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URBAN TRANSFORMATION ON THE WATERFRONTS OF VALENCIA AND BILBAO

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Abstract

This article analyzes cases of urban transformation carried out in the waterfront areas of Valencia and Bilbao, in Spain. Through the implementation of urban regeneration and transformation strategies, these two cities have transformed most of their waterfront areas during the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century. Old industrial sites have been transformed into residential and service spaces, following the lead of other European cities like Liverpool and Hamburg, which also had former port sites. Comparing both of these initiatives of waterfront transformation reveals two very different processes. Two dimensions has been compared: the governance of the intervention plans drawn up and the social dimension of the interventions. The article set out the following questions. What are the perspectives of the urban planning professionals that participated in the transformation of the coasts of Valencia and Bilbao? And, what is the fulfillment of the project objectives and the changes produced in the urban environment of the two areas?

Keywords

Governance; Urban Regeneration; Industrial Landscape Regeneration; Waterfront Areas; Gentrification; Social Dimension

1. Introduction

The recovery of old industrial spaces has been one of the urban regeneration strategies in European cities during the last twenty years. The transformation of urban waterfront façades is a key to understanding the history of design and urban planning in the late 20th century. The decline of waterfront areas in post-industrial cities has resulted in the psychological and social deterioration of important parts of the urban fabric. (Maliene, Wignall, Malys, 2012). Cities have launched urban regeneration programs and strategies to address these problems, and they have looked at the decline of waterfront areas or riverfronts part of the solution (Desfor, G. Laidley, J., 2011). At the beginning of the 1960s and 70s, the coastal industrial cities of North America were the first to tackle the phenomenon of urban abandonment in historic industrial centers, a large part of them located in port areas, at a time when scattered cities were being developed. (Jauhiainen, 1995 and Smith & Soledad, 2012).

The regeneration of old industrial areas has been a part of urban regeneration policies in Europe for the last thirty years (Maliene, et al., 2012). In Spain, the cities of Bilbao and Valencia have carried out transformations of their waterfronts during the late 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Examples include the urban recovery of the Nerbion River industrial area in Bilbao (Atutxa, Campelo, Izaola, Urrutia, Zubero, 2015), and the redefinition of Valencia's seafont (Pérez, 2014). In both cases, strategic plans for urban regeneration were developed.

Comparing the cases of the two cities is interesting because both strategic plans were implemented in similar periods and they also shared some characteristic features. They are both the capitals of their respective autonomous regions, they share a common industrial and maritime tradition, and they both aspire to leadership among Spain's second tier cities.

2. Urban Regeneration on the Waterfronts of Valencia and Bilbao

The object of this analysis in Valencia is the implementation of the urban regeneration plans for its coastline. This is the area where the port and a district with a few maritime towns are located. It is a wide urban strip with notable population social differences and urban morphology, especially in relation to Natzaret, one of the neighborhoods within this city district. The relationship between the city of Valencia and its waterfront is interesting, given that the original location of the city was away from the sea. This is why – during the early

growth of the city in the industrial age at the time of the disappearance of the medieval wall - municipal authorities developed urban strategies to bring the city closer to its sea front.

Architect Javier Pérez Igualada contextualizes this process in terms of the reconstruction strategies of the existing city (Pérez, 2014). An example is today's Blasco Ibáñez Avenue, whose original name was Avenue *Valencia By the Sea (Valencia al mar)*. The growth of the city during the period 1959-1975 was followed by urban development and a surge in new neighborhoods that occupied almost all of the space between the ancient medieval city and the sea. However, there were important questions to be resolved that formed the basis of subsequent concerns about designing new urban intervention plans for more modern times. On one hand, the ancient marine villages Cabanyal- Canyamelar and Natzaret, had become part of the city and had important equipment deficits. On the other hand, the construction of Avenue of the Port and the growth of the port itself had isolated the district of Natzaret, causing the deterioration in the living conditions of the inhabitants giving way to processes of urban segregation.

