

LAND DEVELOPMENT: BETWEEN LOGIC AND MYTH.

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Abstract

Urban planning already has a long history as a technical and administrative instrument for intervention in cities. But there has existed a permanent dialectical conflict between technical rationality and social protagonist, in the creation and development of these same cities. Whenever planning and intervention processes have centred on technical rationality, planning has been accused of being excessively technocratic and of ignoring the inhabitants of the city. When technical rigor in planning has been relaxed and the plan has been produced from an aggregation of different ideas and wishes, it has paradoxically turned out to be a document that does not describe a coherent will or reality. Poetry in interventions in the country, and in the city can be understood as the artistic knowledge of those who know how to combine elements and materials (both territorial and urban) to generate a product of high esthetic quality. It can also be understood, however, as a feeling generated in observers when they perceive an urban or non urban landscape which has been planned. This is a reflection on the relation between these different aspects, and the advances in ideas and realities that are, methodologically, taking place, both in the search for a balance between art and technology in planning, and the intervention in cities by local administration as can be seen in such real cases as the Olivia General Plan, the QUATER project, which concerns the implementation of a system of local quality certification, or the social movement, PER L'HORTA, the aim of which is to defend local, natural and historical heritage.

We can advance, creating significant methodologies, proposals and methods of intervention with which we can integrate technical methods, sometimes with a high level of complexity, that contain social aspirations and a social understanding of interventions developed in cities as well as in the country. This is examined considering the urban or territorial landscape generated by a project or plan as a synthesis of the dialectical conflict between specialisation and signification. Specialisation represents a form of technological intervention that is continuously becoming more rigorous, complex, efficient, and with a higher capacity to produce changes. Signification represents a clear perception by the public of interventions made in cities, and the technological forms of which they are not aware, or are unable to understand.

Key words: *Urban planning, public participation, social issues*

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1. The Logic of Urban Planning: its origins (beginnings) in the Expansion Projects.

The history of Urban planning is already a long one. This is particularly true in the case of Spain where it can be said that this history has its beginnings in the middle of the 19th century. It is certainly true that the way of understanding planning, both technically and methodologically, has evolved following different modes of logic.

In the case of Spain, the first technical and methodological plans for ways to intervene in a city, similar to urban planning, date from the first half of the 19th century, in parallel with the consolidation of property rights.

The progressive implementation and consolidation of property rights brings, at the same time, the implementation of the system that declares state construction projects and initiatives are of public benefit. This is the means by which public projects that need to make use of hitherto private land can be developed and carried out. In other words, this is the mechanism for expropriation.

It was based on this idea there arose expansion projects or projects to open up the city, by carrying out urbanization schemes (roads and gardens) in order to generate buildable plots of land. These projects are understood as civil projects.

Ildefonso Cerdá, see Arturo Soria y Puig, was a civil engineer of roads, channels, and ports who, around 1850, developed a theory of urbanization based on a rigorous analysis of a model city: the city of the expansion. A city generated as a consequence of the extension of its infrastructure network.

The city is understood as a definite logical consequence of a rigorous systematic Cartesian analysis. The population only forms a part of the process of the definition of the city, as an object of analysis, but never as a protagonist. The city of expansion was “the city”, the only desirable city, the best city, the model of a city that solved the problems that had been analysed. The definitive city is always the result of a systematic and implacable logic, a purely rationalistic way of understanding it; where the population is no more than standardised objects with standardised needs, which are solved with standard actions and models.

Perhaps this result of the standard model, as a final product, is not very similar to the standard models of medieval cities, for example, or to the many standard models of archaeological cities, or to surviving cities that represent the innumerable cultures of our world. In this last case we are not dealing with cities that have been planned, but cities that are the result of the continued addition of houses and buildings, constructed using homogenous methods, through a number of individual initiatives. These models were realised not as part of a collective vision but as the sum of many initiatives. The final product is one that is homogeneous and reflects a particular typology and style. But there is a difference, Cerdá's model is the product of a conscious and verifiable logic, whereas the medieval city is the result of the addition of individual initiatives that reproduces the same building typology.

