



STRATEGIC PLANNING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SPANISH CITIES

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Abstract:

The paper investigates how decision-making processes relating to strategic urban projects are framed in order to achieve innovative urban sustainable development and contextualize the problems which appear in the ten cities chosen as models (those with the highest populations). A sustainable city is one that has undertaken a coherent path towards not only strictly environmental topics but also themes like economic growth models and citizens' rights, addressing fundamental issues that are interconnected. These are mainly land use, natural resources and mobility, social cohesion and inclusion projects, expanding information and communication technologies. The aim of this work is to discuss these clearly related themes from a standpoint of sustainable development and strategic planning. In recent years there has been a growing interest in sustainable development as a guiding principle to allow the integration of economic development and the environment within policy and strategy.

Keywords: *sustainable development, cities, strategic planning.*

1. INTRODUCTION

One question that inevitably arises, after examining the environmental situation of cities and conurbations, is simple and direct: are they sustainable? It is not necessary to carry out a detailed analysis to verify that they are far from it. Could they become sustainable? In order to answer this question it is necessary to combine, on the one hand, instruments and resources available for responding and, on the other hand, the willingness to go forward. "In these terms a sustainable city is one that actively contributes to the (economic) well-being of a community" (Bertinelli, Srobl, 2007). This is certainly the case of ambitious projects that aim at integrating economic, social and ecological qualities (Raco, 2005).

This paper contributes to theoretical debates on the utility of strategic planning to sustainably develop cities. Over the last few years, development policies have increased their protagonism in all administrative areas from regional to provincial, county community or strictly on a local scale. So-called Strategic Planning attempts to clarify the question of development, identifying the territories, contents and autonomous actors with which it is possible to create a successful scenario for sustainable development (Salet, 2008; Conroy & Berke, 2004).

Richard Rogers, the famous British architect, states that a sustainable city is, above all, a just city (where justice, food, shelter, education, health and opportunities are adequately distributed and where all residents feel they participate in its governance); a beautiful city (where art, architecture and landscapes promote imagination and stir the spirit); a creative city (where wide vistas and experimentation mobilise all human resource potential and allow faster reaction in the face of change); an ecological city (that minimises its ecological impact, where the relationship between built space and landscape is one of balance and where infrastructures are able to use resources in a safe and efficient manner); a city that favours contact (where public spaces induce community living and the mobility of their residents and where information is interchanged both personally and through different technologies); a compact and polycentric city (that protects its surroundings, centres and integrates communities into neighbourhoods and optimises their proximity); a diverse city (in which the level of diversity and intensity of activities encourages, inspires and promotes a human, lively and dynamic community) (Rogers, 2000).

When discussing sustainable development, it is typical to mention the ability to satisfy four separate parameters at the same time. In short, it is about simultaneously fulfilling goals of a better quality environment, better economic conditions and a society that is more just, participates more and which also considers the rights of future generations. Applying this concept to cities implies the need to introduce the concept of metabolism to urban settlements (Rueda, 2007). A more sustainable city is one that is able to reduce the number of external resources that are needed (land, energy, water and materials), curb the production of waste (air and water contamination and/or solid waste) and, at the same time, improve living conditions (health, revenue, housing, leisure, accessibility, public spaces and sense of belonging) (Cowell and Owens, 2006). To accomplish that, it is first necessary to acknowledge the problem. There is a need for information, facts upon which to build an understanding and expand social perception of the inadequate and unsustainable way life takes place in cities. There is also a need for plans of action, initiatives that deal with amending the situation right from the beginning; with that in mind, a good way to get started is via Local Agenda 21 (used world wide), which encompasses and provides some strategic sense for the set of actions required in so many different fields (Brownill and Carpenter, 2009).

In short, the future of the current urban management model is very limited. To find a sustainable model that is efficient for its “employees” – the citizens – it is essential to guarantee the future of cities in the 21st century, which, thanks to new technologies, will undergo a major revolution within the next few decades (Jordan, 2008).

This paper is set out as follows: section 1 is the introduction. Section 2, sustainability and new answers to environmental challenges. Section 3, strategic thinking, flexible alternatives and globalization. Section 4, analysis and challenges for urban sustainability. The last section contains the conclusions.