With the approval of the Valencia's General Plan of Urban Planning in 1988, new strategies for the urban regeneration of the maritime towns began, including the city's waterfront. The presence of different urban plans with often divergent strategies related to the same area of coastline, is likely one of the features that demonstrates the differences between the Valencia approach and that of Bilbao. The reflection of the Valencian architect Joan Olmos below describes the lack of organized planning, and how it affects the social and economic fabric of the neighborhoods on the waterfront of the Valencia:

"The metropolitan area of Valencia is a good example of the desorption of competence and the accumulation of improvised projects. It should not be surprising that, as the city discovers the waterfront, these coastal neighborhoods, deliberately abandoned in their deterioration, are still the objective of real estate speculation "(Olmos, 2007).

The body that currently manages part of urban planning projects on the waterfront of Valencia is the Marina de Valencia Consortium, a public entity created in 2007 to manage the America's Cup competition that included the participation of the state, the autonomous government and the local government. The consortium currently manages the dock of the old port, through a combination of services and productive uses.

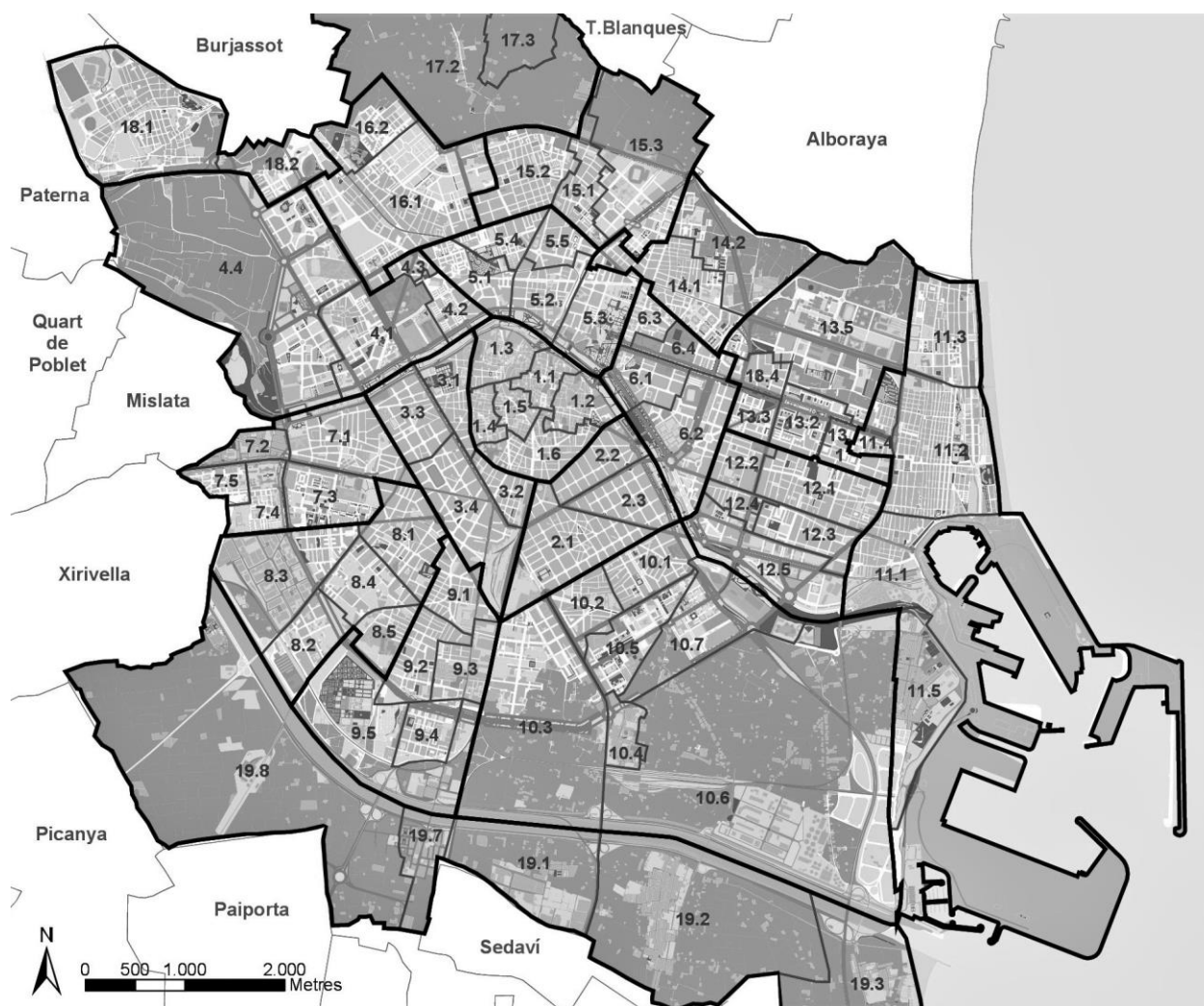


Figure 1: City map of Valencia. The coastal district is the 11, called *maritim towns*. This divides in five neighborhoods: Malva-rosa (11.3), Cabanyal-Canyamelar (11.2), El Grau (11.1), Beteró (11.4) and Natzaret (11.5). This one is in front of the Port, that has isolated this part of the Maritim district from the rest of the coastal line of the city. Close to Natzaret was built the urban circuit of Formula 1 between the years 2008 and 2012. It was finally abandoned due to financial problems; however, it affected the southern part of the waterfront towns, disconnecting the urban areas along the coast.



Figure 2: *City of Bilbao, with river Nervion crossing the city to the sea. In this map (up on the left), the river divides in two parts, forming the Zorrotzaurre Peninsula. This is the new zone where the urban regeneration plan of Bilbao is being built. This part of its Waterfront is close to the Abando-Ibarra zone, built during the first decade of the 2000's with the Guggenheim Museum as the main urban landmark.*

In the case of Bilbao, the industrial crisis of the 1980s provided the opportunity to regenerate depressed urban spaces resulting from economic change in the districts of Abando-Ibarra and Zorrotzaurre Peninsula (Atutxa et al., 2015). In Bilbao plans for urban regeneration were concentrated on the riverfront of the Nervion River in its passage through these districts. The urban regeneration plan was designed and implemented in this area, which is where cultural facilities such as the Guggenheim Museum, the Euskalduna Conference Center- the headquarters of the old Euskalduna shipyards (that witnessed important conflicts between the workers and the police during its dismantling in the early eighties of the last century)- and the Iberdrola tower, the main headquarters of this Spanish multinational energy company, are located.

