



INTERVIEW

MAYOR OF GIJÓN/XIXÓN

Carmen Moriyón Entrialgo

You have a high level of knowledge of the city, as you have been mayor in two previous terms. From your experience, how would you describe the city, what are its strengths, challenges and goals?

Gijón has a fundamental strength, which is all the people who live in it. These last few years have been complex with all kinds of situations that have conditioned our reality, nothing different from what may have happened in other large cities in Spain. What I believe makes the difference is that the people of Gijón have recently shown that they have a firm will to move towards a different, renewed, exciting future. A future that will be built by means of a few projects that are of the city, of consensus; and which, if we are capable of taking a long view, will fulfil the function of transforming us. I have full confidence in Gijón and in all the people of Gijón, and as Mayor I also have the responsibility to bring that enthusiasm and that desire to build to achieve good results. The objectives are ambitious, but we cannot give up on them: to be a cultural, social and economic reference point in the North of Spain. And I am convinced that we are going to achieve it.

One of your objectives for this mandate is to promote citizen participation.



Why is it important for you to involve the population in discussing and deciding public affairs in the city?

Starting from the premise that we are a representative democracy, and therefore, the interests of the citizens must be defended by the institutions elected by universal suffrage, it is true that in the information society and the new technologies it is increasingly important to have modern instruments of participation that allow people to influence public policies, not only through their vote, which is very important, but through more concrete actions and in projects that affect them directly is why it is so important to keep the channels of citizen participation up to date, and we have done so whenever we have had the responsibility of governing, either through specific processes or through initiatives such as participatory budgets.

Furthermore, Gijón has a special feature that very few cities that I know of have: a tremendously active associative fabric, with residents who are very involved in the life of the city, and who are constantly demanding that the city council be up to the task and what is expected of us.

Historically, until now, Gijón channelled all this initiative through a model of district councils. This model seems to have been superseded in recent years, and therefore we are now faced with a process of renewal of these channels. I am certain that together with the neighbourhood movement we will be able to successfully tackle it, so that Gijón will continue to be a benchmark in citizen participation.

How do you plan to generate employment and achieve a dynamic city that leaves no one behind?

Job creation is only possible in an ecosystem favourable to private initiative and economic activity. It is clear that the public sector can help and push, but we must not lose sight of the fact that quality employment is generated by private initiative.

From this point of view, the City Council has a fundamental role to play in facilitating the conditions for economic activity to take place.

Gijón City Council has a long history of economic promotion through different channels, probably the most important and best known being our science and technology park and the business residences and business incubators that we have set up through Gijón Impulsa. We also have some public investment mechanisms such as a venture capital fund or a mechanism for public procurement of innovation, which have been replicated in other parts of Spain, and which give very good results when it comes to weaving the productive and business sector that any city needs to generate employment.

On the other side, the fiscal side, our City Council has a clear commitment to reduce, as far as possible, the tax burden and to promote economic activity. This is the only way to sustain the welfare state and public services. The greater the economic activity, the greater the revenue, which, together with efficient management of resources, generates the possibility of reducing the tax burden. It is no secret, it is political will. This economic solvency is what then allows us to sustain, as I have said, the necessary guarantees so that no one is left behind.



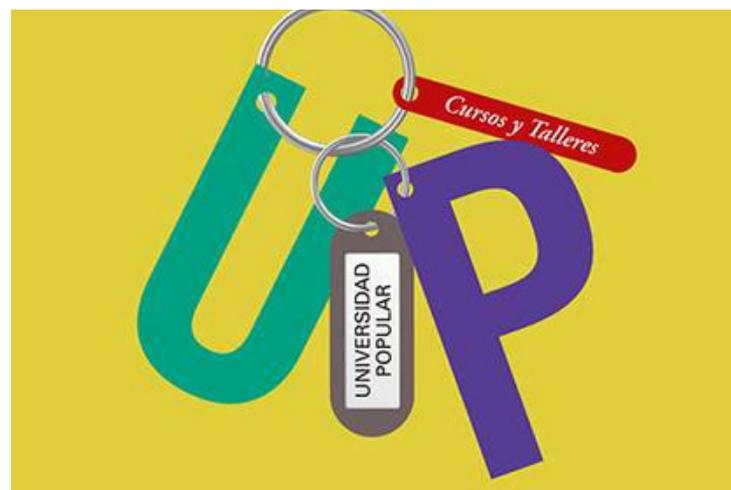


Gijón is committed to lifelong learning, as evidenced by the existence of a Popular University. What would you highlight about this initiative? How is it received by citizens and what kind of training does it offer?