2. SUSTAINABILITY AND NEW ANSWERS TO ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

In the mid-fifties, the first voices warned of the dangers of forms of economic growth which, using high-handed and arrogant logic, underestimated all the negative effects of development and material progress understood to be unlimited. Despite the ambiguity of the term it was agreed that we refer to sustainable development under the following conditions:

- Development is understood to be an objective with which basic human needs are satisfied, achieving reasonable standards of welfare for everybody (the first parameter of development).
- This development is linked to obtaining more reasonable levels of welfare within a determined society and in all societies as a whole (the second parameter of development).

The Rio Declaration, together with Agenda 21¹, can be taken as the starting point for defining those characteristics of the sustainable development process which distinguishes it from other forms of development (OSE, 2012). This interpretation of sustainable development emphasises two key principles:

- Integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives; and
- Wide participation of stakeholders in the development process.

The first of these principles (integration) means that sustainable development entails balancing the economic, social, and environmental objectives of society in decision-making. The development of strategic plans is essential to this principle.

The second principle (participation and consensus) is equally strongly emphasised in Agenda 21, which states (chapter 23) that "one of the fundamental pre-requisites of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making" (Cherp et al., 2004).

The European Commission is the highest administrative level supporting and collaborating with local governments to promote these transformations notably through an urban environment programme in which the following goals are put forth: improving ambient air quality, reducing noise pollution and reducing land pollution in European cities (Hamedinger et al., 2008; Olewiler, 2004). An initiative launched during the Third European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns in 2000 (Hannover, Germany) established the European Common Indicators system towards urban sustainability. It encompasses ten indicators (five mandatory and five complementary) that aim to follow evolution and compare progress in European cities (table 1).

Table 1. Common European indicators towards urban sustainability

Main Indicators	Complementary Indicators
Citizen satisfaction with the local community (perception)	Childrens' journeys to and from school (means of transportation to and from school)
Local contribution to global climatic change (CO ₂ emissions)	Sustainable management of the local authority and local business (percentage of companies or institutions with environmental management systems in place)
Local mobility and passenger transportation (distances and means of transportation)	Noise pollution (percentage of population exposed to harmful noise pollution levels)
Availability of local public open areas and services (proximity and accessibility)	Sustainable land use (regeneration and land protection)
Quality of local ambient air (number of days when limits are exceeded)	Products promoting sustainability (percentage of eco-labelled, organic or fair-trade products)

A few Spanish cities (Saragossa, Barcelona (table 3)) are part of this original nucleus, providing information and specific indicators for a comparative analysis. As can be observed,

this reduced group of indicators illustrates the complexity of the topics that affect sustainability at local level.

Therefore, the degree of citizens' satisfaction with the local community in which they live is very high in Spanish cities when compared to other countries (Vitoria ranks the highest in Spain, with 75% of its citizens being very satisfied²). However, these high marks are shadowed by the results obtained for other indicators, namely those concerning housing, for which the lowest degree of satisfaction is observed. (table 3).

Local Agenda 21, yielding positive consequences, has promoted new sustainability policies at local level. At an international level, cities were the entities that most enthusiastically responded to the Rio Earth Summit's call for new strategic and participative processes to convert traditional development models (Subirats et al, 2001). Likewise, Spanish cities have entered the Local Agenda 21 movement.

Cities such as Saragossa and Barcelona were pioneers, incorporating new methodologies (SWOT matrix) and priorities redirecting public action at local level. Other large cities (table 3) also emphasize their commitment to this. The Metropolitan Area of Barcelona with its almost 200 municipalities has become a model for promoting local networks that are able to meet new challenges.