The processes of urban revitalization generated processes of social dualization and urban segregation that we referred to previously. Gentrification affected the districts in which urban regeneration plans were carried out, leading to displacement of the population and a spike in rental costs. Basque sociologist Víctor Urrutia studied these processes in the case of the district of Abando in Bilbao (Urrutiya, 2004). The consortium Ria2000, a public entity that was equally owned by state, regional and local administrations, has been responsible for managing the process of urban transformation since 1993. Although the consortium has not been officially extinguished, currently its scope of action is very limited, and the regeneration work on the Zorrotzaurre Peninsula is under the management of a separate public-private entity.

2.1 Governance and Social Dimension of the Coastal Transformation in Valencia and Bilbao

In this article we study the processes of the urban intervention plans in Valencia and Bilbao in order to identify the principal differences and how they affected governance, the accomplishment of objectives and ultimate success of the plans. Secondly, we analyze the social dimension of the interventions, focusing on improvement of the urban environment, and on the impact on real estate costs in the areas where the interventions were carried out.

2.1.1 Governance in Urban Transformation

In the context of urban research, governance refers to the management of cities and metropolitan areas, and to the emergence of strategic plans and local area regulations in European industrialized urban areas (Pradel, 2007). An important role is played by the structural changes that affected urban management following the crisis of the welfare state and the deregulation processes of the early eighties of the 20th century. Changes in the relationships between the local, regional, state and supra-state levels are also important, with the increased role of territories, regions, and metropolitan areas as opposed to states. There has also been a growing role of supra-state entities, such as the European Union, and changes in relationships and boundaries between different actors and institutions of the state, the market and civil society. And finally, new forms of organization among institutions have led to the decentralization of political power. Both vertically, within the spheres of different public administrations, as well as horizontally, with the emergence of a network of public and private

stakeholders that by the end of the 20th century replaced the centralized Keynesian state with one characterized by economic globalization (Pradel, 2016).

