the main street that connects the neighbourhood of Ca n'Anglada with the rest of the city, was also very significant. There were various programmes for young people, elderly people, unemployed people and children. A big boost was given to associations and neighbourhood groups, as well as support for small businesses in the district. The participation of citizens in the plan has been one of the main axes of this intervention. Municipal services worked in a common network to achieve greater effectiveness and impact. The lessons of the plan have been applied to other urban interventions. The economic crisis and its worsening impact on evictions and unemployment have had very negative effects on the achievements of the plan.

District 2 and in particular the neighbourhood of Ca n'Anglada has become a diverse and multicultural area, with a dense associative life, and full of small shops and young people who want to improve their lives as citizens and as neighbours. The plan has created the foundations for this neighbourhood to become a real space to exercise citizenship, and to rise above ethnic and cultural differences.

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The neighbourhood of Ca n'Anglada in the city of Terrassa, which lies 30 kilometres north-east of Barcelona, is well-known because of the racial conflicts and riots that took place 10 years ago. The press labelled the neighbourhood as a 'place of conflict', where 'too many' immigrants, mainly from Morocco, had settled during the last few years. The neighbourhood is an urban area with a concentration of immigrants, who make up 35% of the population. This social composition has generated a high level of social tension and confrontation with the native population. The neighbourhood suffers from high levels of urban segregation and poverty, and is stigmatised by its bad image. Ca n'Anglada became a byword in the press due to its difficult and conflictual situation.

But the problem cannot be approached from one single perspective. The concentration of immigrants is not in itself a problem. When the situation may get difficult is when a large influx of newcomers settles in an area where the situation is already bad – where there is a concentration of pre-existing problems such as low levels of education, poor housing and unpleasant public spaces in an urban area segregated from the rest of the city. As Felipe Arena, president of the strong and influential Neighbours Association of Ca n'Anglada says, "the combination of poverty, elderly people and ethnic diversity provoked a cultural and social shock in Ca n'Anglada."

Ca n'Anglada is located in District 2 of Terrassa and is home to almost 18 000 people, of whom over 32% are immigrants (the average migrant rate in Terrassa is 14%). They arrived from abroad over a very short period of time, mainly from 1995 to 2008. The contrast to the local population is strong, since the existing residents are mainly an aging population of retired workers from southern Spain, who migrated internally into the region in the 1960s. In consequence, Terrassa City Council decided to lead a determined intervention to reverse a very fragile situation where conflict and confrontation could have become chronic.

Indeed, Ca n'Anglada and District 2 are no exception in the urban development of many Catalan and European cities today. A concentration of social, economic and urban problems in segregated urban spaces can easily develop into a vicious circle of exclusion and deterioration, with fatal consequences. The municipal intervention in District 2, however, stands out as a good example of how local government tried to close the gap between the newcomers and the native population by building a dialogue between them, to ensure a peaceful coexistence. Mediation in conflicts through personal contacts has increased confidence and trust between the parties. Likewise, the equal participation of the different communities living in the district in the various activities that were arranged also contributed to a positive development.

The Neighbourhood Law

During 2004, the City Council of Terrassa applied for a grant under the Neighbourhood Law that had been adopted by the Catalanian Government. The law allocates regional government funding to projects led by local authorities to regenerate neighbourhoods and urban areas that require special attention. The financial contribution of the regional government (*Generalitat de Catalunya*) has to be matched with finance from the local authority. Sharing finance between regional and local government entails shared monitoring by a specifically created monitoring committee. The regional programme establishes several indicators of social, urban and economic needs that should be considered by those municipalities that want support. It gives each project a score that determines the 'need for regeneration'. These indicators include planning deficits (state of the buildings), population issues (population density, ratio of foreign population,

dependency ratio), economic and social problems (unemployment, poverty, low skills, people at risk of social exclusion) as well as accessibility (transportation, public parking spaces).

The regional programme is a sort of 'affirmative action' for those neighbourhoods that suffer a concentration of social and town-planning problems. As an institutional scheme it is innovative because it combines a holistic view of the urban problems in the region with the voice of the specific neighbourhoods where the problems are experienced, and



The renewed Civic Centre at Montserrat Roig

links them to the local authorities, which take the lead in tackling these issues.

