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# URBAN AND SOCIO CULTURAL RENEWAL PLANNING PERFOR- MANCE

## SITUATION

Sustainability is the optimal relationship between people, environment, economy and available technology. Heritage and sustainability are strongly linked, as today's heritage is nothing but yesterday's sustainability. Nevertheless, through our work with different city councils in Spain, we found that sustainability and heritage have three main problems when it comes to urban planning.

The first problem is that they tend to fall under **separate areas of policy (disciplines)** and are dealt with by different ministerial **departments**. Heritage and sustainability policies are therefore badly coordinated in their application. This may lead to contradictory solutions.

A second general problem in urban planning that influences the relationship between sustainability and heritage is the time between the planning conception and the implementation of the results on the ground. **Urban planning consists of long term activities** that take a long time to get fully implemented. We can only really see if the original planning ideas were correct once their results have manifested themselves, often years after the original policies and plans were conceived and investments made. If those plans are not effective, we will have wasted many resources that we cannot reverse because it will cost then even much more time and money. We cannot follow a trial and error process.

Finally, heritage and sustainability policies need to be filtered according to the **specific context** of every city. The **people**, the **natural environment** and the **history** of every city are so different, that the policies cannot be directly applied without being adapted to local circumstances. Solutions for similar problems need to be adapted to the specific needs of the cities where they are applied.



1. Historic centre of Villena  
source: elCASC



## APPROACH

To face these problems between heritage and sustainability applied to urban planning, we based our proposal on 4 guiding principles:

### 1. Deeply rooted approach

Every action or problem needs to be adapted according to the specific circumstances of the city in order to understand fully the core of the matter. Understanding the people, the natural environment and the history of the city will help us evaluate in what cases heritage should be kept in front of sustainability policies and in what cases sustainable solutions are more important than heritage conservation.

### 2. Multidisciplinary point of view

Life in a city is very complicated and has many layers linked one to each other. Urban, social and cultural aspects of life are strongly related in the city. When you study an urban planning problem or action, you need to deal with it from many different points of view and disciplines at the same time in order to be able to find a proper solution using all the tools you have to deal with it. Only if we face the entire dimension of the problem we will be acting in the most effective and economical way.

### 3. Coordinated action

Once you have decided on a broad approach to the problem in question, you need to coordinate the different city council departments involved and make them work together in the same direction. You need to constantly monitor progress and ensure that the (interim) results are fulfilling the expectations of each department in the most efficient way possible, without diverging too much from the expectations and objectives of the other departments.



2. Cave in Villena  
source: eICASC



3. "Big eared tower" from different views  
source: eICASC



4. Urban cave installation  
source: eICASC



5. Encalijá in Villena  
source: [www.villenacontame.com](http://www.villenacontame.com)

## 4. Participative

To ensure that our plans are correct before implementing them, we need to take into consideration the people we are planning for, the residents. The residents have to be an important stakeholder involved in the planning of the area. Our plans will only be effective if they fit into the life of the people concerned and make their life in the city better.

## ROLE COORDINATION

To follow these principles, we need get together the main actors involved in urban planning and make them collaborate within the necessary broad perspective of the urban context. The urban planning categories of actors that are involved in our further proposals are:

### 1. Political

All the local Government departments. Their job is to study and identify accurately all the problems to be solved and all the potential to be exploited.

### 2. Academic

All the University departments related to the urban needs and strengths of the town. Their task is to establish what academic areas are related to these problems and potentials.

### 3. Private

All the professionals, businesses, companies or residents who have experience in the selected fields, the resources needed to work with or who are going to test the final results.

### 4. Director

To put all these actors together, it is necessary to appoint an urban planner as the technical director that coordinates the tasks of the different actors. The urban planner is the core person that makes all of them work together and in the

same direction towards a sustainable and heritage conservation-friendly urban development. The urban planner needs to be somewhat separate from the other three categories of actors, as he has the broad, overall perspective of the context of the town.

The combined work of these actors is to assure that their work will be useful in the future for urban planning. This combined group selects a specific problem of the town, studies it intensively within the context of the town as a whole, establishes the disciplines needed to deal with the problem and leads the actions that must be carried out to achieve the proper solution.