2.1.2 The Social Dimension of the Process of Urban Transformation

In the European Union, the social dimension of processes of urban transformation is a key part of the sustainability of such processes. As summarized by Pahlen and Glockner (2004), the regeneration of the former industrial zones supported the three components of sustainable development: 1) the economic component, by generating business development and employment in often deprived areas, 2) the environmental component, by eliminating contaminants and dangerous elements of old industry and protecting undeveloped land, and, 3) the social component, by improving the neighborhoods and the environment of urban areas (Maliene, et al., 2012). In this article we deepen the analysis of the social dimension, understood as the improvement in the urban environment of neighborhoods and the impact on real estate costs in the urban areas where the development is carried out.

3. Methodology

We chose two dimensions for comparison of the processes of urban transformation carried out in Valencia and Bilbao. These are the governance of the intervention plans drawn up in each case and the social dimension of the interventions. To understand how these dimensions have played out, we used a qualitative methodology. We carried out a content analysis of interviews with technicians and experts (primary sources) who participated in the governance of the urban regeneration processes of Valencia and Bilbao. In the case of Valencia, we interviewed Ramon Marrades, urban economist and head of the *Marina de Valencia* Strategy Office and Carmel Gradolí, architect and director of the Strategy for Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development (EDUSI) implemented in the Cabanyal neighborhood on Valencia's waterfront. In the case of Bilbao, interviews were conducted with Susana Ruiz, technical officer of the Office for the Review of the General Urban Plan of Bilbao, and Pablo Otaola, head of the management committee of the *Zorrotzaurre Project* and director of *Bilbao Ria2000* between 1993 and 2000. In order to add to the comparative analysis, we used the case of Hamburg's waterfront, another European case of urban transformation. We interviewed Dirk Schubert, urban sociologist and professor at Hafften City University in Hamburg to look at the governance and the social dimensions of that particular

case. All interviews were conducted between May and June of 2018. In order to contextualize the description of urban transformation processes, secondary sources were used, including the documentation used for the partial and strategic waterfront development plans of Valencia and Bilbao.

4. Analysis of Results

4.1 The Governance Dimension in the Urban Transformation Plans of Valencia and Bilbao

The organization of the development plans show differences related to the approach used for institutional participation. In the case of Valencia, the 1988 General Urban Plan (PGOU), although used as a point of reference for the subsequent waterfront planning during the 2000, left important gaps in planning for the port area. It was not until 2007 that a consortium for development of the old docks of the port was created. The governance of the intervention plans on the waterfront resulted in shortcomings in relation to the specificity of uses, limits on the scope of development and the level of participation between the different administrations.

The idea of a "balcony to the sea", raised by the 1988 PGOU is a matter of macro-planning that later includes microplanning, project planning, or "entrepreneur urbanism" (...) The 1988 plan, which has been stretched in time, generated an urban gap in the port area, which became a gray area for planning. In this case, what is requested is that the port authorities, in cooperation with the municipalities, generate the necessary development projects for the planning of port areas that are still subject to port activities (this is the case of Marina de Valencia). In the case of Valencia, there is a special plan in place (approved with a clear lack of participation), which dedicated all available spaces to the services sector, without much analysis. (Ramon Marrades, head of the Strategy Office of the Marina de Valencia)

La Marina Valencia is a well-meaning consortium, but I think that it does not currently have enough capacity to extend its action to the waterfront as a whole, impact a wider area or become a management entity throughout the whole waterfront of the city. It may be a good idea that a single entity manages the whole of the waterfront, with economic and decision-making capacity. From a municipal point of view, the waterfront area needs to be properly

articulated because as a matter of fact, the waterfront is very unstructured. (Carmel Gradolí, architect).

In the case of Bilbao, the creation of *Ria2000*, served as an example of organization among different institutional levels (Pradel, 2016), with a 50% distribution between state and autonomous entities, and guaranteed financing for the transfer of land on the part of the Port, which was a key to the success in meeting the objectives.

*Ria2000 is a model that explains the success of the transformation of Bilbao. The collaboration between public entities was carried out at a very particular historical moment that perhaps today would not be possible. The conjuncture that occurs because suddenly all the public administrations of the different levels sit down and decided to move forward with this planning, stage the success of the transformation of the city. In essence (...) The transformation of Bilbao has had many peculiarities, the largest being *Ria2000*, a public-public partnership, possibly unrepeatably. It is a great agreement between public entities that reached an agreement to undertake the project. It is a very peculiar model. (Susana Ruiz, Bilbao City Council)*

On the other hand, the management of the financial aspects of the project was also one of the keys to the success of the interventions, because it allowed for a sufficient budget and the viability of the project.