The Catalan Neighbourhood Law provides financial support for special public interventions in those urban areas where problems of urban segregation and social exclusion are concentrated. It supports integrated and cross-cutting plans covering eight issues: public spaces, building rehabilitation and renovation, community facilities, information and

communication technologies, sustainability, gender, socio-economic programmes and accessibility. Through this law, the regional government has already financed more than 100 neighbourhood projects all around Catalonia and has mobilised European, regional and local funds. The District 2 plan required an investment of more than €27 million over seven years.

A local team was created involving all municipal departments. At first the technical office, and later District 2, were in charge of the whole strategy, coordinating and monitoring each area of intervention. The individual activities were managed by each department, mainly the Departments of Social Action and Civil Rights, Social Services, Economic Development and Urban Planning.

The lead organisation ensured the integrated approach and the coherence between the activities. Some of these activities should be singled out for their relevance and their effective contribution to the goals of the plan. From the beginning, the most relevant projects and measures the city council implemented were those to improve coexistence and social inclusion. For example, the Welcome Programme for newcomers set up the Information and Orientation Service (SIO), which aims to ensure that everyone has the basic information they need to settle in and to feel welcomed. The service works in coordination with various facilities and municipal services. More than 800 people have benefited from the SIO's basic package, and up to 303 persons have been provided with guidelines.

Barriers to integration

Inclusive development has been the main focus of the District 2's Neighbourhood Plan, in particular as concerns the neighbourhood of Ca n'Anglada, the principal neighbourhood in the district. Here, part of the population lives in severe conditions of exclusion, suffering bad housing, a lack of public spaces and a low level of education and skills. It was a massive influx of immigrants over a short period of time that threatened to disrupt social cohesion and coexistence. In the last 15 years, 30 000 immigrants have moved to Terrassa, and 5 000 of them chose Ca n'Anglada as their home. This led to a clash in 2002 which made coexistence very difficult, because certain civic norms were not shared by the newcomers, given their rural traditions and cultural background – and also because among local people, stereotypes and prejudices were rife.

These obstacles to coexistence between communities were the key factors impeding the inclusion of the newcomers. There was a need to build relationships and links among all the residents of the neighbourhood, in order to increase social cohesion. The plan has strengthened social inclusion by promoting ways to coexist peacefully, creating space for interactions and bolstering feelings of belonging. It has also built the social skills that people need if they are to escape from situations of social exclusion, poor housing, illiteracy and unemployment. The physical improvement of the urban fabric was also a factor in strengthening inclusion and social cohesion.

The main point of the new plan, which was launched in 2005, was the adoption of an integrated approach, linking activities in different fields. The main ones were: welcoming and reception of newcomers, enhancing coexistence and strengthening interactions between ethnic communities, activities (such as sports) for young people, reinforcing citizen participation, promoting retailing and restaurants, new cultural activities and services, improving the quality of life of elderly people and promoting intergenerational relations, building and improving community centres and civic facilities, and renovating the streets and public spaces of the district.

The programme to promote coexistence, launched by the Department of Social Action and Civil Rights, has provided an advisory service on legal frameworks for the management of community associations, which enable owners and tenants to solve their common problems in the apartment buildings. The programme of support for these associations included the explanation of the *Good Coexistence* guide to 2 400



Miguel Hernandez Square – a public space recovered by the plan.

members of neighbours' and householders' communities. It contained information on behaviour rules for the use of public space. More than 300 micro-interventions were performed on the street to detect points of conflict and resolve them. Almost 55% of community residents report a positive change since the visit of the Neighbourhood Plan officers.

The local development programme 'Jobs in the Neighbourhood' created a network among the

environmentally accountable shops which were already established in District 2. It provided job orientation which has benefited 315 unemployed people. Around 200 mainly young people have taken part in vocational training courses (in care, computing, masonry, cleaning, gardening, etc.), which were offered by the municipal enterprise Foment de Terrassa.

Strengthening social networks, volunteering and community life was one of the plan's main goals. A total of 73 associations and organisations involved in education, training, health, religious issues, economic and social activities were involved in the development of the Neighbourhood Plan. More than 5 000 people have taken part in activities addressing citizen participation, such as public hearings where elected councillors, municipal officers, local associations and citizens themselves meet to discuss the plan, or working groups on specific aspects of the plan.

