

# LIFESTYLES



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## Living Places

Intergenerational Dwellings  
Plaza de América  
Building



# INTERGENERATIONAL DWELLINGS PLAZA DE AMÉRICA BUILDING IN ALICANTE

## Intergenerational dwellings to grow old at home



Apart from an accomplishment and a social achievement, the promotion of active and healthy ageing is ‘an opportunity’, for example, to live and grow old with dignity at home, as is done by the occupants of the Plaza de América building in Alicante. One of the most innovative experiences in the field of social architecture and design which has become the object of interest and curiosity of all and sundry.

The Plaza de América building of intergenerational dwellings for non-dependent seniors and supportive young people arises from the progressive ageing of the population and a significant demand for attention and cares on the part of seniors. With these premises, the Alicante Town Hall has developed through the *Patronato Municipal de la Vivienda de Alicante* [Alicante Municipal Housing Board] a new accommodation formula: publicly subsidised homes on a rental basis for seniors and young people additionally equipped with municipal proximity services.





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The Plaza de América project started in 2002 as a Plan for Intergenerational Dwellings and a Health Centre, to which was later added a daycare centre for seniors and a public car park, with a final cost of 12,390,778 euros. This pioneering building in one of the most traditional districts in Alicante was inaugurated six years later, on November 24, 2008 with the following facilities :



- 72 one-bedroom dwellings (40 effective square meters), distributed in four storeys, especially designed for non-dependent seniors, although with an intergenerational character in their occupation. All of them with adapted bathrooms, heating and air conditioning.
- An effective surface area of 1,551.71 square meters of common services such as lounges, gym, heated geriatric swimming-pool, vegetable garden, solarium, landscaped terrace, launderette, etc.
- A health centre dependent on the *Conselleria de Sanidad* [Regional Healthcare Department] of the *Generalitat Valenciana* [Valencian Regional Government] (3,074.18 square meters).
- A daycare centre for seniors dependent on the Social Action Councillor's office at the Alicante Town Hall (995.35 square meters).
- 256 public parking places.



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Leaving aside the health centre for its specific nature and the determining factors which are dictated by the *Conselleria de Sanidad*, the other elements of the project are linked to one another. In other words, the daycare centre users can occupy common spaces in the dwelling area, e.g. the gym and the geriatric swimming-pool installed on the upper part where the solarium is situated as well. Similarly, the dwelling tenants can use daycare centre services such as the dining-room, the ballroom or the hairdresser's, among others.





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All 72 dwellings, outward-facing through the glazing of their whole façade surface, have an east/west orientation, the latter being protected by a second practicable latticework façade which regulates the access of sunlight and softens the temperature. These two options can be physically distinguished by the longitudinal opening which acts as an inner street used to arrive at the dwellings and which simultaneously facilitates the aeration of interior rooms, thus permitting crossed ventilation, a condition which was imposed as essential.



The dwellings and common spaces have been designed thinking of a user who is non-dependent but may have some degree of disability at a given moment, with guarantees for the required assistance, provided by either own or external staff. The places for meetings and joint activities (library, TV room, computer room, launderette, gym and swimming-pool) are distributed across the different floors, thus making relationships between neighbours easier.



Flexibility is a factor which was taken into account in the construction of dwelling interiors, which can incorporate the bedroom into the living-room, creating a single space, or divide it into two separate rooms with the aim of achieving greater privacy. The kitchen remains directly linked to the dining-room, but can be closed using a sliding door. The same happens at the daycare centre rooms, located on the first floor next to the health centre; their capacity/size and use can be modified by means of mobile panels.



