EURO CITIES

Gijon's new governance model

Digital tools help empower citizens

Gijon City Council has responded to the need for greater efficiency, transparency and participatory democracy by changing how it operates. At the heart of its transformation is a digital platform enabling residents to share responsibility for governing and managing the city and helping it become a stronger and more vibrant place to live and work.

Gijon is one of the most populated cities on the northern coast of Spain, with its fair share of urban problems. It is also one of the most committed to becoming a smart city. In working towards its goal of using integrated technologies to provide truly intelligent services across the city, it had already launched a smart citizen card, introduced e-government initiatives and established mechanisms for collecting city data. The next step on Gijon's smart city journey was then accelerated by growing demand for greater accountability of political leaders and greater involvement of local people in public decisions.

The city council recognised that it needed to operate more transparently and openly and work hand in hand with citizens to understand the actual status of the city and the experiences and views of those living in it. This was vital, it believed, if it was to be able to develop relevant and sustainable initiatives addressing the social and economic realities of the city. So the council resolved to do two things: to provide wide and easy access to public data to open up new opportunities and solutions: and to empower and enable citizens to take an active part in the workings of government and help improve their city.

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Societies and citizens are changing and developing ICT tools to release and make use of open data is one of the biggest steps to enabling citizens to actively participate in local affairs - one of the features of a modern, 21st century city.
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Enrique Rodriguez Martin, European and international affairs, Gijon City Council

Urban platform

These objectives led to the development of a Citizen Participation and Open Government Strategy in 2014. With total funds of €203,000 from the municipal budget and the European Regional Development Fund, the council set to work with business, NGO and technology partners to turn its vision into reality.

First it developed procedures for co-participation, co-decision making, co-creation of information and co-production of public services. It then created an integrated 'platform for participation' to enable these activities. This hosts three portals which release city and governmental data to the public for the first time in a clear and meaningful way.

cities in action

November 2016

where: Gijon, Spain
what: Knowledge society
when: 2014 - ongoing

The first of the portals to go live was Observa Gijón (Watch Gijon), an 'urban observatory' providing access to nearly four million sets of records related to the city's economic management, local government activity and welfare indicators. The portal has been seen more than one million times by people wanting to learn, analyse and evaluate the real-time management of the city, including municipal budgets and investments. As a source of data on the city's different business sectors, Observa can also inspire entrepreneurs to, for example, build an app that guides art lovers around the city's galleries.

Digital democracy

The second portal, Cuida Gijón (Care for Gijon) means citizens can help maintain and conserve the city's streets and facilities, encouraging personal responsibility and saving government money. People can quickly communicate, via the Cuida website or app, issues they notice such as street lights that aren't working or benches that are damaged. For transparency, all reported issues are published online and updated when they are fixed. As well as dealing with around 1,000 complaints a year, the portal also receives around 275 improvement ideas. For example, Cuida's inventory of municipal land and properties gives citizens the chance to check ownership and, if unused, to propose new community uses.

The third portal, Participa Gijón (Participate in Gijon), is the primary mechanism for promoting and strengthening participative government. Here, citizens can learn about council initiatives, put forward their own, comment on different topics and proposals and take part in a collaborative decisionmaking process. New regulations, city plans and competitions have all been opened up for debate on the portal. One of the biggest collaborative decisions made via Participa so far has been how best to spend Gijon's 2017 €6 million participative budget.

Collective intelligence

These tools have helped some citizens start to see themselves as co-responsible for the daily management of the city, especially 'digital natives' and community activists. The challenge now is to engage more citizen groups. To reach them, the city has created a communication programme of workshops, micro-sites, videos,

mentoring and working groups. To overcome barriers to progress within the council itself, such as lack of digital know-how, a plan is being rolled out to modernise the municipal organisation so that it can better support Gijon's overarching smart city strategy.

The portals are being enriched and enlarged day by day as more projects and issues are opened up for discussion and residents add their own information and ideas. Users' collective intelligence and low-cost electronic voting are making a valuable contribution to the tools' ongoing cost-effectiveness. The next goal is to ensure that the platform continues to add value to the city as an essential element of its smart city infrastructure: by helping to bring the Internet of Things into public life, creating a 'city nervous system' enabling truly intelligent management of resources and services.

> " It is unusual to be able to access this large amount of information in open formats about what is happening in a city and about what the local government is doing. Even more unusual is the way all this information is presented, in an accessible and understandable way, with graphics and maps. "
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> **Paco Prieto, creativity & innovation Consultant, Talento Corporativo**

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Contact: Fernando Alvarez Garcia | Head of the planning and modernisation service, Gijon City Council | fagarcia@gijon.es