*The financing came from the lots that were transferred by the state. The original two million euros of the year 1993 would generate 1000 million. Doing projects that I consider were indispensable. (...) That arrangement (*Ria2000*) managed to generate the enthusiasm that transformed Bilbao. It became a highly valued asset by the private sector, because it took over the difficult task of planning and management and ended up delivering to real estate developers the land on which to build. *Ria2000* sold the lots, at market price, but ready to build, which meant that the private sector was very comfortable, and *Ria2000* as well. While Bilbao *Ria2000* was a public entity, its financing was private. Even the financing that came from Europe was distributed among the administrations in equal percentages. (Pablo Otaola, Manager of Bilbao *Ria2000* between 1993 and 2000)*

We also considered the example of the transformation of Hamburg's waterfront, where a new city was built, the *HafenCity*. The success of the project's governance and the fulfillment of its objectives are linked to the ownership of land by the city-state of Hamburg, the main

administration that promoted the transformation, and the pre-existence of a good transport system. (Schubert, D., 2014). However, in relation to land use specification there were disagreements about the functionality of the services, especially in commercial uses, and the ability to control the balance of uses.

Because the land belonged to the city-state of Hamburg, the development of the waterfront was easy to control from the beginning. The land was sold and privatized, not leased. There was already excellent public transport in the area (...) The question was whether an additional commercial center was necessary, which would compete with the city center. In the northern part of HafenCity many stores were empty, and existing stores were not those that would be expected in a high-class area. We will need to wait, when the southern part ends, to see if a new urban center and urbanity will emerge, or if another (often empty) new shopping center. It is difficult to know from the beginning of the development of a plan if this will be able to generate a desirable diversity of uses. (Dirk Schubert, HafenCity University)

4.2 The Social Dimension of the Process of Urban Transformation

The relationship between the construction of new neighborhoods in waterfront areas and the arrival of a new population raises some debate about urban regeneration processes. Displacement of former residents and the creation of a certain inter-metropolitan social duality among new residents and old ones (Salom and Fajardo, 2017) are some of the social issues linked to the regeneration of old industrial sites along waterfronts.

In the case of the *Marina de Valencia*, the impact on real estate costs in the surrounding neighborhoods is an inevitable consequence of development. Nevertheless, the consortium advocates for a socially sustainable growth model. The model gives preference to uses in accordance with agreements with local interests that depart from services-oriented uses such as shopping malls, gaming rooms or hotels.

We are aware that the transformation of the Marina de Valencia as a space for innovation and a quality public space will have effects on real estate costs in the area. It seems impossible to prevent foreign and local interests in investments in the coastal towns. People who feel attracted to living in such an environment. (...) If we talk about gentrification, of increasing real estate values, this is a process that is a bit different from other cases. We also believe that the model with which we work in the Marina de Valencia- where we have encouraged participation of neighborhood associations in order to generate uses of the

Marina that are interesting for them- has a benefit of opportunity for the development of alternatives to the services-oriented uses that were projected; shopping centers, casinos, etc. In this case, I believe that the current model of the Marina de Valencia is positive in terms of social sustainability (Ramon Marrades, Marina de Valencia)

There are also opinions from those who believe that development of the waterfront areas has had a negative impact on the social structure of the neighborhoods of the coastal district.

The growth of the city of Valencia along its coast has come about partly against the previously existing social fabric. And this has resulted in scorn towards the forms of production, towards the social structure and the people's way of life (...) It is not that there is a well-thought-out and structured model to develop a city, that sometimes has to face eviction problems. Valencia's has been a little-thought-out model, which has been left in the hands of faith that the market will take care of it. In the development of the waterfront, very powerful economic forces, such as the port, have been left pretty much unsupervised (Carmel Gradolí, architect).

In the case of Bilbao, the epicenter of the transformation was *Abandoibarra*, located in the area of the city expansion. This area was built in the center of the city at the end of the 19th century after the arrival of industrial transformation (Leonardo, J.J., 1989). With the development carried out, new residential areas, cultural facilities and offices have replaced the docks of the ports and shipyards. In general, the development has not produced an intensive process of displacement of the population, nor the excessive modification of the real estate costs.