## SUMMER FESTIVAL

In late 2012, we got in contact with the **town council of Villena** and we decided, together with the **University of Alicante**, to organize a **multidisciplinary event** in 2013 where we could study and analyse the historical centre of the town and its problems, and test some possible quick low-cost solutions. This event follows precisely all the four approach principles, studying the local context, bringing together the point of view of the residents with the participation of people from different disciplines and coordinating them in combined results.

To give shape to this event, we set up an **organising group**, getting together the four categories of planning actors mentioned above. This organising group worked for eight months (from January to August) to coordinate all the different local government departments, understand the specific features of the town and stipulate which disciplines should be involved in the event.

As the town had already organised a number of small socio-cultural events during the year, thanks to the work of the historical district's office and many neighbourhood associations, we decided to establish this new event as a **longer academic event**, focused on the



6. Group coordination  
source: eICASC





urban problems of the historical town centre, their possible solutions and the educative diffusion of the values of the town's heritage.

We decided to give the event the format of a **festival**, consisting of a series of workshops, lectures and activities lasting 10 summer days. At the festival, more than 100 students from all over the world and different disciplines studied, designed and developed on-site practical solutions to the identified problems under the guidance of expert tutors and local residents.

As the festival was focused on the historical city centre of Villena, we decided to call it **eLCASC** ("casc històric" catalan phrase for historical districts) formed as an acronym from "Certamen de Activación Socio Cultural" (Socio Cultural Renewal Festival).

11. Main pavilion  
source: eLCASC



7. Medieval Market / March 2011.  
source: www.villenaentame.com



8. Oktoberfest / October 2013.  
source: www.facebook.com/rabalvillena.com



9. Halloween / November 2013.  
source: www.facebook.com/rabalvillena.com



10. Wacky races / March 2013.  
source: www.villenaentame.com

eLCASC was born as a new urban planning activity, aimed at investigating and transforming the social and urban fabric of the historic town centre, and establishing a testing ground to study the town's, social, cultural and technological problems and strengths.

First we had several meetings and discussions to introduce the organising group into the environment of the Historical Town Centre of Villena, from which we identified the main issues and potentialities of the historical town centre that we wanted to study and suggested solutions to:

- Urban voids and dividing walls
- Old houses
- Open gaps and dug out caves (from demolished houses)

- Complicated urban planning (6 volumes)
- Insufficient urban equipment (parks, gardens, benches, ...)
- Social conflicts between different ethnic groups
- Young people who had never been in this district
- Too few shops



12.

source: www.iberrutas.com



13.

source: elCASC



14.

source: www.flickr.com/risugon



15.

source: www.villenacuentame.com

Later, we identified seven disciplines which could deal with these problems and develop the strengths. Each discipline was linked to a different workshop:

- Urban voids equipment
- Heritage / Restoration/ Urban plan of the town centre
- Educational resources
- Urban art
- Traditional handcrafts
- Activities in public spaces
- Social Education

Finally we selected 7 people / organisations who worked on these disciplines and had proved experience in each one to lead the participants of every workshop:

- Arae - Restauración y patrimonio, Restoration and Heritage.
- Zuloark - Self-made urban equipment and citizen participation.
- PKMN architectures - Educational and social resources for the city.
- Espai MGR - Street art, social and urban criticism.
- Paco Ortí - Art, traditional craftsman.
- Desayuno con Viandantes (DcV) - Urban criticism, citizen participation.
- CPESRM (Social Educators association from the region of Murcia) - Social education

## 16. Madrid skyline games.

source: PKMN



## 18. Crafts.

source: Paco Ortí



20.

source: author

**17. Social breakfast.**

source: DeV

**19. Habit make us blind.**

source: Espai MGR

**INTERVENTIONS**

The ultimate purpose of every workshop at eLCASC was to devise and deliver innovative low-cost architectural, artistic, socio-cultural and technological interventions which could possibly play a role as future model solutions to be developed by the government or the local resident associations. All the workshops were focused on different local features and disciplines. Below are several images of the workshop interventions and activities:

1. The history of the construction of the town is a perfect example of a zero waste construction. The historic centre of Villena was built in a mountain and many houses were dug out directly into the soft lime rock because this was an easier and cheaper way to build the walls. This construction method provided warmer houses in winter and cooler in summer.

Zuloark and PKMN equipped a square with urban self-made wood furniture reproducing the shape of the dugout caves to show them outdoors and providing a place to sit and meet in a park.