In Spain, and despite its limitations, Local Agenda 21 can already boast three positive effects that will nonetheless require a final assessment of these tangible results:

- It imbues the development issue with a more trans-sectorial logic and a more holistic approach. Based on the premise of local and global responsibility, there is a correlation of many aspects that go beyond classical urban policies. In addition, natural resource management issues are integrated with issues of urban planning, mobility management, economic development and, to some extent, social cohesion (White and Engelen, 2000). The combination of criteria and principles of sustainability is allowing for a shift in the way local policies are managed: from street cleaning to waste management, from lighting to energy efficiency, and so forth.
- Local Agenda 21 actions assume new strategic planning instruments that combine environmental dimensions and dominant economic dimensions. Less frequently, social dimensions are added. Changes that imply a transition towards models that are more sustainable must undoubtedly be gradual in time, introducing a medium to long-term horizon typical of strategic planning. This desirable vision of the future for cities stems from the strength derived from Local Agenda 21 more than from other instruments.
- In several Spanish cities (table 3), Local Agenda 21 is proposing the opportunity for renewal, innovation and enhancement of participative processes. Bringing the community into these strategic processes of gradual change is a *sine qua non* condition for their success. Along those lines, Local Agenda 21 offers scenarios and processes likely to strengthen the community. A few cities (table 3) have focused on governance, where different actors are part of the process and actively take up their share of the responsibility regarding common goals and objectives. Hence, these are participative processes directed at establishing a different relationship between local authorities and different stakeholders.

In short, topics such as water or energy consumption and waste production are about adjusting the value to the cost. Using public transportation, saving water, using electric or low-pollution vehicles and energy efficiency and saving are items that should be contemplated with favourable taxation. At local level and in the absence of broader policies, these strategic indicators can undertake an innovative role. Introducing an environmental variable in local taxes such as council tax, business tax or rubbish collection - without

increasing the fiscal load per capita– could become an important contribution to speeding up changes in favour of urban sustainability.

Finally, cities play a fundamental role in the shifts of habits and values of citizenship with respect to the new model of sustainable development. Environmental awareness, education and information campaigns can generate effective scenarios for social change within the local framework, because they use feedback from public participation processes and are thus more permeable to influence from organisations (Instituto de Gobierno y Políticas Públicas (UAB) - Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 2002).

3. STRATEGIC THINKING, FLEXIBLE ALTERNATIVES AND GLOBALIZATION

Strategic thinking as applied to urban processes is a fairly new concept dating back to the 1980s, with its roots in military planning and adopted first by the business world. Global consideration of the processes that affect citizens is advisable when it is included in any initiative whose aim is to plan for the future or to define planning. Cities experiencing strong competition with other cities or even within their own neighbourhoods might use this documental framework to understand, project and intervene. Despite the relatively limited importance of the environment as a policy objective within formal policy documentation, a large proportion of local authorities have initiatives in place, or planned, which attempt to combine economic development and environmental aims (Gibbs et al.1998).

In general terms, it can be stated that strategic plans over the last twenty years have acted reasonably well as instruments of strategic reflection, as processes of public-private consensus and inter-administrative coordination, and as frameworks for formulating strategies in the local and territorial sphere. Without overriding the other planning systems in the territory, the strategic plans have meant creating a state of opinion, motivating institutions and introducing reflections oriented in the long term towards having more developed cities, bearing sustainability in mind (Golden, 2006). Allmendinger and Haughton (2007) note that this emphasis on ‘joining up’ has a political purpose, for example, to place demands for environmental sustainability within the context of the continued need for economic growth, thus the need to formulate strategic plans (Fernández, 2004).

The ideas and practice of strategic planning have evolved over time. It has become generally recognised that the planning process rarely follows the ‘rational’ model of a sequential cycle of formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Instead, planning occurs as a continuous and iterative process, in which important decisions are frequently taken during the implementation stage, and monitoring and evaluation occur in advance of final outputs and outcomes. Thus, although current understanding of strategic planning retains the idea of planning as being about setting goals and identifying the means of achieving them, it has moved away from a fixed plan and solutions, to an adaptive process, involving the management of change as it affects conditions, constraints, and resources. Second, it involves a shift away from the view that the state alone is responsible for development, to one in which various stakeholders are involved in the planning processes of dialogue and accountability. Third, strategic planning involves a comprehensive and holistic approach which seeks to integrate the full range of available resources, and to build on existing policies and initiatives. The importance of the implementation phase in the planning cycle has also been increasingly emphasised. Thus, the current understanding of effective strategic planning stresses its strong linkages with good strategic management (Cherp et al., 2004).