2. The Logic of static planning.

In Spain, the logic of the expansion projects lasted from 1850 until approximately 1920, at which time the movement of Modernist Architecture and the CIAM, see Fernando de Terán (a), began to develop. Also in Spain, the development of a modernist architectural movement ended dramatically with the Civil War, (1936-39) when the victorious fascist faction rejected and forbade this movement. Some years later, in 1956, the first land law was approved, which consecrated a new planning logic. This, understood as static planning, fixed urban organization for indefinite amounts of time, and would also define the content of property rights.

A new logic substituted the old, a new logic where the citizens continued to be ignored. They were spectators in the design of their environment. Often spectators that accepted their role as such, because on one hand, it was difficult for them to understand the technical contents of the plans, and on the other hand, they were not sufficiently motivated to participate, that is to say, to put effort into something that was seen as very distant, barely intelligible, and difficult to adjust or modify within a process of public participation. Furthermore this process was in no way facilitated by the administration. It was another technical logic.

3. The Logic of systemic planning.

In 1975, the year of the dictator Franco's death, a new law was approved in Spain, the first reform of the Land Law. A year later in 1976, a revised text was approved which implemented definitively, a new planning logic, systemic planning, or scientific planning as it would be called by Fernando Terán (b). The technique was purified, refined, and defined in more detail. The typology of planning was defined in a very structured way following the new systemic theories applied to urban and territorial planning. Initially, it was scientific planning that was aspired to.

This planning logic anticipates a system of public participation by accepting the need for one i.e. the need to include the public as participants in the elaboration of plans which the self same public would experience in their final form. However, the reality is very different. The real situation being that a large part of the population does not understand the technical or conceptual contents of the documents; it is also difficult to demand that people participate at the times that the promoters consider convenient. Presentations often take place during office hours, when people are normally at work. Participation often consists of the checking of the status of the individual plots of land that belong to each owner affected. Very few people have the capacity to criticize proposals based on a global vision and are even less capable of putting forward viable alternatives rather than wishes closer to their dreams. A lot of people are demotivated by this and therefore simply give up, partly because they do not understand, partly because they do not care, and partly because they have faith in their social, and political leaders. People often complain with good reason about non-participative planning, but they do not participate when the possibility to do so exists. This is why the logic of a

necessary rationality imprints itself against a social dynamic that has its own logic, its own 'tempus', and its own moments of action and mobilisation; which is for the most part independent or unrelated to the 'tempus' or rhythms of the planning process.

4. The Myth as a motor of behaviour.

Ruben Pesci in his methodology of environmental projection has taken advantage of the mythical value of projects that are important to the public as a tool to promote the social process in other projects, be they urban, territorial or of a different type. It is certainly true that it is the myth that moves people, mobilising them towards taking the initiative. It is for example the myth of Europe that has served the Spanish people as the justification for the great effort that was made in terms of social and economic progress between 1980 and 2000. The myth of being like all other Europeans, and of generating in Spain, similarities in daily life to those of the more advanced European states, has made it possible to justify various decisions, initiatives, and laws that would have been very difficult to bring about in the absence of this myth.

The myth of the strategic plan for Barcelona in the 92 Olympic Games created an example to follow. The myth of The City of Arts and Sciences in Valencia, created an image of the city, and created an identification with that image that was a justification for initiatives and actions.

In Valencia, in the year 2001, the myth of safeguarding the historical, cultural, and natural heritage of the fertile irrigated region of Valencia, see José Luis Miralles, generated a popular movement backed by 118,000 signatures. The Valencian countryside is a peripheral urban space that represents the unbridled knowledge of many generations of simple country people. This wild knowledge shows itself in an agricultural landscape greatly marked by special characteristics. A landscape of smells, colours, and textures that vary throughout the year, scattered throughout with farmhouses and buildings dating back to medieval times. A space which the people feel is their own. A popular movement generated a popular legislative initiative, a law protecting this heritage, to be presented to the Valencian legislature. This initiative achieved 118,000 signatures of support, approximately 10% of the electoral roll of the Valencian metropolitan area. This initiative dramatised and consolidated a myth: the safeguarding of the Valencian countryside. This myth caught the imagination of many people. But the initiative was rejected by the Valencian legislature and this myth remained in the hearts of the people without any real, notable, or visible consequences. A wasted myth that would have justified the taking of logical and rational measures to safeguard this heritage. A myth without planned actions, but with a logic to substantiate it.

This is how the 'tempus' of movements and social uprisings follows its own rhythms, with its own dynamics, and which, in general, does not adjust itself to the 'tempus' of the logical processes of planning.