It is true that the city center area has been regenerated more so than the neighborhoods. But that is because available land was in the center. (...) Prices in Bilbao have always been very expensive, because the city is very small. There is nowhere to grow, the location cost here is almost not found elsewhere. But I think that there is not enough housing stock to say that it has become gentrified. If we understand this process as the displacement of a population of an area, in the center of Bilbao, where the regeneration was carried out, the population before and afterwards is the same. The new inhabitants have not displaced anyone because there were no homes in the areas where it was built. Nor do I think that the areas with the lowest income have become worse. (Susana Ruiz, Bilbao City Council)

In the case of the Amézola Project (part of the Ria2000 developments), the neighborhood was linked with the center of Bilbao. The development has attracted a population with higher purchasing power, but without displacing anyone, so I would not consider it a case of gentrification. In Abando Ibarra, an elite has been created, and it is the most expensive place, but these are new areas. Zorrotzaurre even promotes the maintenance of the neighbors. What has happened is a change in the consideration of the city. From the depression of a gray city, to pride in a renovated city. (Pablo Otaola, Manager of Bilbao Ria2000 between 1993 and 2000)

In relation to the influx of new residents into the new areas of the old *HafenCity* ports of Hamburg, Professor Dick Shcubert considers the result a mixture of uses by different social classes. He attributes the upper-class preference to settling in the waterfront areas a consequence of the building's high standard.

The highest part of HafenCity provides for the construction of residential buildings for families with children, and in the future also housing and public housing cooperatives. The result is a more mixed population for the waterfront as a whole. (Dirk Shcubert, HafenCity University).

5. Conclusions

Related to the governance of the urban transformation of the waterfront areas of Valencia and Bilbao, the experts interviewed in this article emphasize some of the issues already detected in previous studies of each case. While Bilbao is an example of good governance, with balanced participation of different administrations and a satisfactory result in terms of the objectives achieved, the case of Valencia is characterized by the lack of a unique strategy and the coexistence of different development plans that have not always been managed in the same direction. The governance of the development plans for the Valencia waterfront left shortcomings related to the specificity of uses, the limits on the scope of the developments and the level of participation between the different administrations. In any case, the question of the duplication of commercial uses and their success is not exclusive to the experience of Valencia. Also, in the case of Bilbao and the city of Hamburg, despite the best governance of the plans, there have been cases of abandonment, little use and even failure of commercial experiences. The question of the use of the soil in the new urban spaces created on the

waterfronts of the old industrial cities does not seem to be resolved. The different consortiums that manage these spaces; *Marina de Valencia*, *Ria2000*, and *HafenCity* are constantly rethinking the suitability of promoting residential, commercial, productive or recreational uses.

In relation to the social dimension, the opinions of the experts consulted in this article indicate that the transformation of urban waterfront areas leads to an increase in real estate costs and the modification of the urban landscape of the neighborhoods. Most experts considered this an inevitable process that nonetheless can be tackled through the diversification of uses of the transformed spaces, creating uses in accordance with local interests. Some differences between the cities of Valencia and Bilbao should also be mentioned. In the case of Bilbao, the transfer of the port to a new location cleared the lands on which the development took place. The adjacent district is the area with the highest rent in the city, the Abando district. In the case of Valencia, the transformations carried out on the waterfront have had an impact on an already consolidated urban structure, a district of maritime towns, with low incomes- below the city average- and are related to various situations of social conflict and degraded spaces. Some of the planned interventions, such as the construction of large road axes, affected the social and urban fabric of some of the city's waterfront neighborhoods. We should also mention the disparity of uses and projects that were available in the case of the Valencia waterfront, such as the case of the urban circuit of Formula 1 between the years 2008 and 2012. It was finally abandoned due to financial problems; however, it affected the southern part of the waterfront towns, disconnecting the urban areas along the coast. Currently, a new urban development plan is being considered that will have to mend this empty space on the Valencian coastline, with a mixture of residential and recreational uses and with the need to overcome railway barriers and areas close to the port's facilities.

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