Pontevedra, walking does it!

PETTRA, a firm devoted to strategic territory studies is submitting to the 10th European Urban and Regional Planning Awards the practical experience of the city of Pontevedra, which, for the last 14 years, has been developing an urban model based on the culture of sustainability, and whose sustainable mobility projects have managed to decrease fossil fuel consumption to about 400 tonnes per day, just 65% of what was previously consumed. Such consumption has been replaced by the most natural of energies: the human capacity to move without the need of motorised machines.

Pontevedra is a municipality with 83,000 inhabitants. About 65,000 people live in the city centre and it is the main point of reference for a territory with a scattered population of 160,000, which is typical of the Autonomic Community of Galicia.

Its mobility policies are directly related to energy consumption, since widespread use of the car created a significant demand for fossil fuels, as well as causing problems derived from air and noise pollution, and road violence.

Energy consumption associated to the exploitation of the territory is intimately linked to the use of private transport for journeys inside the city itself. For this reason, a plan to dramatically reduce such intensity of traffic was carried out, with the idea of replacing it with journeys on foot.

A car consumes nothing if it does not move. This very simple argument led to applying the concept of **necessity** with regard to the use of cars in the urban environment. Thus, the underlying principle of spatial planning is energy sustainability.

Consuming less fuel means reducing greenhouse emissions, less air and noise pollution, less road violence, and more quality of life for the people living in the area. In short, fostering the sustainable management of the territory **in search of an alternative urban model.**

The process

It was people's willingness to turn their city into a healthy, environmentally friendly place that set this project in motion. For this, diverse local initiatives were suggested with the aim of improving the relationship between the intervening elements of the urban space by redistributing their weight taking into account the social and economic aspects of the territory.

The management and planning mechanisms that were used to achieve the transformation of the city into a more sustainable space were very varied and complementary. Among others, there were:

— **Regulations** Pedestrianization of the Historic Centre and those areas of denser commercial activity were planned by means of:
- An edict declaring the Historic Centre as a place of absolute pedestrian preference (1999), later expanded via the Plan for the Special Protection, Interior Reform and artistic preservation of the Historic-Artistic Site, enacted in 2003.
- The establishment of "Guidelines for the enactment of regulatory ordinances for the use and protection of public spaces, and instructions for their treatment" (2009).
- The modification of an ordinance regulating municipal road use. Top speeds are limited to 30 km/h citywide; Pontevedra becomes the first city in Spain to do so.

— **Urban planning** Implementation of urban development policies based on sustainable energy criteria:
- The compact city is maintained, respecting its historical evolution and following traditional European urbanism standards.
- Tertiary economy development is fostered, especially with regard to commercial and administrative tasks inside the city.
- Housing development in the outskirts is limited, which would lead to an even more intensive use of the car.

- Relocation of businesses to the outskirts is prevented.
- New infrastructures and facilities are created in the urban space (stadium, music conservatory, sport facilities, university campus), which are accessible on foot from any point in the city.

— **Infrastructure** In 1999 transformation of the physical urban space is started with the purpose of adapting it to more sustainable criteria, reducing the space reserved for cars and increasing the one devoted to the people who move with energy of their own.
- Most streets widen sidewalks and narrow traffic lanes.
- Architectural barriers are suppressed, promoting universal accessibility.
- The number of long-term parking spots is dramatically reduced.
- New spaces for the coexistence of different mobility alternatives arise, always respecting pedestrian priority.
- Life-saving speed bumps are in widespread use.
- Easy parking spots are expanded to avoid useless car journeys for those coming from outside the city.

— **Operative** Rearranging motorised traffic following the principle of necessity allows for a considerable energy saving, therefore, proactive measures are adopted to reduce the number of car journeys.
- Service parking systems are put in place (15 min surface parking for free) in the most central areas accessible by car. This facilitates operability in the services sector.
- “Way to School” Plan, to encourage children to walk to school in an environment that is completely safe by suppressing accumulations of vehicles around schools.
- Creation and spreading of awareness of Metrominuto, a map indicating the times and distances between key points in the city. The purpose here is to foster movements on foot inside the city.
- Plan for motorised urban mobility. Priority access points for vehicles are established, thus discouraging inappropriate uses of motorised vehicles.
- Pontebici Plan for the promotion of bicycle use side by side with motorised transport and pedestrians.

