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1. Present Status of Planning

In Spain, the serious blow caused by the economic and financial crisis is intimately linked to the evolution of the construction sector and, therefore, to the way cities are made, the way building takes place, and the way urban planning is used. Generally speaking, there are two possibilities for analysis of the status of urban planning in Spain: on the one hand, understanding the crisis as an opportunity involving the necessary reconsideration of the way cities are made, with much more participative standards and respect for the environment and, on the other hand, denying the exhaustion of the current model, defending its continuity and its capacity for economic growth.

Evidently, the political component lying behind each option is clear; while the conservative parties support, with varying degrees of concealment, the strategy to continue creating built space not according to social needs, but according to profit standards, the parties and platforms located more to the left recognise the creation of new spaces for urban planning, enabling new ways of making cities. A (bad) example can be found in Madrid where a large part of the planning measures have been considered illegal: in 2012, 22 urban planning developments included in the General Urban Development Plan (PGOU) for Madrid were considered null and void.

I believe that we are currently going through a period that presents an opportunity to change the dominant paradigm, including in urban planning. Society cries out for solutions that the market does not provide; the political parties that are stuck in excessively formal ways of doing and implementing that are far removed from reality, observe without reacting how from the traditional top-down approach there is now a shift towards very bottom-up grassroots movements. Including in urban planning. The empowerment of society in multiple spheres of action can be seen perfectly in planning itself: from participative urban planning models to unplanned changes in the use of urban spaces.

This optimism is tarnished by actions like those of the 'vulture' funds from other countries that buy up housing (in many cases social housing, or publically rented housing) with the aim of, once the contract has been settled, turning it into unsubsidised housing and, thus, causing the expulsion of tenants. Who is responsible for stopping this? Is urban planning the appropriate mechanism for counteracting these imbalances found in the fragility and vulnerability of families in Spain? Without a

doubt, it has an important role, but not alone; it requires many other legal instruments to materialise the guarantee to decent housing for Spanish families.

2. Dominant Themes and Media Coverage

There are different issues that dominate the discourse on planning, some are recurrent since they go further back in time than the current post-crisis period, others, on the other hand, are particularly associated with the serious consequences that the crisis has had on the territory.

The need to review urban planning methodologies: 'Urban planning standards' have not been updated systematically in Spain since their introduction in the 50s and 60s. The arrival of new technologies enables an extraordinary change in ways of doing urban planning. For years experts have advocated for a better and greater use of new technologies in designing urban planning that would be more appropriate to the changing needs of society; new multifunctional buildings, facilities more integrated into their surroundings, and planned mobility incorporating new tendencies in the use of transport... In short, changing out-of-date mechanisms and tools in order to develop new habits, new lifestyles in the ways cities are designed. Today this is possible thanks to the power of technology. The media echo this type of evidence more and more due to their political 'neutrality' and their 'aesthetic' contribution toward new urban planning.

Mobilisation of empty housing: After the crisis, the number of empty houses (finished or under construction) in Spain has increased extraordinarily. Simultaneously, many families find themselves condemned to eviction due to non-payment. As well as representing a clear indicator of the difficulties of market adjustment, this social emergency demands the need to determine alternative ways to mobilise empty housing. The housing that lies in the possession of the banks is unlikely to be put on the market since it is retained in order to avoid even more negative price shocks. However, there is also a stock of social housing built, empty, and not allocated to families due to a lack of management tools for said stock. Today fines are being imposed on those city councils responsible for this kind of practice.

Surface rights and their use as a public policy tool: The distinction between land and building use allows the Public Administration to freely concede land use to the building rights owner. While the land remains in public hands, the social housing built on it can be privately owned and, after a time, return to public ownership. This procedure cheapens the construction costs of housing and favours access to that housing for those that fulfil a series of requirements. Unfortunately, some public administrations act in the opposite way: they try to sell the public ownership of the land to the building rights holders to achieve short-term profits for the public purse.

The 'Smart City' and sustainability: Without a doubt, this is the dominant discourse not only in urban planning but in general, in the search for cities that are highly competitive and, at least in theory, citizen-focused. The 'Smart City' can be found in diametrically opposed discourses: on the one hand, in the technification of urban planning, for example considering improvements in connectivity infrastructure and in methods of waste collection and disposal and, on the other hand, in the 'smart society', where we find doubts about the citizenship's adaptation and benefit in relation to new technologies.

The exhaustion of the previous model of prolonged and unsustainable urban growth is substituted by much more technically and economically sustainable models. In this regard, the construction of new housing can achieve very high standards in quality and sustainability that may, with difficulty, be paid for and used by its owners or tenants. It is perhaps necessary to reconsider the application of sustainable improvements when the capacity to pay for them is not as high as would be necessary. In a similar vein, the change (step back) made by conservative politicians with regard to renewable energies not only worsens the quality of life of Spanish citizens but will hinder the achievement of the objectives associated with the EU's Horizon 2020.

