PONTE VEDRA
A WORLD APART
In 1999 the city was dormant and exposed to a series of threats: cars, discomfort, traffic jams, and noise. The transformation began with a symbolic measure, which was transcendental but not that well understood: the historic centre was not the place for cars. This is the starting point of an urban model that gives the city back to its dwellers. Since then, the importance has been placed on people.

Step by step the whole city becomes part of the new model and the yearly urban quality ratios receive international recognition, especially with reference to universal accessibility, the system of mobility, pedestrianization, road safety, heritage preservation, and child mobility.
Better on foot

People use their own energy to move around. Seven out of every ten displacements are made on foot or by bicycle. Walking is a basic skill, a custom that should not be lost willingly, the most efficient, healthy, economic, and natural instrument of mobility. The entire city is configured to be a very complete pedestrian itinerary. A maximum of two kilometres of flat surfaces make it possible, and the design of public spaces is at the service of the walker.

Walking does it

We need very little more than our own energy to cover distances of two to three kilometres: walking is the solution our current cities need in light of the excesses of traffic. Whether it is in small cities like Pontevedra or in particular sectors of larger metropolises, a reduction in motorised transport displacements gives way to a more appropriate and enjoyable use of space. Cars are supposed to help, not invade. A map of times and distances encourages us to go on foot from one salient point of the city another, to leave home or work convinced that walking is the easiest and most comfortable way to reach our destination.
Life-saving policies

The main objective of mobility policies is that people live safely, and that moving around our area is comfortable and dynamic. Speed limits of 30 km/h throughout the city are not the only measure that has been introduced: life-saving speed humps are now widespread, which increase pedestrian space on the road and prevent drivers from invading sensitive areas. Zero deaths. Only 8% of those injured require hospitalisation, and out of 1,200 accidents per year, below 30% need police intervention.

By car? If that’s what you really need, go ahead.

There are almost 55,000 vehicles in a municipality with a population of about 83,000 (motorisation index: 66.2%). Is there enough space for such a number of cars? The solution is to allow only the cars that are strictly necessary: emergencies, deliveries, provision of services, access to residents, etc. Vehicles should not monopolise the scarce urban spaces. The result: less traffic congestion, less noise, cleaner air, more comfort, more health.
Park and walk

Many people come to Pontevedra to work or for administrative reasons. There is a tradition of private motor vehicle use in our geographical area, whose population is considerably dispersed and very dynamic. Several alternatives are on offer to park motorised vehicles. The best option is to leave the car at a 10-minute walk from the city centre, for free and with no time limits (about 2,500 parking spaces are available). In the case of small chores that take less than 15 minutes, drivers may feel inclined to use one of the approximately 500 free surface parking spaces. In addition, underground private car parks have more than 4,000 spaces on offer.

Less than half of the fuel

Traffic reduction brought with it a spectacular decrease in fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. In the space of 12 years, there has been a 60% reduction in petrol use. It is estimated that each citizen now emits about 500 kg of CO₂ less than in the past. This has been possible thanks to pedestrianization policies and the reorganisation of motorised traffic, which, in turn, brought down the number of unnecessary displacements.
Walking to school

Italian educator Francesco Tonucci, author of Children’s City, was one of the main inspirations for the transformation of the city of Pontevedra, a process that he actually follows closely, and with which he supports his proposals in favour of urban regeneration. The city itself helps to educate children by fostering their individual autonomy and by allowing them to grow up free of unnecessary threats. The “Camiño Escolar” (Walk to School) initiative has been designed to earn parents’ trust and encourage them to send their children to school on foot. Twenty-one supervisors distributed throughout the city help children cross the street half an hour before the classes start, and half an hour after school ends. Up to 70% of children are already walking to school. Also, a network of shops has been created for children to ask for help if need be. This system involves parents and teachers too, and a forum has been created for children to express their personal opinions.

No bicycle lanes

The use of bicycles as a clean and convenient means of transport has recently been increasing in popularity in the city of Pontevedra. With the city’s traffic calming measures in place, bicycles are exposed to very minor threats. That is the reason why bicycle lanes are not necessary. Bicycles share city spaces with pedestrians and motorised vehicles alike, without any inconvenient. Adapted parking spaces are available for all users throughout the city.
Accessible and integrative

Every individual has equal rights to use and enjoy their city, which is why people with accessibility difficulties have been a top priority in Pontevedra. Single platforms, ramps, adapted urban furniture, public building accesses, as well as the permanent struggle to transform private spaces to make them more easily accessible is a slow but continuous process directed towards local reform.

Healthy living

Pontevedra is a city with extremely low levels of air and noise pollution. Many people in the area use the more than 20 km of accessible footpaths and promenades, which start in the city centre, and invite physical activity, entertainment and healthy living. Natural footpaths follow the course of the river and, in conjunction with the historic centre, conform the itineraries of Pasominuto, a map indicating the number of steps, the distance in kilometres, and the time in minutes from one salient point of the city to another. Pasominuto has been welcomed as a useful tool in heart disease prevention.
Preservation of biodiversity

The city boasts three natural parks with a total surface of more than 150 hectares, in addition to numerous urban green areas. A total of 134 different species of wild birds have been recorded. With the recent intervention in the river, the estuary, and the riverbeds, lampreys, eels, sea breams, basses, cuttlefish, shrimps and otters have reappeared. Similarly, there are 219 different species of tree and more than half a million of them have been planted in recent years.

Rational use of water

The city makes use of water from river Lérez for domestic use and returns it after a filtering and purification process several kilometres downstream. A complete system of channels, which has recently been expanded, contributed to the elimination of most spillage, so that no contaminants reach the natural environment.
Commerce, in the city

Pontevedra does not lend itself well to the construction of large shopping centres in the outskirts, which have been affecting urban commercial areas so negatively over the last few years, generating new mobility problems and senseless consumerism. Decisions were made to preserve the city and its entrepreneurial and urban character. The opportunities reside in commercial activities that bring people together, organised events held in the city centre, and social cohesion.

Public space

Public spaces are understood as an extension of people’s homes: active, well lit, efficient in terms of maintenance, well cared for, and prepared to host social and economic life in all its forms. This also guarantees the success of a city. Innovation and design in local companies and public initiatives allows for the introduction of customised urban furniture adapted to accessibility conditions. The design of public spaces is also oriented towards life in the community.