

Focus Experience

#25

Educating Cities
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Title

The Rivers Project **Citizen committed to the conservation and improvement of environment in Braga**

Basic data

City: Braga

Country: Spain

Number of inhabitants: 80,000

Topics: associationism and participation, lifelong learning, environment, civics, science and technology, urban development .

Principles of the Charter of Educating Cities: 1, 4, 5, 9, 11, 20

Summary

The City Council of Braga joined the Rivers Project in 2015, which encourages citizen participation in the conservation and improvement of our rivers. Its goal is to respond to the problematics of the changes in the quality of the rivers through citizen awareness of the problems of our fluvial eco-systems and the need to protect them.



The Rivers Project is an initiative created and put into practice in the Autonomous Community of Catalonia in 1997 by the Habitats Association. At this time its area of application has extended to different rivers in the Iberian Peninsula, coming to form the Rivers Project Network.



The City Council of Braga proposed to primary and secondary schools, NGOs, companies and the population in general to adopt sections of the Este River in its passage through the municipality, managing to mobilise hundreds of volunteers. The participants clean the river and its banks and monitor the water quality. Participation in the project has been a success and has not stopped growing since it began.



Volunteers doing tasks by the river

Objectives

General objective: to conserve and improve the rivers and their banks by implementing river renewal plans, with the involvement and responsibility of civil society, with a view to sustainable development and environmental education.

Specific objectives:

- To promote a participatory reflection on the city and its river banks.
- To create a spirit of cooperation and exchange of ideas and experiences amongst the groups of volunteers.
- To make the citizenry aware of this issue, through respect for and care of the river eco-system and the whole territory.
- To carry out actions that improve the quality of the river.
- To organize activities and events to publicise and discuss the importance of the water of the river eco-systems.
- In the schools context, to contribute to making environmental education a transversal subject.

Methodology

The Project is based on the work carried out by groups of volunteers through periodical interventions along 500 meter stretches of river that they have adopted, to which they commit themselves to maintaining the area. Each group is made up of at least 4 people, who may be members of a family, a group of friends, an association, a sports club, school, university, etc. Through an observation-based methodology shared by all and easy to apply, the groups bear responsibility for monitoring and protecting the section of the river they had adopted, thus contributing to a permanent improvement of the river's resources in general and the renewal of their stretch in particular.

The Project contemplates two interventions per year by the groups, one in the spring and the other in the fall. The City Council coordinates the visits of the groups to the stretch adopted, accompanied by a municipal expert, during which a kit is distributed with all the material necessary for preparing the study of the river (characteristics of the water life in the river, vegetation, etc.).

At the end of September 2015 the City Council of Braga sent all the participants a call to clean their stretches of the Este River and plant autochthonous species of river vegetation.

Moreover, the groups are invited to participate in other activities, such as hikes, photographic exhibitions, picnics, etc.

At this time the City Council of Braga is preparing training courses for monitors to support the initiative. At the same time we are trying to make the groups more autonomous over time.

The city of Braga is located in the northeast region of Portugal and is the main urban nucleus of the Greater Metropolitan Area of Miño. Its central location in the region fosters its role as the structuring and distributive hub for services. Braga occupies a surface area of 183.4 km² and has a population of 181,474 inhabitants, according to the 2011 census. Braga belongs to two major river basins, that of the Cávado River in the north and that of the Ave River in the south. The Este River has its source in the Este Valley to the east of Braga and flows into the Ave River. Before this experience the river was very polluted. The Rivers Project is helping to restore it.

In the city of Braga the initiative has been consolidated as a major environmental project and volunteers' participation is growing every day. The river was divided into 36 stretches and at this time all of them have been adopted. In order to meet the citizen demand, the City Council has expanded the adoption of other water courses cutting through the city. In Portugal there are already 170 municipalities that have joined the project, and 155 kilometres of rivers have been adopted.

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Social and urban context

Assessment

Contact



Mixed-age groups take part in the project



View of Braga



Leisure activity associated to the initiative