Planning and urban design works have been carried out both by private companies and local technicians. Pettra’s 2012 Traffic Plan was especially important to consolidate the urban model following the new driving conditions and traffic calming regulations, pursuing top levels of urban quality, a decrease in energy consumption and the effective functioning of the city itself.

Apart from Pettra’s strategic study, the council’s architects (Mr Jesús Fole and Mr Ángel Velando) and engineer (Mr Jesús Gómez) have taken action to put the new regulations into effect.

Energetic balance

There has been an ongoing decrease in the city's energy consumption and this is easy to perceive. As the urban model was perfected, the use of fuel clearly diminished and the number of movements on foot increased, not to mention the positive effect on people's health, morale and urban harmony.

Decrease in energy consumption			
	1997	2012	Variation
Incoming vehicles			
Vehicles per day	79,000	79,000	*
Average distance covered	9 km	8.7 km	- 0.3 km
% incoming vehicles to the city center	83%	9%	- 90 %
Average times to destination	36 min	17 min	- 52 %
Inside movements			
Vehicles per day	52,000	17,000	- 67 %
Average distance covered	3.8 km	1.9 km	- 1.9 km
% incoming vehicles to the city center	98%	32%	- 67 %
Average times to destination	18 min	7 min	- 61%
Decrease in fluel consumption at 4,5 l/h			
Daily consumption	530,550 l	172,800 l	- 67 %
Effective daily reduction		357,750 l	
Effective annual reduction		130,578,750 l	

* The number of incoming cars in 1997 was slightly inferior (68,000), but it has been homogenised to draw a more realistic comparison with the data available.

Sources: 1997 traffic and mobility plans (performed by Iceacsa) and 2012 (by Pettra), in addition to data compiled by the Local Police Traffic Control Centre.

This dramatic decrease of 67% in energy consumption can be explained with the following data:
- Considerable reduction in the number of vehicles coming from outside the city and heading to the centre, which went there in the hope of finding a free parking spot. Nowadays, they are diverted through a series of rings (which already existed then) and either drive more smoothly to their destination or resort to free car parks and their occupants get to the centre on foot.
- 67% decrease of internal motorised journeys. The cars are not moving because their owners choose walking rather than driving.
- It takes less time for motorised vehicles to reach their destination. It is now half the time it took them 14 years back.

Recognition of this model

The urban model of the city of Pontevedra, apart from being the central subject of presentations, sessions and work meetings in several places in Europe, has been awarded many important prizes.

— **Cermi Prize 2007**, awarded by the Spanish Confederation of Disabled Persons in recognition of its universal accessibility policy in public spaces. This prize is truly meaningful, as it is the associations themselves that choose the winner. All Spanish associations of people with mobility problems function as self-regulated entities.

— **National Prize of Galician Culture**, in recognition of its urban transformation, as well as the respect and enhancement of its historical and architectural heritage.

— **Fesvial Prize**, awarded by Fesvial Foundation for Road Safety in 2010, whose jury was composed of the main state institutions to do with mobility and safety, as well as private firms and NGOs working in those areas.

— **Safe Mobility Prize** during the 2nd Gathering of Cities for Road Safety, held in Córdoba under the auspices of the Directorate-General for Traffic (DGT) and the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP), in recognition of its dramatic reduction of accident and fatality rates in the capital.

— **"Child-Friendly City" Declaration** as presented to the city of Pontevedra by Meniños independent organisation in 2012, in recognition of its awareness of young children when dealing with urban mobility policies.

— **Intermodes Prize 2013** in recognition of its intermodal transport policy based on pedestrian mobility. The highest recognition Pontevedra has received for its alternative city model from a European administrative organism.