

Focus Experience

n° 30

Educating Cities
International Documents Databank



Title

Neighbourhood Guardian Program of Cascais A plan to improve the quality of life in the city

Basic data

City: Cascais

Country: Portugal

Number of inhabitants: 205,113

Topics: citizen participation, volunteer work, environment, civics, quality of urban living

Principles of the Charter of Educating Cities: 1, 4, 9, 11, 20

Summary

The Neighbourhood Guardian program was created in 2009 by the Department of Environment of the City Council of Cascais in order to encourage citizens to participate voluntarily in the improvement of the quality of life in their neighbourhoods. The work of the guardians consists in reporting on the status of the public spaces in their area of residence (urban cleanliness, refuse removal, care for public green spaces, play and recreational areas, promenades, car parks, public safety, etc.).



The guardians act, moreover, as educational and awareness agents on environmental issues and other matters vis-à-vis the other citizens, from the perspective of a service of proximity. When the residents identify a problem, they inform the guardian in their neighbourhood, who has direct contact with the Department of Environment and other services of the City Council.



Any citizen between 18 and 80 residing in Cascais can apply to be a Neighbourhood Guardian by submitting an application to the Department of Environment. The regulation governing the Neighbourhood Guardian set down their rights and duties, and frames their action in accordance with the quality and transparency standards of the Department of Environment, based on the effectiveness, thoroughness and excellence of its services.



Cascais' Guardians

At this time there are 210 guardians covering all the neighbourhoods in the city. They ensure the maintenance and conservation of 93 children's playground areas, 23 community vegetable gardens, 3 vineyards and 2 community apple orchards, 126 hectares of green spaces and approximately 1,140 kms. of streets.

The Neighbourhood Guardian program has proved itself to be a success. Since its launch, there have been more than 12,500 requests for interventions in public spaces, where the problem resolution rate has been 98%. The Program is based on the need to create dynamic, participatory local communities concerned with the conservation of their environment.

Objectives

- To promote synergies between the City Council of Cascais and the residents of the different neighbourhoods of the municipality.
- To involve, inform and make the citizenry aware of the process of becoming responsible for the management of their neighbourhoods.
- To solve the problems identified by the residents in their neighbourhoods as quickly as possible.
- To foster citizen participation in issues affecting their city.
- To raise awareness on the importance of respect and harmony in public spaces.
- To foster efficiency and effectiveness of municipal services.
- To make the citizenry aware of a more sustainable lifestyle.

Methodology

During the first stage of the Program 54 Neighbourhood Guardians were selected, who were spread out across 4 municipal districts. Beginning their functions in January 2009 now there are 210 guardians.

Each guardian is given the material necessary for their activity (identity card, mobile phone, notebook, regulations, institutional brochures, contacts with the relevant municipal entities and a map of the intervention area marking out: public green spaces, recycling containers, routes of the manual and mechanical street sweepers, etc.). The guardians call for interventions through an app that allows them to send pictures and use a geo-location tool to pinpoint the area requiring intervention.

The guardians attend training workshops focusing on issues related to the co-responsibilization of the citizens in the conservation of the environment and the improvement of the quality of life in the city. Moreover, they attend information sessions with the participation of the executive of the City Council of Cascais, the staff responsible for the districts and the municipal technical experts in the city's different areas (Environment, Town Planning, Mobility, Municipal Police, etc.). Monthly and annual meetings of guardians are also held.

Since the creation of the Cabinet of Citizenry there has been tighter guidance of the guardians in the search for solutions to problems, clearing up doubts and distributing information on environmental awareness.

The guardians are also compensated for their non-remunerated volunteer work through the CityPoints app, which rewards citizens in general for their good practices. This app lets you accumulate points that can be exchanged for discount coupons or special deals on local products and services (free entrance to museums, participation in guided tours or other events, attending training workshops, coupons for books, plants, etc.).

The guardians also participate in activities of the Department of Environment, such as, for example: The Environment Week, Local Vegetation Week, and Children's Week, amongst others.

Collaborating Entities: City Council of Cascais, Neighbourhood Committees, Municipal Companies, Municipal Police, Associations, Civil Protection, etc.



Guardians' Activities

Social and urban context

Cascais is a Portuguese city located on a small bay on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, 27 km. from Lisbon, with a population of approximately 206,000 inhabitants and a surface area of more than 97.4 km².

According to official figures, in the last 20 years the secondary sector has been losing ground to the tertiary sector, which represents around 86% of municipal economic activity (2011 figures).

It has been noted that currently most of the Neighbourhood Guardians are over 46 years old. Specifically, 36% are over 60, 35% are between 45 and 60 and 26% between 31 and 45. Only 3% are between the ages of 18 and 30.



Centre of Cascais

Assessment

The evaluation of the Program is positive, with a 98% problem solving rate. The overall satisfaction index of the Neighbourhood Guardians is 93%. The improvement in the quality of the services provided by the City Council, especially by the Department of Environment, is another positive indicator.

The work of the guardians, together with the Department of Environment and other municipal companies, ensures a swift response to all concerns that are identified.

The program has been growing constantly and permanently. On the one hand, the number of guardians has increased since the beginning of the activity, and, on the other, more and more residents are requesting the intervention of the guardian in order to solve local problems.



Working sessions

The success of this program has led to its extension to other services. For example, the “Vegetable Garden Guardian”, in operation since 2017, appoints a guardian for each “community vegetable garden” who is in charge of ensuring the proper maintenance of the common space of the vegetable gardens and compliance with the regulations by each gardener. Still in its initial phase is the “School Guardian” with the idea that the students become and feel more responsible for their school space.

Strengths:

- The success of this program is shown not only in terms of the number of guardians but also because of the increase in the quality of the services provided by the City Council.
- The guardians are privileged interlocutors between the local population and the services of the City Council since their interventions request are considered high priority for city services, expediting solutions.
- By involving the residents in a process of public space management, this project contributes to strengthening an informed citizenry that is active and responsible.
- The great interest of the citizenry in this initiative led to the expansion of the Program to all residents in all the city's neighbourhoods.

Future proposals:

- The creation of a survey of the population in each neighbourhood is envisaged to evaluate the impact of the work of the Neighbourhood Guardians.
- In order to improve the efficacy of the program, the City Council plans to have 250 Neighbourhood Guardians by 2020, which would reduce the size of the catchment areas of each guardian.

Contact

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