In Spain the strategic planning culture is already valued as an effective mechanism for defining and articulating the needs and interests of society and its economic, social and institutional agents as regards new scenarios in the future (table 3). Summarising, everything seems to indicate that strategic planning has gained maturity, balance and acceptance and has evolved sufficiently to provide an appropriate response to the problems of governability faced by our cities. It has been accepted as a new instrument for sustainable urban development, with a clear current potential for making positive contributions to our cities. Strategic planning has been accepted in many cities as a process which adds value to traditional planning. In fact, not only is the validity of strategic planning in the urban area being debated, but attempts are being made to extend it to town and country planning. Its capacity for promoting governability and reinforcing social assets in urban areas is also openly recognised (Borja, 2003).

The evaluation of urban sustainability has changed depending on the different urban visions. Today it has exceeded the horizon of basic needs satisfied and the construction of indicators is associated with the integrity of concepts such as habitat, sustainability, complexity and integration of social, economic and ambient dimensions. Strategic planning is a technique that has been applied to multiple facets of human activity; just remember Sun Tzu (1963), Arthur Thompson (2004) or Henry Mintzberg (1990); however, the application of strategic planning to urban reality is relatively recent and its beginnings are eminently practical: a mixture of thought, techniques and art or good work.

SWOT Analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project or in a business venture. This methodology is used in the cities selected (table 3). It involves specifying the objective of the business venture or project and identifying the internal and external factors that are favourable and unfavourable to achieving that objective. The technique is credited to Albert Humphrey, who led a research project at Stanford University in the 1960s and 1970s): it is recognized as the first technique and a valuable instrument of strategic analysis. Analysis consists of four steps: External analysis, internal analysis, SWOT matrix preparation and determination of the strategy to be used. The SWOT matrix correlates internal aspects (Strengths and Weaknesses) with external ones (Opportunities and Threats) (Aaker,1992) (Table 2).

Table 2. The SWOT matrix

Weaknesses	Threats
They constitute the main negative factors of the city which, if not overcome, will prevent the mission from being accomplished.	They are environmental factors that cannot be affected, prevented or provoked, but which, if this happens, can affect the functioning of the system and make mission accomplishment difficult or prevent it.
Strengths	Opportunities
They are defined as the main factors of the city which constitute the most powerful elements and provide support for the mission to be accomplished.	They are the elements that can appear in the environment without any possibility of affecting their appearance or not, but it is possible to make use of them if action is taken in this direction, making mission accomplishment possible or favouring it.

The typical SWOT analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats that define strategic action brings back a degree of effectiveness that had been lost due to the rigidity of conventional urban discourse. Urbanism's loss of creative ability and innovation power has been the consequence of a progressive juridification of planning. One of the keys

to successful strategic planning resides in the absence of a discourse focused on legitimising economic interests, an aspect that is inherent to customary urban practice. Secondly, strategic planning lends itself to active participation, allowing the interchange of many diverse points of view and thus facilitating the search for rational and consensual solutions. Thirdly, the range of its possible contents renders it an adequate medium for addressing studies, proposing projects and developing programmes whose initiatives proceed from restricted sectors with limited capability to carry them out. In this case, it would be possible to find project development related to Agenda 21, processes of commercial regeneration, assistance programmes, etc (table 3). Not only can these actions be developed, they should be boosted and supported with other actions along strategic paths as well, so that they can be mutual primers, prompting synergies that are more powerful and employing equal resources (Albrechts , 2004).

