

URBAN II Evaluation

Project Case Study: URBAN ON LINE (Gijon)



1.0 Goals

The *URBAN EN LINEA* ('URBAN On Line') project focuses on the narrowing of the existing digital divide between the URBAN II area and other parts of the city.

In 2002, a study on the penetration of Information and Communication Technologies in the URBAN II area concluded that there was a gap of 3-4% between the URBAN II area and the rest of the city in terms of broadband access to internet. Also, the study showed that just 10% of households had a computer and that all of them had a clear wish to be connected to internet through broadband access.

To overcome these challenges and breaking the "digital divide" existing at the time, a number of activities and goals were designed in the framework of this particular project:

- Creation of four public access spaces (*Mediatecas*) providing free access to the internet, training courses and support services;
- Establishment of a funding scheme providing direct financial aid for broadband connections in households and for the purchase of computers by residents in the area;
- Design and creation of an URBAN II On line Business Centre portal;
- Web page design and launch SMEs based in the URBAN II area;
- Provision of a number of tailor-made ICT training activities including courses on the use of internet, Microsoft office, e-commerce and website design.

The total budget within the URBAN II programme allocated to develop these activities was 1.7 million euros, of which 1.2 million has gone to the infrastructure renovation projects for the internet access centres, to computer acquisition and to promote connectivity. 438.000 euros were the costs for training activities in the *URBAN EN LINEA* project.

2.0 Implementation

All URBAN II projects in Gijon were co-ordinated by the City Council, which holds final responsibility for the implementation of the programme. In parallel, there was a strong involvement of all relevant actors in the design, planning, implementation and

communication of the project URBAN EN LINEA. Local and voluntary associations have participated in different levels in the implementation of the project, such as training. Moreover, the participation of the voluntary and community sector throughout the project cycle has helped with empowerment and has led to higher levels of capacity and expertise of the organisations involved.

In this respect, two neighbourhood associations were given the responsibility of running two internet access and services centres (*Mediatecas*). These neighbourhood associations were involved in the design of the training activities on the use of internet, the information campaigns, the dissemination of the funding scheme supporting the purchase of computers and for accessing the internet through broadband connections. Taking advantage of this experience and know-how, they have both become mature organisations with enough capacity to run these centres once the project came to an end.

3.0 Results and Impact

There is widespread agreement among stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in URBAN II that *URBAN EN LINEA* was one of the highest profile projects attached to the programme but also one which stimulated the most impacts. In terms of direct **outputs**, URBAN II provided five different sets of results:

1. First of all, a **funding scheme** was established to help households in the area to connect to the internet through broadband access. 1,173 households now have their first internet connection and 2,834 people have benefited from the scheme (51% of them are female). As a consequence, a major increase in the number of households having a computer and internet broadband access was recorded. Today, the URBAN II area is Gijon's neighbourhood with the highest levels of broadband connection in absolute terms. The use of Information and Communications Technologies increased; 71.5% of the area's households now have a computer, compared to 40.8% in 2002 and 62.5% have broadband access to the internet (in 2002, only 11.5% had this type of fast internet access). In the rest of the city, 48% of households have broadband access to the internet. This translates into a 14.5 percentage point increase after the implementation of URBAN II in the area. The table below illustrates this trend:

	URBAN II area			Gijon			Differences URBAN II/ Gijon		
	2002	2004	2008	2002	2004	2008	2002	2004	2008

Households with a computer	40.8%	49.1%	71.50%	44.60%	52.3%	68.3%	- 3.7%	- 3.2%	+3.20%
Households with internet access	21.6%	34.6%	66.4%	25.7%	34.9%	51.7%	- 4.1%	- 0.3%	+14.7%
Households with broadband internet access	11.5%	25.60%	62.5%	13.9%	27.5%	48.9%	- 2.4%	- 1.9%	+13.60%

2. **Four public spaces** that provide citizens with free access to internet and host training and support activities on Information and Communication Technologies have been developed in the framework of the URBAN EN LINEA project. These centres were given the name *Mediatecas* and were set up in Natahoyo, in the Centre for Young Initiatives, in the "Escuelas de Pescadores" and in the district of Tremañes. These centres guarantee free access to the internet to the residents in the area and also constitute the central point for local communities to learn and access the new Information and Communication Technologies. By way of example, the Municipal Centre of Natahoyo has two different rooms equipped with 19 computers in total and ready to host training activities in the field of ICT. It also has a public space for using internet through WIFI (wireless) and a documentary section with CDs and DVDs to facilitate training and learning activities.