These cave-houses were also represented at an artistic installation by Paco Ortí made out of metal mesh, clay and local materials that provided a new essence to a new urban square that had resulted from several house demolitions.

At the same time, a local art studio called Aeiou studio performed a tape art intervention in a dividing wall representing again these cave-houses and trying to diminish the visual impact of the dividing wall.



21.

source: eLCASC



22. Zuloark &amp; PKMN.

source: eLCASC



23.

source: author



24. Zuloark &amp; PKMN workshop.

source: eLCASC

2. The heritage and sustainable traditions of the town made it more social and liveable. With the technology of the lime kiln, people used the lime rocks available in the area to get the quicklime. The quicklime mixed with water became a natural and breathable paint. As lime paint needs to be repainted every year, the people made it before their holidays and turned this annual necessary tasks into a social and cultural event called “Encalijá”.

eCASC organized an “Encalijá” to paint several streets of the historic district with the help of the residents.



25.  
source: [www.villenaentame.com](http://www.villenaentame.com)



26. Encalijá.  
source: eCASC



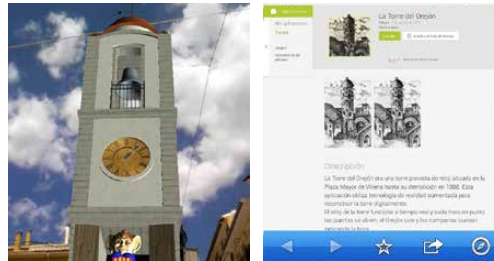
27. Encalijá.  
source: [www.flickr.com/risugon](http://www.flickr.com/risugon)

3. New technologies offer us the chance to recover our past without the need of new constructions or big investments. In medieval times, there was in Villena a civilian tower with a clock with a small big-eared puppet which came out every hour. It was such an important feature in the city, that people from other cities started calling them “big-ears”. This tower was demolished in 1880, but it’s still alive in the memory and tradition of the people of Villena.

eCASC tried to bring it back through an augmented reality app with which you could see the tower, at its original size and on its original site. Another activity to remind the people of this tower was a big wheat-paste billboard at a big dividing wall of a building close to the plot where the tower had been.



28. Aumented reality / Diffuse / “Big eared”.  
source: eCASC



29. Virtual “big eared”.  
source: author

30. App playstore.  
source: author



31. Media presentation.  
source: eCASC





32. Arae tape art traditional house.  
source: eCASC

4. Another problem we tried to solve was the insufficient number of shops and places of employment present in the historical town centre.

The workshop by Paco Ortí tried to encourage the people to generate their own job by recovering a traditional and contemporary craftman's job like the ceramist. All the participants learned how to work with clay to build traditional ceramic pieces, considering them as a piece of art, the glazing and the use of a clay oven.

5. Due to the existence of many empty spaces, the historical town centre has many dividing walls that give the impression that the area is unstructured and unfinished.

The workshop by Espai MGR tried to bring urban art expression onto these walls with the aim of diminishing their visual impact. For this they used a non-aggressive technique like the wheat-pasting of big printed billboards generated digitally. They placed an image of old music cassette with tape out of it and a pencil trying to rewind it and get it back into the cassette. This was an idea developed with a local resident association, who wanted to show and remember that in this spot there was the "big ears" tower.



33. Arae tape art traditional house.  
source: eCASC



34. Arae tape art traditional house.  
source: eCASC



35. Wheat-pasting Espai MGR.  
source: eCASC



36,37. Wheat-pasting Espai MGR.  
source: eCASC



38. Wheat-pasting Espai MGR.  
source: eCASC

6. The number of demolished old houses in the town centre left many empty unbuilt and unused spaces. Such spaces gave the area an unfinished, badly structured and abandoned image, which was not attractive for urban renewal investments. The plan for the historical centre of Villena tried to address this problem and proposed the demolition of many houses. But it took 10 years for the plan to be completed, during which time social circumstances in the area had changed, which, together with the economic crisis, had led many people to want to renovate their houses rather than move away to other areas. The new socio-economic context after 10 years had made these proposals, unwanted and difficult to implement. The result was a complex, out-of-date plan making

it difficult for the people and professionals to really know what can or should be built and what not. There was a need to show the people the potential use of the unbuilt and unused spaces and study at the same time the complicated plans for the historical centre.