5. The dark side of the myth

But if a rational logic is not synonymous with efficiency, if logic is not synonymous with quality, or necessarily with acceptance and social recognition, or with social cohesion, the myth is not synonymous with these concepts either. Myths can end in scandal, deception, social infighting and backbiting. An example is a large leisure project promoted by the Generalitat Valenciana, a huge theme park with an especially significant name given the context, 'Terra Mítica' ('Mythical Land' in English). This project is facing bankruptcy. At the moment all payments have been suspended and serious doubts exist as to the possibility of its continued existence. A myth such as the 'Terra Mítica' project has managed to encourage the people, to motivate business people, to excite many others, and has succeeded in attracting investment only for it to be discovered in the end, that everything was more the expression of a desire than an investment with guarantees of a better economic future. Some people, as some people always do, have benefited from the project as it stands, but in order for it to continue we will all have to pay a heavy price. An economic activity, essentially private, indirectly promoted and guaranteed with public funds, but without direct public control.

The myth can mobilise, justify, excite, create synergies, unite labour and business forces in the pursuit of commonly agreed objectives. The myth can affect a positive transformation of a city, of important territorial spaces and of important urban spaces. But the myth also hides deception, demagogic populism, the absence of rigor, effort generated and frustrated, mistrust,...

If logic, rationality, and rigor are necessary for, but not synonymous with, efficiency and quality in the positive transformation of territory, the myth is necessary because the people can make sense of the why and wherefore of their efforts. However it is not synonymous with success, it is not synonymous with rigorous planning, it is not synonymous with honest intentions, it is not synonymous with genuinely viable proposals.

6. The birth of new forms of intervention in the city and in the territory

I share with Pesci the idea that conflict is the engine of initiative and, in the end, also a source of myths. Conflict mobilises people and makes them take part in one or more initiatives that arise. Complete security, complete satisfaction of all necessities, generates, in general, comfort, apathy, the absence of interest, non-mobilisation, a lack of participation, inactivity,...

The logic of planning sometimes becomes a routine administrative action. When it stops being a surprise, when it stops being a new instrument, when it stops being innovative, the plan becomes almost like a task for a civil servant, who draws up the plan as if he were filling out the structured and systematised parts of a highly regulated test.

And this is when the plan ceases to be an obligation, assumed and considered as a strange instrument, something that is not one's own. It is then when other more participative forms of intervention are sought, which better involve both the people, and the administrative personnel.

Out of this arise systems of quality control among which we can cite as examples ISO 900 and ISO 14001 the International Organization for Standardization or EMAS (Eco-Management & Audit Scheme) among the systems for environmental quality. Our teaching and research unit F. Eiximenis has participated in the European project QUATER within INTERREG IIIB, which has as its common objective the development of standards of this type: a certified quality standard of territorial risk management for local administration, drawn up on the basis of the standard OHSAS 18001 (Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series of the British Standards Institution).

These types of standards tend to be applied in the private sector. Compliance with the standard on the part of the company, externally verified by an expressly authorised firm of auditors, using a standardised process, allows the company to obtain quality certification that complies with a specific quality standard. These standards enforce a process of continual improvement, as well as resulting in an increase in knowledge and training for the company's staff with regard to their responsibilities in complying with the quality standard. Audits are performed periodically in order to renew the certificate.

In Europe, these standards have had notable success in the private sector. The availability of a seal of quality, obtained through a process of certification is a way of distinguishing a brand and this can influence the preferences of the consumer.

Project QUATER is involved with the transferring of these standards to the public sector. Should this kind of quality certification be extended to local administration, it could become a system whereby it is possible to identify which local authorities deviate from a particular quality standard, and to identify those which do not. This distinction could be used as a criterion in the process of resource allocation by the regional or national administration.

This is not the only method of intervention in cities or territories that has appeared in recent years. The Local 21 Agendas are also a system of public participation in the definition of local policies and actions, leading to sustainability. What they propose, in many cases affect urban policies, and the organising of territory in terms of heritage conservation.

7. The search for balance between the plan and the myth

Now, more than searching for other methods of intervention, and without disregarding anything of value, I would like to look for the balance between the planned action as the result of a rigorous analysis, and logic as the only possible guarantee of the viability

of an action, and the myth as an absolutely necessary reality to motivate affected communities, people, or groups of citizens.