There are many positive elements that can be highlighted in a programme such as the Popular University. It is a project that was a pioneer in Spain, being Gijón/Xixón the second city council to recover the Popular Universities in Spain after San Sebastián de los Reyes and that has already more than 40 years of history (in 2022 it celebrated its 40th anniversary). A project that continues to have, 40 years later, an important pull among the population of the city: in the current edition of courses and workshops has reached an occupancy rate of 98.69% in its more than 1,700 places. UP students tend to repeat, going deeper into a subject that interests them (many courses offer advanced itineraries with different levels) or trying out new interests and hobbies.

The UP offers around 130 courses in each edition, with a wide variety of subjects (art, history and heritage; science; nature; drawing and painting; photography, video and cinema; gastronomy; music, etc.), which are taught in various facilities in the city, decentralising the educational offer in the neighbourhoods. This is another of the strong points of the Universidad Popular's offer: a wide variety of courses, always introducing something new in its offerings, and which are close to the people.

The UP is committed to adult education, to the search for spaces for relationships and meetings for citizens and to the promotion of artistic and cultural activity in the city. In addition to the courses on offer, there are cycles of conferences and concerts, artistic exhibitions of the students' work and collaborations with other municipal areas.



Tell us about the leisure, health, sport and work-life balance programmes run by your council, and how they contribute to work-life balance, social cohesion and the reduction of risk factors.

Years ago, our city opted for an alternative way of reconciling work, family and personal life, through a programme that combines entertainment, cultural and sporting activities, time for homework and snacks, and which is currently present in 15 schools in the city.

These centres are open 11 hours a day, 12 months a year, and children from kindergarten and primary school can participate in the programme.

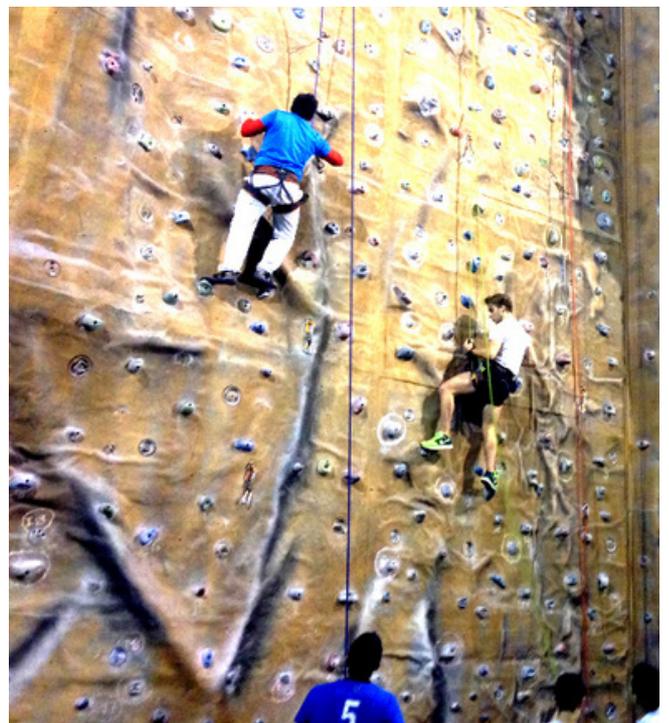
The Sports Schools promote sport among children and adolescents, offering twenty sports outside school hours in more than 50 schools and high schools in the city between October and May. This is a fundamental step in the sporting education of Gijón's schoolchildren, helping them to learn about different sports and above all to take up exercise, creating healthy sporting habits for the rest of their lives.

The promotion of physical activity among citizens and active ageing are some of the objectives of the "Walking for Life" programme, which has been offering routes for all physical levels since 2006. There are currently a total of 59 routes, accompanied by 3 monitors, with different timetables and levels of difficulty. Although they are aimed at all citizens and there are activities for families, the promotion of active ageing and healthy lifestyle habits among the elderly plays an important role in this programme.

