Ciudad Mallorquín: Inclusive Housing and Sustainable Urban Development

Submitted By: Grupo Argos

Organization Profile

Organization Name: Grupo Argos

Organization Type: Private sector

Website: https://www.grupoargos.com/quienes-somos/nuestros-negocios/desarrollo-urbano/

Practice Details

Country(ies): Colombia

City(ies): Barranquilla

Start Year: 2021 **Ongoing:** Yes **End Year:** N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Social Housing
- Housing Rights & Social Inclusion
- Housing & Climate Mitigation
- Housing, Land & Spatial Planning

Relevant SDGs:



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Problem & Context

Atlántico, Colombia, faces a housing deficit of 31,000+ households. Rapid growth has fueled informal settlements in fragile ecosystems. For years, social housing policy located projects on the periphery, far from jobs, services and quality public space, entrenching segregation and high service costs. Ciudad Mallorquín breaks this pattern by placing affordable housing in a strategic, well-connected area of the Barranquilla metro, next to high-income neighborhoods and major facilities. Its continuous network of parks and civic spaces fosters daily mixing across income groups, promoting social mobility. By linking location, infrastructure and ecological restoration, the project closes the policy gap between housing delivery, land-use planning and environmental management, while showing that well-located social housing can raise quality of life, reduce inequality and inspire new models of inclusive urban growth.

Solution Developed

Ciudad Mallorquín addresses the housing deficit in Atlántico by providing over 16,000 affordable homes, 90% VIS, for low- and middle-income families. Beneficiaries are households historically excluded from well-located housing, now with access to schools, health services, transport and jobs in the Barranquilla metro area. Objectives are: (i) deliver adequate housing in a strategic location; (ii) secure water, sanitation and mobility infrastructure; (iii) create public spaces that foster interaction across income groups; and (iv) restore ecosystems for resilience. Innovations include the Von Humboldt Institute's landscape strategy, which strengthens ecological connectivity, and the first transport model in Latin America led by a private project, guiding how the community connects to public transit and regional mobility. Alongside 17 hectares of parks, LEED for Communities Gold precertification, and nature-based solutions such as dry forest restoration, Ciudad Mallorquín stands as a benchmark for inclusive and sustainable urbanism.

Implementation

Implementation began with a Plan Parcial (2019–2020), formally agreed with local and environmental authorities and socialized with multiple stakeholders. This process defined land use, ecological buffers and infrastructure. In 2021, works started with Grupo Argos financing urban infrastructure and ecological restoration, and more than ten of Colombia's largest developers launching housing projects. Actions included: restoration of 60+ ha of mangrove and dry forest; creation of a community nursery; design of 17 ha of interconnected parks; implementation of SUDS and floodable parks (next phase); and development of a pioneering transport model linking the project to metropolitan transit.

Actors: Grupo Argos led planning, investment and park systems; municipal and environmental authorities provided approvals and oversight; the Von Humboldt Institute guided the landscape strategy; developers financed and built housing; community groups co-created park programs and stewardship.

Timeline: planning and agreements (2019–2020), construction of infrastructure and housing (2021–present), first residents settled (2023), full buildout to 2030.

Resources: COP 200.000m (USD ~50m) from Grupo Argos, COP 2.2 bn (USD ~550m) from developers, plus technical and institutional partnerships ensuring legitimacy, innovation, and long-term sustainability.

Enablers & Obstacles

Key enablers included strong political and regulatory support, with the Partial Plan approved by local and environmental authorities. Community engagement through workshops and co-creation built trust. Partnerships with Conservación Internacional and Universidad del Norte (the region's leading university and a direct neighbor of the project) strengthened ecological compensation and ensured academic rigor. The project's LEED for Communities Gold precertification validated sustainability standards. Financial feasibility was ensured by Grupo Argos and 10 of Colombia's largest developers. Obstacles included resistance from some high-income neighbors, opposed to social housing in a coastal area considered exclusive, and criticism from environmental activists lacking technical evidence, often overlooking that the site was a former limestone quarry.

Results & Impact

Ciudad Mallorquín is already delivering measurable results. More than 2,500 residents have settled since 2023, with over 7,000 homes under construction and 16,000 planned, 90% of them VIS. Grupo Argos has invested COP 200.000m (USD ~50m) in public infrastructure, while developers have mobilized COP 2.2 bn (USD ~550m) for housing. The project is generating 3,000 direct and 6,500 indirect jobs annually, and is expected to double property tax revenues in Puerto Colombia, strengthening municipal finances.

For low-income households, the greatest impact is access to well-located, affordable housing in a strategic area usually reserved for high-income projects. Families now benefit from proximity to schools, health care, jobs, and transport. The 170,000 m² of parks and green corridors are open to all, enabling daily interaction across income groups and creating pathways for social mobility.

Broader impacts include: ecological restoration of 60+ hectares of mangroves and dry forest and academic partnerships with Universidad del Norte ensuring long-term monitoring. Socially, the project is reconnecting fragmented communities and strengthening collective identity. Economically, it acts as a regional growth engine while setting a benchmark for inclusive, sustainable urbanism in Latin America.

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Replication & Scale Up

Ciudad Mallorquín is replicable if key conditions are met: political and regulatory support; well-located land near jobs and services; financial collaboration between anchor investors and developers; scientific guidance to adapt landscape strategies to local ecosystems; and strong community engagement. With these enablers, the model can be scaled to other Latin American cities facing housing deficits and ecosystem degradation.

Ciudad Mallorquín can be scaled by embedding its model into housing and urban policies that promote well-located land, infrastructure co-financing, and public-private partnerships. Replication in other Latin American cities requires anchor private investment, multiple developers for scale, and scientific guidance from institutions to adapt ecological strategies. Community engagement programs ensure ownership and social mobility, making the model transferable and expandable through additional phases to 2030.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice has been fully adopted into formal policy frameworks and legislation, and is being implemented at scale with institutional support.

Ciudad Mallorquín has been fully integrated into formal planning policy by following the guidelines of the POT (Land Use Plan), ensuring alignment with local and metropolitan legislation. This provided institutional support and legal certainty for its scale implementation with major developers and public authorities. The main obstacle was NIMBY resistance, particularly from high-income neighbors who opposed social housing in a coastal area seen as exclusive, highlighting the need for sustained citizen engagement to demonstrate the project's social and environmental benefits.

Lessons & Takeaways

In hindsight, implementation could have been phased in smaller stages to reduce the visual impact of large-scale construction. Greater and earlier socialization with communities and stakeholders would have helped address misconceptions and build broader support. Adjusting building heights and densities more gradually could also have eased concerns from neighbors, ensuring a smoother integration of social housing into a traditionally high-income coastal area.