Asertos Programme Alicante

Submitted By: Arquitectura Sin Fronteras España & Quatorze



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Quatorze & Arquitectura Sin Fronteras España

Organization Type: Civil society

Website: www.asertos.org

Practice Details

Country(ies): Spain

City(ies): Alicante

Start Year: 2017

Ongoing: Yes

End Year: N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

Communal & Self-Build Housing

Housing Rights & Social Inclusion

Relevant SDGs:



UN-HABITAT

Problem & Context

Between 1991 and 2011, the Valencia Region saw its population living in vulnerable neighbourhoods rise from 12.3% to 43%, the highest rate in mainland Spain. By 2020, in Alicante province, 26.31% lived in low-vulnerability areas, 33.09% in medium, and 12.19% in integral vulnerability—nearly three quarters of the population. Urban vulnerability, driven by segregation and housing market disparities, is a major public health issue. Poor housing—marked by damp, inadequate heating, or low natural light—worsens respiratory, sleep, and musculoskeletal problems, and impacts mental health and social support. These conditions erode social capital, damage networks, and harm overall well-being. Measuring and addressing urban vulnerability offers significant potential for public health innovation. This idea is particularly indebted to the report "Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts", edited by Wilkinson and Marmot in 1998.

Solution Developed

The Asertos programme, active in Alicante since 2017 and promoted by Quatorze and Arquitectura Sin Fronteras España, addresses urban vulnerability through housing rehabilitation, community-led public space creation, and skills training. Target beneficiaries are residents of vulnerable neighbourhoods, particularly young families facing poor housing conditions and unemployment. Objectives include improving housing safety, fostering social cohesion, and mobilising local resources to tackle poverty from within. Asertos uniquely applies the Salutogenic Theory and the Asset-Based Community Development model, focusing on community strengths rather than deficits. It integrates the Diffusion of Innovations framework, identifying “positive deviants” to inspire behavioural change, reaching a critical mass of early adopters for sustainable transformation. Since its inception, it has rehabilitated 13 buildings, completed 72 urgent interventions, created 4 community spaces, and engaged over 20% of residents, with measurable impacts on health, well-being, and social capital.

Implementation

The programme advances urban regeneration through four main action lines: urgent home repairs and full rehabilitations to address unsafe or unhealthy living conditions; participatory transformation of vacant plots into green and leisure spaces; vocational training linked to construction, gardening and maintenance; and collaborative drafting of Neighbourhood Community Action Plans connected to the Urban Agenda 2030. Implementation relies on a network of actors: Quatorze and Arquitectura Sin Fronteras España lead facilitation and technical design; regional and municipal administrations provide regulatory support and allocate housing funds; local NGOs and cooperatives deliver training and employment opportunities; and residents contribute labour, local knowledge and stewardship of spaces. Launched in 2017 with a pilot in the Cemetery Neighbourhood, the approach expanded from 2020 to other districts through iterative 3-month cycles, enabling gradual scaling and ongoing

engagement. Financing combines public housing programmes, social innovation grants, and community-sourced resources, reinforced by strategic alliances with employment, social services and environmental initiatives.

Enablers & Obstacles

Key enablers included strong community engagement through iterative participation cycles, the trust built by working with local “positive deviants” and early adopters, and the mobilisation of neighbourhood resources using the Asset-Based Community Development approach. Political and financial backing came from the regional government (housing rehabilitation funds), municipal support for public space interventions, and social innovation grants from Obra Social “la Caixa”.

A major obstacle was the often-fragile relationship between communities and public administrations, marked by mistrust and slow bureaucratic responses. Tensions also arose between administrations of different political colours, which risked discontinuity in support. These challenges were addressed by transparent communication of results, maintaining open participation channels, and building cross-party understanding to safeguard the programme beyond political cycles.

Results & Impact

Since 2017, the programme has directly improved housing conditions for 152 residents (43 men, 44 women, 65 children) through 13 full rehabilitations and 72 urgent safety interventions. More than 50 low-income families have been supported in home improvement processes. Four common spaces have been co-created — including 2,700 m² of gardens and leisure areas — with the participation of over 100 residents, enhancing access to safe, green environments. Asset mapping identified 2,467 community resources, fostering local capacity and social capital.

Impacts on low-income and marginalised households include safer, healthier homes (reduced damp, structural risks, and energy inefficiency), increased employability through vocational training for 155 residents, and expanded access to public space in neighbourhoods with limited amenities.

Longer-term effects include stronger social networks, greater resident participation in decision-making, and increased trust between neighbours. The programme has stimulated the local economy via construction and maintenance work, while reusing vacant land for green areas contributes to environmental regeneration. The continuation of public investment despite political changes indicates institutional resilience, and the glocal approach positions the model for replication in other European cities facing similar urban vulnerability challenges.

Replication & Scale Up

The Asertos methodology, developed in Alicante's Cemetery District (2017–2025), is now being adapted to other urban and rural contexts in the province, with strong potential for replication across the Valencian Region and other European areas facing urban vulnerability. Key enablers include robust data from local observatories, a flexible asset-based approach, and integration of housing, social and labour support. The creation of the Celestina Urbana cooperative will channel public/private investment into rehabilitating devalued housing while preventing gentrification.

Scaling up Asertos involves expanding its asset-based, participatory methodology to other vulnerable neighbourhoods, using local observatories to identify priority areas. The Celestina Urbana cooperative will drive growth by pooling public and private investment to acquire and rehabilitate devalued housing, integrating social, labour and community support to prevent displacement. Strategic alliances with administrations, NGOs and training entities will enable replication at regional, national and European levels.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice has informed or been partially integrated into policy discussions, strategies, or pilot-level policy instruments.

The regional government has funded the Asertos programme for three consecutive years, recognising its potential for community regeneration. We have actively advised on the development of public policies related to housing and urban vulnerability. However, despite this engagement, the change in regional government has delayed the implementation of some policy proposals. Nonetheless, our work continues to inform ongoing discussions and serves as a valuable reference for future policy strategies.

Lessons & Takeaways

In hindsight, we recognize that communities can only thrive when they effectively manage common resources, as Ostrom highlights. While our programme focused on housing improvements, we see that homes themselves are central common goods with great potential to drive lasting social change. Future approaches will strengthen community management of housing as shared assets, fostering collective responsibility and empowerment to ensure sustainability and resilience beyond physical rehabilitation.