Table 3. Ten largest Municipalities in Spain

Territory Country Municipality	Population (N° of inhabitants)	Population density (inhab/km²)	Strategic Plan	Local Agenda 21
Madrid	3,265,038	5 374	2005-15	Yes
Barcelona	1,615,448	15 991	1987,2006-10 Vision 2020	Yes
Valencia	798,033	6 046	1995,2007-15 2010-2020	Yes
Seville	703,021	4 994	2001-2010 Seville 2020	Yes
Saragossa	674,317	692	1998,2006, Saragossa 2020	Yes
Malaga	568,030	1 438	1992,2006, 2010	Yes
Murcia	442,203	495	2008-10, 2007-13 2014-2020	Yes
Palma de Mallorca	405,318	1 923	2007,2012-15	Yes
Las Palmas de Gran Canaria	383,343	3 797	1989,2004-07 Proa 2020	Yes
Bilbao	352,700	8 729	2004-07,2010	Yes

Sources: Instituto Nacional de Estadística. INE, 2012, in www.ine. Ministerio de Administraciones Públicas, in www.map.es. Ayuntamientos (City Councils)

The multidimensional character of the strategic plan and its implications are the consequences of the variety of pursued interests and the wide social response that sustains it. This path points to a return to Urban Regeneration philosophy.

Thus, strategic planning is a commitment made by the most representative institutions of urban society that establishes a vision of a city and a series/group of objectives and actions agreed upon by consensus. Economic, social and political changes in recent years have determined the right framework for all institutions and people that make up a city to promote its development in an organised way. For this reason approximately 100 social, professional, academic and business institutions, as well as those at different government levels, have been

preparing Strategic Plans for cities and have put them into practice. The challenge consists of honouring the proposed commitment to build a better, more competitive, consolidated and open city, the main aim being better distribution of wealth and progressive and extensive improvement of all sectors of society, in other words, to improve the quality of life for everyone in a healthier environment (Garcia, 2004). Making good use of the city's resources in education, health, tourism, business and promoting their consolidation, extension and publication in an environment that will benefit from them is a central part of the strategic proposal in the cities selected (table 3).

The main motivation of the Strategic Plans in the ten cities (table 3) is to increase the general economic level and quality of life of all city inhabitants. A favourable social environment is necessary to improve the economy and generate wealth and welfare that will lead to a beautiful habitable city. The success of these Strategic Plans lies in the efficacy with which the link between the general direction taken by the city and its quality can be strengthened. It would be absurd to make any economic progress if this deteriorated its urban and environmental quality. Economic strength and development pressures can produce various types or models of urban development; in the face of this, it is necessary, with the participation of society as a whole, to build a city based on a development model with the highest social and cultural objectives.

According to Wright (2007) three basic points of the strategy are used in Spanish cities:

- 1) the formation of the strategy
- 2) putting it into practise
- 3) strategic control (changing the strategy or its implementation to guarantee the desired results.)

Therefore, the strategic concept does not ignore the conflict but understands reality as being the result of interaction between several partial visions of all those involved in the planning process. Planners thus have the power to put previously chosen actions into effect.

4. ANALYSIS AND CHALLENGES FOR URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

Embarking on the road to urban sustainability in any city cannot merely be a combination of good intentions and generic declarations, sprinkled with some more or less exemplary measures. If we creatively follow the pathway already set out in some places with initiatives such as Local Agenda 21, we can expect a certain "contamination" effect to occur in each and every urban policy. So one cannot defend a sustainable model of urban mobility and, at the same time, carry out actions on many other contrary or at least contradictory fronts without risking failure (Bruff, Wood, 2000).

Our impression is that the urbanisation of our societies is continuing its unstoppable progress without, in general, considering these aspects, in spite of talking about urban sustainability or Local Agenda 21 more or less rhetorically. Cities nowadays consume three quarters of world energy and produce at least 75% of total pollution. Their numbers continue to grow, as do their inhabitants. In 2012 there were 41 cities with over five million inhabitants, of which 10 were in developed countries. Three hundred large urban conglomerations (over 100,000 inhabitants) have been calculated to exist in Europe and 35 have populations of over one million. Among them are Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Seville; and with almost one million we have Bilbao and Malaga (Lázaro and González, 2002).

The European Union is paying increasingly more attention to this. A set of local sensitivity indicators was approved at a recent summit held in Hannover. They should serve as a guide and comparative framework for European cities. Some progress has been made in various

Spanish cities (table 3) in this area and some have signed the Aalborg Charter (González, 2002, 2005, 2006).

