

The Asturias Coastal Zone Protection Plan (POLA) - ES

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space
- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Sound use of resources and promotion of less resource intensive processes/products
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment

2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Ecosystems based approach
- Socio-economic

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

The POLA represents a best practice case study in the protection of a sensitive environment and landscape, recognising the challenges of achieving balance and integration between environmental, economic and recreational aspects. It shows integration within the planning system recognising, incorporating and in some aspects influencing local and national plans. It also provides useful practical examples in environmental protection and its translation of the planning principles of the '500 m wide non-development coastal strip'.

4. Overview of the case

The POLA is a coastal planning tool which defines specific actions to be performed: leisure spaces (beach-parks and coastal paths) or regeneration (areas of high natural value). It also organises its further development in subsequent planning documents at a smaller scale, such as: Special Plan for Protection of Coastal Undeveloped Land, Special Plan for building Degraded areas, Special Plan for Archaeological Areas, Special Plan for Tourist Camps and Special Plan for high voltage networks.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

Asturias' coastal zone, in the north of Spain, is characterized by a high ecological and landscape values, with several Natural Protected Areas, Sites of Community Interest (SCI) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) of the Natura 2000 network, and RAMSAR sites. The coastal zone is approximately 350km long and is made up of high cliffs, pocket white sand beaches (250-300), long beaches with dune systems. Asturias is changing from a heavy industry (mining and steel) to a service-based economy. The geographical scale for implementation is Regional, but the application sometimes influences local and national plans. Several previous urban and territorial planning instruments have helped to preserve the Asturian coast, whose valuable natural and landscape values the Asturian society have agreed to protect. As a result, Asturias has a high quality coastal area, with a 300 km long protected coastal stretch (the longest protected stretch in the Spanish coastal zone).

The Government of the Principality of Asturias has been developing an active policy aimed at the conservation of natural values of the coastline in a consistent manner with its use and public enjoyment. These are the main lines of action:

- Creation of a Network of Protected Natural Areas.
- Instruments of Spatial Planning, through the Regional Planning Guidelines (DROT), Guidelines Sub-Regional Planning for the Gaza Coast (DSFC) and Territorial Space. Management Plan Coastal Asturian (POLA).

b) Objectives

The objective of the POLA is to solve the conflict between coastal uses and preservation by changing the equilibrium between them, i.e giving always priority to the preservation to promote the uses, facilitating the public access to the coast and improving the quality of the recreational use. The timescale associated with the implementation and goals achievement is undefined because Coastal protection is intended to be permanent. The POLA economic memory fixes 8 years for its development.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

The POLA has been promoted and is being managed by the Government of the Principality of Asturias. It has been written to fully take into consideration the different powers of government, from local authorities to the various agencies of the State Administration. The various periods of public information ensure their knowledge by citizens, who have had the opportunity to submit their suggestions and submissions. A long process of development, but whose outcome is a document that has achieved a high level of consensus among all stakeholders and is in line with European Union directives on ICZM. The signing, in June 2004 of a co-operation agreement between the Principality of Asturias and the Ministry of Environment for ICZM implementation proves the quality recognition by the National Government as a model for the sustainable development of this precious natural ecosystem.

b) ICZM tools

The POLA has been carefully prepared respecting the competences of the different public administrations at every level. To achieve its objectives, the POLA proposes the following tools:

Spatial Planning tools:

- Designating Coastal undeveloped land, as areas to maintain its environmental and scenic qualities and prohibit urban developments.
- Several proposed activities: beach parks, the network of footpaths, cycling paths and the performances of regeneration of degraded vegetation cover.
- Development plans to act on specific aspects: areas degraded by buildings, villages, archaeological sites, tourist camps and high voltage networks.

The novel concept in the POLA is, without doubt, the beach park. It is an instrument that aims to reconcile beach protection and its enjoyment by all citizens. Thus, the sandy environment is endowed with adequate spaces and facilities and parking areas with the aim of protecting the landscape and ecological values (as dunes and wetlands) from parking. The POLA proposes 23 beach parks. Beach parks and the 232 rural communities of the coast were connected to each other through a network of footpaths and a coastal trails system, re-using some 450 km of existing roads supplemented with 150 kilometres of new sections, usually joining them. The use of existing roads and easements and the maximum respect for the landscape are the design criteria of this network. Some projected paths require land expropriations.