An urban plan or an urban intervention that is perfectly defined and justified, rationalised to the extreme, can be seen by the public as something alien, made by specialists with a level of knowledge very much above the normal level of the people.

On the other hand, an urban plan or intervention that is developed to aid the success of an important event becomes something necessary and awakens expectations because the success of the event will depend on the good design of the plan, its timely approval and the punctual execution of the work, which intuitively and instinctively, everyone has turned into myth.

The myth of the event, gives the plan its relevance. The myth of the event profiles and sets out the role of the plan. The logic of the plan acquires its value in service of the myth.

This conclusion brings me to the introduction of myths of reference in the composition of urban plans. In the current composition of an urban plan by the local authority in Olivia on the coast of Valencia, the conclusion of the logic, the analysis and the organisational proposal were redefined in the form of urban projects that aspired to become myths for the locally affected population. The rationally defined urban plan is transformed after analysis into several projects that form a meaningful whole, easily understood by the people and also easy to adopt: the Coastal Tram, the Valleys of the Fountains, the Historic City, Industrial Oliva,....

Every one of these brings together a number of different operations in the city with a meaningful element that gives sense to the whole. For example the Coastal Tram brings together a number of actions on the coastline in a nexus that leaves open the possibility of a future tram line. The whole is designed and interpreted globally.

Equally, the Valley of the Fountains is a project connecting the old town with the coast, a distance of about a kilometre. The nexus is the river, 'the valley', which begins next to the old city and runs for a distance of a kilometre before arriving at the sea. This valley is used to define a linear park that utilises the water of the valley itself in its design, and serves as a central point for the urbanisation that surrounds it between the old city and the sea.

The logic of the plan is explained as a myth. This logic establishes the rationality behind the operation while the myth explains the operation.

Conclusions

Unlike other countries of Europe, land planning experiences in Spain have a long tradition. However, it must be said that since the moment Ildefonso Cerdá developed his Theory on Land Urbanization ("Teoría General de la Urbanización"), by the middle of 19th century, the way in which we understand land development, both in a

methodological and a technical way, has changed following different forms of logic, all of a rational character.

First, with a rationality that searches for the form of an ideal city of universal character.

Afterwards, with a rational systemic process of a cyclic character in order to match up land planning in a continuous and dynamic way to the always changing necessities both of the city and its citizens.

Due to the same rationality of its forms and processes and to its own technical character the land planning process has driven a certain distance between society itself, to which paradoxically land planning proposals are directed, and the plan considered as a product. Therefore, society feels the plan to be an alien and technical document and does not consider it as something it owns.

In fact, social movements, nowadays widespread in Spain, where land-planning practice is also frequent and much extended, very often show up this real divorce.

In other words, engineers, technicians, specialists who draw up or contribute to elaborate plans, studies or technical proposals develop a role that, without nullifying their own contributions or discussing their necessity, is manifestly too distant from society and the population's feelings and perceptions.

In a parallel way, myth serves to give a reason or to justify social initiatives of any kind. Myth serves as a way to put in movement, justify, illuminate, and generate synergies, and to unify efforts, both of social, trade unions, and company collectives, all of them channelled towards achieving some commonly accepted objectives.

Myth serves for the positive transformation of land and cities, of especially significant portions of land and cities, of land and urban heritage. However, this is not always true because sometimes myth fixes aspirations impossible to reach, thus generating frustration if they are not achieved.

These are the reasons that justify the need to search for new types of plans resulting from a balance between rationally planned actions and the use of myth. Rational actions due to analytical rigour and logic will be the only possible warranty of the viability of intervention. Otherwise, myth will be the reality necessary to give significance to planned projects, thus encouraging behaviour and initiatives of affected communities, population or citizens.

As an example, in drawing up the development plan for the municipality of Oliva on the Valencian coast, conclusions on the logic of the analysis and the proposals for land planning are re-defined by means of projects that have a significant and comprehensive character for the population; projects that tend to transform themselves into myths for the local population affected.

Thus, the logic of the plan is explained as a myth. Logic fixes the rationality of intervention and myth explains intervention. Technicians analyse and fix prospective

coherence, and poets rewrite the proposals in the form of projects that have a significant interest for the population involved.

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