A bridge to the future

Physical regeneration and new building have also played a significant role in turning District 2 round. The project renewed 13 streets and two squares, transformed the main thoroughfare, Barcelona Avenue, improved three existing bridges and built a new bridge plus a footbridge. It has smartened up parts of the neighbourhood, and incorporated new elements of safety, comfort and mobility for pedestrians into the urban landscape. Two community centres have been built. This improvement of the neighbourhood's physical space and environment is very significant because it complements the social intervention and reinforces the residents' pride and sense of belonging.



There is consensus among observers, both within and outside the municipality, that over and above its expected and achieved outputs, the plan has strengthened social networks and social capital in the community, and reinforced the social structure and the ability to anticipate, prevent and absorb conflicts.

It can be concluded that a number of the activities and initiatives implemented by the plan had positive impacts in reducing isolation, lack of communication and prejudice. These were very important preconditions for the organisation, formalisation and consolidation of communities of neighbours in many of the blocks of flats. These communities include families of different backgrounds that share common problems in their buildings. The plan has been an opportunity for neighbours to get to know each other and share basic rules of civic coexistence. Activities such as sport practice have been used as 'excuses' for meetings between the autochthonous population and newcomers, and as a means to build mutual understanding.

However, during the project's implementation a major difficulty was noted in rapidly creating a space for peaceful coexistence in a context of strong multiculturalism, where citizens' cultural differences and social behaviours become evident. Stereotypes and prejudices, coming from both parts, are thorny barriers to a good and fluid coexistence, and impede the spread of civic values. The plan therefore supported small but symbolic



Activities for elderly people

activities like 'Cooks of the world' (*Cuiners del món*), which encouraged women, both immigrants and native, to cook their traditional recipes. The project, which was organised by the Women's Association of Ca n'Anglada, mobilised more than 40 women and published a cookery book. The project carried out several actions to allow and to facilitate dialogues, understanding and new relations in the neighbourhood among individuals and families. The effects and impacts of these efforts are difficult to

measure and there is some pessimism about the achievements. Usually, social changes at this level cannot be achieved only through public intervention, but require processes that build mutual understanding and shared trust, develop a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood and reinforce social bonds.

General acclaim

The evaluation that was conducted at the end of the first period of the plan (2005-2008), showed that technicians, politicians and neighbours all value the achievements of the plan and think that social cohesion in the neighbourhood has increased. Residents agree that the city council has reached out to the community through this type of intervention.

In this sense the plan has been innovative and has distinguished itself from other public policies owing to its integrated approach, its transversal application, and the new links and internal communication within the city council.

Hence, several aspects should be remarked on as clear assets of this innovative urban strategy. First, the intervention approach has incorporated the dynamics and values of coexistence, mutual knowledge and strengthening the social structure (networks, interactions, etc.) between different social and ethnic groups. Conflicts have been addressed, and coexistence and conflict-solving spaces have been created. The plan was aware that outputs of this kind are not always visible in the short term. This approach also requires a clear political commitment and a bold approach.

Secondly, the coordination and integration between different municipal services was very important. Different departments have worked together not just by combining their efforts but by sharing a common vision of urban regeneration. This has been a success factor that was taken into account by other neighbourhoods.



Citizen participation: working group on coexistence and cohesion in the neighbourhood

Thirdly, the creation of new public spaces and roads has improved the quality of the urban fabric and has enhanced urban identity and people's sense of belonging. Furthermore, roads that integrate the District 2 neighbourhoods with each other and with the whole city were renewed.

Fourthly, simultaneous work to generate broad participation and interaction on the ground, and to reach out to socially excluded groups such as elderly people, young people and women was very relevant. It allowed dynamic processes of inclusion to be initiated through proximity ties.

Also important was the strengthening of associations and the active participation of many of them. However, there are different perceptions about the effectiveness of public participation processes driven by the plan. It seems that it was better at disseminating passive information than at encouraging citizens to deliberate and take the common objectives on board.

Nourredine El Hamlouni was born in Ksar El Kebir in northern Morocco and has lived in Ca n'Anglada for 10 years. He is a volunteer mediator, founder of the Catalan Association for Friendship and Future, and he says that he has mediated in several small conflicts involving neighbours. He is optimistic though, because 10 years after the riots there is a much greater capacity to solve conflicts: Moroccan immigrants are recognising civic norms of behaviour, while at the same time more and more native people are recognising the newcomers as their neighbours.