The provision of land for social housing: Since 2007, in Spain, when new housing developments are built planning requires that 30 per cent of the new residential land (with possible variations between Autonomous Communities) must be dedicated to social housing. In a period of recession like the present and in order to adapt subsidised housing to the 'reality of the market', the negative situation of the sector together with the characteristics of our conservative government means that since 2013, at the request of housing developers, the Autonomous Communities can suspend land reserves for subsidised housing for four years under two conditions: that there is a percentage of subsidised housing already built and unsold in the municipality that constitutes over 15 per cent of the subsidised housing planned in or resulting from current planning or that there is an 'evident disproportion' between the legally enforceable reserve and the real demand and possibilities to access said housing. Measures of this type cause reflection on who exactly urban planning serves...

The national media today are more concerned with other topics, particularly regarding the recovery of the real estate sector and the potential increase (again) of housing prices as a result of market revival.

3. Theory vs. Practice

In light of what I've discussed up until now, it seems that it would be difficult for planning to be affected in the short term by changes in perceptions and in the uses of space. The entrenchment of tradition in urban planning to a large extent hinders such willingness to adapt. Currently, the social movements and critical schools of thought in

planning exemplify attitudes and actions much more in line with society's feelings, reducing the potential gap between theory and practice.

In Spain, the first land act was enacted in 1956 and the most recent is that of 2008 (*Texto Refundido de la Ley de Suelo de 2008*). Over the course of this period, legislation on land has been accompanied by other laws focused either on housing (Law 8/2013, of 26 June, on urban rehabilitation, regeneration, and renovation) or on other aspects such as, for example, sustainability (Law 2/2011, of 4 March, on Sustainable Economics). The distance from other European countries with regard to measures to be adopted is shown in the ad hoc structure of the set of laws that respond to the more or less immediate needs of the country.

4. Addressing and Reducing Disparities

The main problem in urban planning today is, given the existing methodologies and uses, the difficulty in maintaining a balance between the public and the private. Cities understood as products of urban planning in use do not cover the needs of citizens, neither in terms of rights or guarantees of a better future. The arrival of extreme neoliberalism puts the defence of the 'public' in danger; from space to transport and via facilities. The relative rigidity of urban planning methodologies prevents them from responding in an objective way to an appropriate balance between the public and the private.

Planning can contribute to improving the quality of life of citizens as long as it abides by its own determining factors, explicitly incorporating its intergenerational inheritance, and admitting its ability to make mistakes. We must put urban planning at the service of needs, seeking the consensus of all the agents involved around the instruments and priorities of urban intervention.

5. Future Challenges and Education

It is clear that not only with awareness-raising among planners are social achievements or respect for what is public reached. Perhaps today more than ever we need the active integrating inclusion of different disciplines, holistic approaches to resolve the problems presented by the built city, proactive attitudes to place value on the least represented groups in history such as women... Urban planning should be understood as the top representative of a conciliatory discipline, made for constant feedback between experts and capable of adjusting itself to the permanent changes that society experiences. Without a doubt, urban planning should be less 'technical' in order to be more 'social'.

In Spain there are no university degrees with the title 'Urban Planning'. The discipline finds itself on the border between 'Regional Planning' taught in Geography and 'Urbanism' taught in Architecture. Perhaps due to this gap, in recent years there have

been signs of a conciliatory willingness and a need to incorporate representatives of other disciplines in research laboratories and university departments. The process is slow since it is always difficult to share spheres of power in university studies, but it progresses satisfactorily.

6. Role of the European Union

Top-down regulations tend to be excessively complex and not well-adapted to the diversity of the local spaces and territories that converge in Europe. I find it difficult to imagine a European urban policy capable of being sufficiently flexible to gather the specificities, the different traditions, and the different ways of doing things. I would back a common framework that responded to social, economic, and environmental needs that planning should consider as minimums. The development of instruments according to capacities, contexts, and path dependencies should remain in the hands of local governments.

Eliminating administrative levels (centralisation) means achieving economies of scale and reducing the costs of transactions for those that operate in more than one jurisdiction. However, centralising also means increasing the costs of providing and distributing a good, as well as inefficiencies in the distribution and provision of a commodity in a centralised way in a low-density area. Fundamentally, the increase of the administrative scale (centralisation) incurs in greater heterogeneity in citizens' preferences and greater difficulty in finding a middle ground for the provision of certain commodities like, for example, in the case urban planning.

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