



Interview ▶ The mayor of the capital of Alt Urgell talks about housing in the city



Joan Barrera

Mayor of La Seu d'Urgell

«That there are cross-border migrants is natural, but we cannot allow a massive entry»

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Following the statements made by the Head of Government, Xavier Espot, about the rental flats in La Seu d'Urgell, from EL PERIÒDIC we were able to speak with Joan Barrera to comment on the current situation regarding rent in the capital of the Catalan region, in addition to other issues such as work or public transport.

–Is there a lot of demand for rental flats in La Seu d'Urgell?

–Yes. We find that there is a lot of demand and this puts pressure on the rental market in La Seu d'Urgell. This is not recent; it's been a while. A little over a month ago, the Generalitat de Catalunya said that La Seu is a tense rental area, and limits the rents here in La Seu. All this comes from afar, from a problem such as the fact that the housing stock is very limited and in the end it is being strained by the

current demand.

–Whose is this demand?

–New border workers, new people who come here to work and new civil servants. In short, at the end of new people who have come to live here in La Seu, as seen in the register, which is increasing. Now the rental market is insufficient.

–Is there currently an offer left?

–It's the one there. And as we have already said, what must be done is to facilitate the process in the urban planning field. If someone wants to build, they will be welcome to finally put new housing on the table here in La Seu. In 2007 we did the promotion of the Horta del Valira flats. There is a part that ended in 2010–2011, and all this has been full for more than 10 years. Now what is there are the plots right in front which is where new construction can be done.

–How have rental prices risen in re-

cent years?

–Since the end of the economic crisis in 2008, which ended around 2014, there has been a constant increase that now makes paying rent here in La Seu d'Urgell difficult for many people. It should be noted that it has been a sustained growth over time, this problem has already been put on the table in the previous legislature and even in the next one. For many years there has been criticism that things have not been done the way they should be done, and we want to start putting points and solutions. For example, the plots I mentioned earlier in the Horta del Valira could not be built on because electricity had not been brought in, and neither was a municipal housing park built. The result of this is that we currently have a very serious problem.

–What policies do you plan to implement to curb the inflation of rental flats in La Seu?

–If they ask us to build on these plots,

we will go ahead with them as required by the regulations and the urban planning price. Apart from this, we want to bet on the Housing Park which makes it easier for vulnerable families and young people to acquire a rental, as it is very important and right now they have problems accessing it.

–What do you think of so many Andorran workers coming to live in La Seu from outside?

–I think it's natural. Right now one in three workers is a border worker here in La Seu. This means that there are many, about 1,500. Before the economic crisis we had 13,000 inhabitants and with the crisis it dropped by approximately 1,000 inhabitants. This means that there has been a flow of people coming and going depending on the work offered in the territory. Obviously, Andorra is a very important part of the territory. We commented that all this is a natural process that has existed and

will exist due to the flow of people, it is another thing to pretend that, a massive arrival. We cannot support this at the city level because we are dimensioned in a very specific way. Beyond that, it is part of this economic and workers link between Andorra and La Seu d'Urgell. If new people come to work in Andorra and live in the capital of Alt Urgell, they are welcome, that is clear. What must be monitored is an arrival flow that is too large for the city's dimensions. It is what we must avoid with the price of urban planning, and with all the rules we have at hand.

–What do you think of the statements made by Xavier Espot? Did you talk to him?

–He said that we had already spoken. We were able to put this disparity of opinion on the table. We said that this whole issue for us and for them is over, and what we have to do is to work in a dialogic way, together all these issues that affect in a cross-

border way.

-Are you planning to meet to make joint policies on housing?

-It is an issue that we must discuss and put on the table. We are in the month of August, it is a bit bad, but in the month of September we will talk and I am sure we will make it crystal clear with this issue and others that we have to deal with in the future between the two of us. For sure we will work on it and there will be this climate of cordiality that has always existed and that is what must reign in the future.

-In Andorra the price per square meter has increased by 15.5% during the second quarter of the year. Do you think it can affect La Seu d'Urgell?

-Everything that happens in Andor-



«If we say that everything must be more sustainable, it is much better to have good public transport than multiple private ones»

ra affects La Seu. If in Andorra there is a very large increase, and this is considerable, in the percentage of the rental price, it will affect. This is an issue that first affects Andorra and it is certainly in the Government of Andorra's interest that this stop, and therefore, to make the policies they have to make so that the issue of housing works for them. Obviously with these economic ties everything that affects here affects there and vice versa.

-What policies does your legislature have for cross-border workers?

-We proposed several policies: firstly, the issue of work: first, that all the unemployed in La Seu and the region can have a job in Andorra before hiring people from outside, they are people who can have this opportunity and we think that they should



give priority This is through the SOC (Employment Service of Catalonia). Another point is the issue of public transport, which is very important: we want it to be every half hour during rush hour, with a reasonable price. This is being worked on. Then there is the issue of queues, we talked about enabling both lanes during rush hour. In addition to improving the conditions of cross-border

migrants at the socio-health level.

-Do you think that the new authorization will improve the cross-border bus line?

-In the end we worked and we stayed on improving the half hour during rush hour and better services on weekends. We all know that this was the result of a company's bankruptcy and that it has had a complica-

ted process lately. We must work so that it does not happen in the future, that is why we spoke with the Government of Andorra, both with the Head of Government and with the competent administration, and we will be very attentive so that this can improve; because this is what many people who live in La Seu suffer from. In addition, with the growth of borderers it is a vital issue for the city.

In the end if we say that everything must be much more sustainable, good public transport is much better than multiplied private transport. With regard to prices, it cannot be that in the metropolitan area, with all the subsidies that there were for public transport, to make an impulse for people to take public transport, and subsidize half of it, and multiply here in a similar period. ≡

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