Undoubtedly, the plan made a great effort to improve coexistence and undertook several actions to ensure civic norms through mediation processes. It is very difficult to measure the impact of these actions, because they take time to bear fruit. Nevertheless people do feel that the likelihood of conflict is less. But a climate of tension still reigns, exacerbated by the current economic crisis that has led to new situations of exclusion (evictions, unemployment, new poverty etc.).

It seems certain that the plan has improved neighbourhood policy, the coordination of decentralised municipal services and the integration of different measures and projects. But this development is slow and often imperceptible. It is a long-term gamble, and relies on the residents staying involved in those issues that concern them. Outwardly, it seems that a certain way of making public policy is ending.

Hence, many people had higher short-term expectations of the plan and they doubt that the district has entered into a real and sustainable process of transformation.

But if pressed they admit that everything takes time. It must be said that the local authority has a strong



The northern part of Ca n'Anglada has a high concentration of ethnic minorities and housing in bad condition.

commitment to young people, and the plan

has been able to involve many young people in voluntary activities, culture, training and strengthening intergenerational relations. The council is also committed to small retailing, and especially the restaurants and bars that are typical of working class neighbourhoods. Support for this sector should continue so that the district becomes still more attractive.

Can social change be sustainable?

It is also true that many challenges remain to be tackled, such as improving and smartening up the northern part of Ca n'Anglada, building new housing and demolishing derelict buildings. Pere Montaña, the first director of the plan, and head of the Terrassa's Department of Urban Planning, says that the problem with plans of this kind is that they should bring an added value, and this is not always achieved. Physical regeneration measures are clearer, they can be sustainable by themselves, but in social interventions sustainability is not always ensured once the additional budget provided by the plan is exhausted.

Whilst he is aware of this problem, he believes that the plan has succeeded in creating and strengthening social networks, and has thus boosted the capacity to anticipate problems and prevent conflicts. Not only is the community more resilient, but there is also a greater capacity in the municipality through the integrated strategy developed by the plan.

But finally, can we say that the plan of the District 2 of Terrassa has been a real success? What has its main contribution been? Has it been innovative in its approach, its management, and its impacts? We have no clear and definitive answers to these questions, but we can be positive about some of them.

First, we must say that the plan tackled a huge problem: the obstacles to coexistence between communities that share a degraded urban area. The newcomers have no interest in getting closer to the native population. As they are a big community, they are satisfied with the social ties within their own ethnic community. Meanwhile the native community believes that the massive arrival of immigrants is to blame for rising social exclusion and deprivation.

In this sense we can say that the plan faced a long-term and substantial challenge. Mediation and interaction, through close intervention in the neighbourhood, was crucial. These interventions encouraged people to make contact with each other and discover projects of common interest. The strategy was that each party must recognise the other party, so opportunities to get to know each other better and to share common goals should be created. Boosting communities of householders, citizen participation, and cultural and youth activities, were various ways to do this. The way the plan created opportunities to strengthen cultural and social ties has undoubtedly been a social and institutional innovation.

At the same time, the plan has been able to dignify the neighbourhood, by improving public spaces, streets and squares, thus creating a space of coexistence and social inclusion. People now have a stronger feeling of belonging to a shared space. The plan also facilitated a shift in the organisation of municipal services. The integration of segmented policies has had positive impacts on the effectiveness of public services. The plan entailed the creation of learning networks within the municipality and between the council and the civil society partners. Plans in other neighbourhoods of Terrassa, like the plan that is currently under way in La Maurina, are benefiting from this learning.

District 2 and in particular the neighbourhood of Ca n'Anglada is a diverse, multicultural and conflicted urban area. It has a dense associative life, small shops and young people who want to improve their lot as citizens and as neighbours. The plan has created the foundations for this neighbourhood to become a real space to exercise citizenship, beyond ethnic and cultural differences.

As noted above, many of the results and impacts of the plan are not readily observable and may evoke different opinions or at least different perceptions. People look at the same environment with different glasses. In any case what has been done and what is still under way will leave a footprint in the medium and long term. More and more residents will feel they belong to the neighbourhood – not only because social networks are stronger but because the quality of urban public space is improved.

AEIDL has been contracted by the European Commission in 2012 in order to provide 50 examples of good practice in urban development supported by the European Regional Development Fund during the 2007-2013 programming period (contract reference 2011.CE.16.0.AT.035). The views expressed by AEIDL remain informal and should not under any circumstance be regarded as the official position of the European Commission.