Finally, I would like to highlight the support of the Gijón/Xixón City Council for the activities set up by the city's powerful associative fabric. An example of this is the alternative night-time leisure programme for young people "Abierto hasta el Amanecer" (Open until dawn).



It has been 26 years since the launch of this pioneering programme in Spain, which quickly spread throughout the country and was imitated in many city councils. A programme made by young people for young people, which seeks to offer healthy leisure alternatives for weekends, and which over the course of 3 editions opens the doors of numerous city facilities (municipal centres, sports halls, schools...) for cultural and sporting activities on weekend nights.



This year's theme for the celebration of the International Day of the Educating City is "Culture as a source of Creation and Learning in the Educating City". Tell us about initiatives in Gijón-Xixón that are in line with this slogan.

In Gijón/Xixón culture has been a backbone of our city strategy for many years. Since the 1980s, a decentralised network of cultural facilities (libraries, municipal centres, museums...) has been built in the neighbourhoods, accompanied by a wide-ranging cultural programme for all ages. From the Cultural Innovation area we have proposals such as FETEN (European Performing Arts Fair for Children), Danza Xixón, Arte en el Barrio, the Documentary of the Month, Jazz in the Centre, the Workshop Concerts... The Gijón/Xixón Library Network has 11 libraries that serve the neighbourhoods and offer a wide variety of activities to encourage reading (reading clubs, storytelling, literary creation, workshops...). The Municipal Museum Network has 8 museums dedicated to artistic, archaeological, industrial and ethnographic heritage, which organise different exhibitions and activities throughout the year. The Film Festival, the didactic proposals of the Botanical Garden or the Art in the Street programme during the summer are other noteworthy initiatives in the city.

The Ministry of Equality's "Corresponsible Plan" includes actions such as the educational leisure programme "Esparciendo Cultura por Xixón", which brings culture and science to children between the ages of 6 and 12.

The Jovellanos Theatre makes a special effort to bring the performing arts closer to schoolchildren and young people in the city. Activities with schools throughout the year, discounts for under 30s and a wide range of shows especially aimed at young audiences.



Cities learn from, are inspired by and collaborate with each other. Does Gijón-Xixón share projects with other cities?

Gijón/Xixón shares projects with other cities in many areas, but I am particularly interested in highlighting the work done within the Spanish Network of Educating Cities (RECE). Until a few weeks ago, our city coordinated the RECE, and has a long history of participation in the different thematic networks, in which projects and experiences are shared with cities from all over Spain. In this sense, Gijón has been present in the last two years in the 3 thematic networks of the RECE, where it has been able to present some of its most outstanding projects in child participation, employment and training, or the fight against the culture of hate.



At the beginning of October, the cities of the RECE met in your city for the XVI Meeting of the Network, what is your assessment of this meeting?

We are very satisfied with the outcome of the 16th Meeting, both in terms of participation (nearly 300 people from 90 different cities) and the level of the dialogues and experiences presented at the Meeting.

From the feedback we are receiving, both through informal comments and through the evaluations of the Meeting or messages of thanks from participants, I believe that it has been a success and has been a great closure to the Gijón/Xixón coordination period.

I would especially highlight the good reception by the participants of the presentations of experiences: 44 experiences in agora format and 24 experiences in poster format from city councils from all over Spain, and study visits to 18 educational experiences in our city. I think that this was possibly the most enriching part of the Meeting, as it allowed us to get to know many initiatives and for the cities to take away a variety of ideas and proposals, through which to evaluate new lines of action in the municipalities.

The organising team decided to extend the duration of the meeting by half a day, which made it possible to open up more time for experiences. Although it was a very tight programme, I think that the general feeling of the participants was that it was an enriching meeting in which a lot of good work was done.

I would like to send all the support of Gijón/Xixón to the new coordinating city of RECE, Viladecans, elected in the assembly of the 6th of October, and we are at their disposal to help them in everything they may need.

Any other information you would like to share with us

We would like to thank all the teams from the participating cities for their visit to Gijón. It was a privilege for us to receive them.