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### SOCIAL PROGRAMME

The Plaza de América project is completed with a wide social programme which responds to the need for establishing some action criteria regarding the activities to be performed by young people inside the actual building and the possible collaborations of other bodies, and which is prepared on the basis of the social and anthropological perspective which considers the objectives of social cohesion (dependence), identity awareness (membership) and strength of tradition (permanence). The programme, which seeks to be participative and open to every building occupant, consists of five initiatives:

1. Back to the land. The idea is to work with it, and in it, through gardening, landscaping and vegetable growing gardens. The building includes two landscaped spaces with 12 containers-vegetable gardens which can be grown by tenants, daycare centres or people living in the neighbourhood.
2. From culture to information. A library to share books, with the possibility of starting a writing lesson, cinema-debate sessions, music and dance workshops and explanatory talks about current news.
3. Parties. Community and personal celebrations, using building spaces.
4. Technology in your hands. Seeking to bring all the devices which form part of daily life closer to seniors, so that they can learn how to operate them and check how they can be useful every day.
5. The good neighbour. It includes all those activities meant to provide help, company and solidarity for day chores. Each young person pays special attention to the four seniors who live in the adjacent dwellings. Organised and supervised by a social worker from the Social Department of the Alicante Municipal Housing Board.



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## BENEFICIARIES AND REQUIREMENTS

The exclusive beneficiaries of the Municipal Programme of Intergenerational Dwellings and Proximity Services are the residents (the people who live in them), among which two groups can be distinguished, in a proportion of one dwelling for young people for each four dwellings for seniors:

### ***Young people, less than 35 years of age***

The requirements to become recipients are: being registered in the Alicante municipality at least during the last five years (giving priority to people from the neighbourhood), committing themselves to deliver services to seniors, not owning an inhabitable dwelling and having a personal yearly income of ca. 21,000 euros.

### ***Seniors, older than 65***

The requirements to become recipients are: being registered in the Alicante municipality at least during the last five years (giving priority to people from the neighbourhood), being valid/able to live independently, not owning an inhabitable dwelling and having a yearly income of less than 21,000 euros.



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All dwellings can be occupied by the tenant alone or together with his/her partner. The price of rents is 150 euros a month per dwelling plus the occurring community expenses, thus guaranteeing the repayment of the mortgage loan plus the maintenance expenses by the Alicante Town Hall.

Likewise, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood are also beneficiaries of this innovative project, since they can use the services offered by the public facilities installed in the building: health centre, daycare centre for seniors and car park; in addition to benefiting from the urban requalification that the construction itself generates thanks to these improvement actions.

The Plaza de América building of intergenerational dwellings is the first of three buildings included in the Municipal Programme of Intergenerational Dwellings and Proximity Services of the Alicante Town Hall, which will represent a total investment of 50 million euros. As for the other two projects, Benalúa and Lonja Mercado, the first one finds itself in the previous phase of putting the works out to tender, and in the second, the architectural project is still being drawn up. Financing is based on the participation of the three Public Administration levels.





# INTERGENERATIONAL DWELLINGS

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**“This type of dwellings gives real value to the meaning of solidarity and mutual help”**

For Carmen Pérez, architect of the project, the great challenge was to “provide the habitat suited to the needs of a specific group of users with a wide range of circumstances which vary depending on personal situations.”

The remaining objectives were oriented “to facilitate coexistence between people of different ages, among whom must arise a mutual help relationship within an atmosphere that seems familiar to them; to offer services which extend the situation of independence and security; to integrate the new technologies which can improve welfare and comfort conditions in the most simple and natural possible way; and to create spaces for occupational and training programmes,” she adds.

One of the aspects that distinguishes this type of dwellings from other conventional ones according to the architect refers to security conditions: “A mixed alert system has been designed by means of switches situated in the bathroom, the living-room and the bedroom which transmit signals to the control panel situated at the caretaker’s desk on the ground floor and can also be sent to external municipal assistance services.”

Furthermore, as stated by Carmen Pérez, this type of dwellings have the advantage that, on the one hand, “they avoid loneliness and isolation” and on the other hand, “facilitate the extension of independence and the disappearance of the fear of suffering accidents without receiving attention.” To this must be added that “the relationship between young people and seniors permits to discover other problems and ways of living through the transfer of knowledge, thus giving real value to the meaning of solidarity and mutual help.”





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