3. A total of 30,199 beneficiaries have participated in the different **training activities** developed in the newly created public access centres. ICT Training activities were structured between two different sets of modules:

- Basic internet and computer use for everybody to learn about the basics on using a computer and accessing the World Wide Web. Over 30,000 people have been registered in these activities;
- More focused ICT training modules such as websites design or design of on-line training. An average of 600 people have participated in this type of activities.

Both types of training activities were tailored to the specific needs of the beneficiaries in terms of content, level of knowledge and timeframes, facilitating in this way access to all the population. For example, modules were scheduled between 8.30 and 9.30 am for local retailers and shop assistants, just before the opening hours.

4. A web portal for companies and businesses based in the URBAN II area was designed and launched in the framework of the URBAN EN LINEA project. This virtual space provided a number of professional services to local companies, enabling them to develop their competences in the communication, publicity and e-commerce spheres. Since then, 34 local companies have used e-commerce solutions through this recent established service. The tool remains in operation and fully accessible for all local companies that might wish to use it for expanding their activities in this particular field. The web portal home page looks as follows:



5. Finally, an important outcome of the project was the preparation of 255 web pages for 255 SMEs based in the industrial Parks or within the URBAN II area. These 255 local

companies covered a wide scope of activities and, in particular, 62 were from the commerce/retail sector, 64 from the services sector and 44 from the industrial sector.

The key **indirect impact** of the project is the **strengthening of the voluntary and community sector** as a great number of the activities funded were run by voluntary and community organisations. This voluntary and community sector included local neighbourhood associations, educational centres and foundations, associations for elderly people and local business associations. The participation of the voluntary and community sector during each of these stages of the project cycle has been high. It has led to empowerment of these entities and to higher levels of capacity and expertise of the organisations involved.

4.0 Identified Good Practice

Although the *URBAN EN LINEA* project can be seen to represent good practice in a number of areas, the three key aspects identified through the evaluation are as follows:

The indirect impact described above on the **strengthening of the voluntary and community sector** can be outlined as a key good practice of the *URBAN EN LINEA* project: Two neighbourhood associations have been entrusted with the responsibility of running the internet access and services centres (*Mediatecas*) of *Natahoyo* and "*Escuelas de Pescadores*". These neighbourhood associations got involved in the design of the training activities about the use of internet, they contributed to the launch of the information campaigns and were very active in the dissemination of the funding scheme for the purchase of computers. Taking advantage of all this experience and know-how, they have both become mature organisations with enough capacity to run these centres; in this manner, *Natahoyo* and *Escuela de Pescadores* are jointly managed by the local residents with the supervision of the competent department at the City Council level.

A second good practice that has already had an effect at regional level in Asturias is the **funding scheme supporting access to internet though broadband access**. The funding scheme, as indicated in the results and impact section, has had a significant effect on the use of ICT in the *URBAN II* area, changing the existing trend and making this part of Gijon the champion for broadband access in the city. The regional government of Asturias has implemented a similar funding scheme; this time the financial aid is focused on young people from 18-35 years old resident in the region.

ICT training activities specifically tailored to the needs of the target groups can be considered a third element of good practice in this particular project. The evaluation reveals a high level of satisfaction among residents with the modules and training activities

addressed to residents, professionals and businesses. Principal features of this good practice are:

- i. Planning of all the courses in different timeframes along the day, allowing the participation of all target groups (women, young people, elderly people, local shops and retailers, etc);
- ii. Modules were adapted to the different and specific training needs of the different collectives;
- iii. Compatibility of the modules with working activities. Courses had an average duration of 28 hours (2 hours per day); thus they could be completed in just three weeks, not interfering or having an impact on each of the participants' working responsibilities.