The workshop by Arae Patrimonio y Restauración studied the existing plan and designed an example of a possible house that combined the observance of building regulations with new construction techniques and a model final result. By making an artistic 1:1 scale mock-up of this possible house using plastic tape for the floor and walls, they were able to show residents that it was not impossible to build an affordable and pleasant house in an otherwise unused and empty urban space in the historical town centre.



39. Rooftile Paco Orti.  
source: eICASC



40. Crafts Paco Orti.  
source: eICASC



41. Paco Orti.  
source: eICASC



43. African dances.  
source: eICASC

42. Football.  
source: eCASC



7. A principal feature of the urban renewal project was the improvement of social and neighbourhood relations. Urban space affects social interrelationships, so they must also be taken into account in urban planning. One of the main strengths of the historic town centre is the limited car presence that allows the spontaneous use of public space there to socialize, play, consume and many other uses. Through the small houses and narrow streets, people are closer and more connected to each other, which is an important value of most of the Mediterranean cultures.

After a drift by the historical town centre of Villena, the workshop led by Desayuno con Viandantes organized a series of street dinners. The dinners took place in different specific spots in the town centre. At those dinners, 2 of the workshop

participants shared a table with 2 residents who had been dissatisfied with something for a long time or who had different ideas about the development of the town. Both residents were unaware who they would be sharing a table with. They organized the table to encourage conversation and create a mutual understanding of the problems of the town centre. This was a different way to involve people in citizen participation without them really, certainly initially, realizing it.

The workshop by CPESRM organised different activities like a batukada performance (percussion and dance), an African dance masterclass or a football match for children, with the aim of bridging ethnical and cultural differences and encourage residents to make better use of the public space together for anything they need or want.



45. Batukada.  
source: eCASC



46. Open air dinners Desayuno con Viandantes.  
source: eCASC



44. Soft rock molding.  
source: eCASC



47. Green attack.  
source: eCASC

## CONCLUSIONS

The first eCASC festival was a **complete success**. Everybody (town council, university, organizers, tutors, participants and residents) agreed that all the results of the festival were positive. They wanted a second event to be carried out the following year (2014).

All the results of the workshops were meant to be a **reference for the future urban renewal of the town**, to be carried out by the town council and or the place-making interventions carried out by the residents, proving the necessity of their involvement. The creative atmosphere of the festival inspired individuals to think beyond their own fields of knowledge and experience by relating to other people. Creativity was able to provide new identity to unstructured urban areas. The workshops showed the people and the town council **the importance of good collaboration between different agents and of pooling resources**.

The town council also realized the usefulness of **civic participation tools** for the design and management of urban renewal processes **prior to any plan implementation**. The best way to for politicians and professionals to get into the real context of an urban area is to understand it through the people who live in it, and there are many other and different ways to do it without asking door to door or organising big meetings where just the most vociferous get their message across. At the same time, the event showed the town council that there are many different ways to fulfil the urban renewal of an area without the need of investing huge amounts of money to build fancy facilities without the guarantee they will be used.

The main goal of the workshops was to involve the local people, show them that the results were for them and that they had the right to decide, to use the new facilities and to take care of them. The **bottom-up interventions showed the residents that they had the capability to build the town they wanted** and the benefits they can get through **participating themselves in the**

**urban planning processes**. The festival activities showed that people have the right to help develop their own towns and cities and not just wait for the politicians, professionals and property develop-

*“The results of eCASC were specifically adapted to local history and features of the town centre of Villena, but the same procedure applied to a different town could get totally different results. When studying another town, eCASC may also take different duration or formats.”*

ers to do it for them.

In addition, the workshops and activities helped to bridge **some urban and social prejudices** in the people and showed them that working together with people in other neighbourhoods whom they never met or talked to offered different possibilities for the town as a whole to regenerate and reactivate its historic core. Many young people in Villena had never crossed certain streets or areas just because they were perceived as “dangerous”. Now working in these areas and meeting the people who lived there, they realized that this was just an unfounded preconception.

The ludic atmosphere of the festival generated positive social relationships between people, thereby **enhancing the traditional community feeling** of historical town centres. In Mediterranean historic areas, people spent most of the day in the street gathering with the residents. This is one of its major benefits we must not forget and we are intent on preserving.



48.  
source: elCASC



49.  
source: elCASC



50.  
source: elCASC



51.  
source: elCASC



52.  
source: elCASC



53.  
source: elCASC