Coordination tools: some actions are being developed along the coast of Asturias through agreements with the municipalities and under the agreement signed with the Ministry of the Environment.

Participation tools: public information processes ensure the information, consultation and awareness of citizens, who have had the opportunity to submit their suggestions and submissions.

7. Cost and resources

The budget for this initiative is €137,901,000. The manpower used for the implementation of the tool is 8 part-time staff. This does not include the technical assistance contracted for its execution.

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

10 administrative agreements have been signed. 10 beach-parks have been created and 10 have been executed. 205,68 path km have been created and 10 paths are projected (77 km).

The investments related to the public use, beach and recreational infrastructure management (beach-parks and paths) have been considered as a priority and will be achieved in the timescale defined, proposing for a second phase the objectives related to the landscape and environmental improvement (degraded areas, electrical network underground and tourist camps relocation, housing expropriations).

9. Success and Fail factors

Positive: (i) High social awareness and the citizen's positive value of coastal protection and the possibility of enjoying the public coastal space without any environment damages; (ii) Realistic approach of proposals tailored to the characteristics of the Asturian coast and the main problems with non-rigid instruments capable of adapting to circumstances and local conditions. Also (iii) the investments related to the public uses have been a priority; (iv) prior availability of Asturian coastal planning tools, particularly the sub-regional Guidelines for Planning of the Asturian Coastal Zone approved by Decree of December 16, 1993. These guidelines facilitated a uniform treatment of the coast in the different municipalities, in terms of both the definition of the Coastal Undeveloped Land, and its regulation of applications, releasing a 500 m fringe of urban development and providing a very restrictive regulation, minimizing urban pressures threatening other Cantabrian coastal areas.

Negative: (i) low involvement of other administrations in the decision-making process, leading to the POLA development projects not being owned by the General State Administration and Local Government, hindering inter-administrative cooperation. Also (ii) the owners of the lands affected because of the limitations have appealed against POLAs approval. Even though the majority of the appeals have not been considered, sometimes the Court ruled against Principality of Asturias; (iii) the economic downturn that has affected the implementation of the Plan period and therefore weakening the ability of the Plan as a tool for this part of the territory.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

Positive: The European Urban and Regional Planning Awards highlight good practice from the wide variety of planning systems, methods and activities to be found within the European Union. The POLA was selected within the Regional Planning category, its outstanding characteristics being in the fields of sustainability, innovation and integration. It represents a case of best practice in its approach to protection of a sensitive environment and landscape, recognising the challenges of achieving balance and integration between environmental, economic and recreational aspects. It further shows integration within the planning system recognising, incorporating and in some aspects influencing local and national plans. It also provides worthy practical examples environmental protection in its translation of the planning principles of the '500 metre wide non-development coastal strip'.

Negative: A larger building pressure detected in the nearby lands which are not protected by the POLA.: as the demarcation and restrictive regulation of undeveloped land costs are not based on physical criteria, but in the range of 500 meters under the law, a shift of the pressure of the uses and activities bordering the protected area has occurred in some areas. Therefore, in specific situations, developments continue to generate some indirect impact on the coastal strip, despite running out of it.

11. Prepared by

Raúl Medina / Pino González-Riancho, Environmental Hydraulics Institute IH Cantabria, Spain.

12. Verified by

Jose Antonio Cullía de la Maza. POLA's coordinator, SPAIN Country.

Miguel Ángel Álvarez, INDUROT, Universidad de Oviedo, Spain

13. Sources

- Government of the Principality of Asturias. Planning and Urban Design Department. "POLA: Tools of preservation of the coast"
- <http://www.asturias.es/portal/site/Asturias/menuitem.fe57b77c5fd38046e44f5310bb30a0a0/?vgnextoid=af7320b86797e010VgnVCM100000b0030a0aRCRD&vgnextchannel=12f020b86797e010VgnVCM100000b0030a0aRCRD&vgnextpage=next>
- <http://tematico.asturias.es/pola/Plano%20gu%C3%ADa.pdf>