As we have seen, cities concentrate a growing proportion of the population, which is around 80% in Europe. This is only indicative because the condition of being a city does not respond to a single model or legal definition. In fact, statistical data defined by the number of inhabitants (over 5,000; over 20,000; ...), by minimum density, by functional structure, etc. coexist. In Spain 85% of the population is considered urban because it lives in towns of over 5,000 inhabitants, but this would be 50.7% if we took populations of over 50,000 as the reference. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that the increasing urbanisation of Spanish society indicates that this is one of the areas where the transition towards sustainability is gambling on its future. Nevertheless, western cities also symbolize the most unsustainable form of development because they are the neuralgic centres of unlimited growth that prevailed as a model in the 19th and 20th centuries. The cities signing the Aalborg Charter - currently over 1,200 - recognize “Our present urban life style, in particular our patterns of division of labour and functions, land-use, transport, industrial production, agriculture, consumption, and leisure activities, and hence our standard of living, make us particularly responsible for many environmental problems faced by humankind” (Moreno, 2005).

The most decisive challenges of this new notion involve all urban dimensions, but basically focus on reducing the environmental impact of cities, of the effects produced by concentrating many people and resources in a small space. This produces a huge quantity of waste and negative effects on the environment at the same time. Experts have analysed the city along these lines for some time as an ecosystem that generates a metabolism which flows both inwards and outwards. From this viewpoint, reduction of the environmental impact of cities focuses on two interconnected aspects: on the one hand, decreased consumption - of energy, natural resources, land, etc - and, on the other, minimizing the externalities of urban metabolism (pollution, emissions, waste) (Nello, 2001).

Similarly a productive area much larger than the city's surface area is required for it to function, so the environmental impact generated by an urban system goes beyond its limits. In order to maintain their present standard of living it is calculated that the inhabitants of Spanish cities require an average of three to four hectares of productive land outside the city limits per year. This is known as the “ecological footprint”³. Some North American or North European cities require double that figure, over seven hectares per inhabitant per year. This global impact of local urban systems explains why cities are open metabolic systems, that is, they are not isolated but rather need to maintain relations with their environment, exchanging energy and materials to survive and function. The difference between the urban metabolism and the natural ecosystem lies in this huge consumption of energy or materials, whose main purpose is not the survival of the inhabitants, but rather to feed the city so that it can function as an artificial system (building, transport, lighting, etc.).

Some dimensions are particularly relevant from this perspective, and the most relevant to this purpose are land-use (linked to the city model), energy consumption (with the mobility model being of particular importance) and urban waste treatment. All these aspects have a common denominator: increased consumption, which is generally not proportional to the evolution of the population and is the basis of most socio-environmental problems in our cities. The quantity of cars, urbanised surface area, waste production, energy consumption increases ...and, therefore, if nobody remedies this, the cities will see their own unsustainability grow. We will therefore try to concentrate on these dimensions, as the cities' capacity for evolving towards a more sustainable model of management and coexistence is on the line⁴.

The ten cities were chosen because they have the highest populations and have put Agenda 21 into action to adopt integrated policies that include sustainability. In order to make these policies part of town planning, they have developed strategic plans that contribute to a qualitative change in local administration and generate greater awareness of environmental problems, and have made participation in decision-making easier at a local level. The ten largest Spanish cities represent over 20% of the total population (Table 3).

The concept of strategic planning was exclusively linked to businesses until 25 years ago when San Francisco drew up its first strategic plan. This application to the urban phenomenon was a novelty because it viewed the city as a system with complex internal and external relations.

In Spain, Barcelona is the pioneer in this aspect, since its Economic and Social Strategic Plan was applied in 1987. A first generation of strategic plans was produced on the basis of this initiative and the most significant were those of Metropolitan Bilbao (1989), Malaga (1992), Valencia (1995) or Saragossa (1998) (table 3).

The characteristics repeated in all these processes are the involvement of the main economic and social agents of the city, who work together, and the desire to improve the citizens' quality of life.

The main concerns of the municipal managers of those years focused on guaranteeing employment, attracting investors from outside and winning public funds. Currently the main objective of local government is to "sell the city" so they cite the need to make local businesses competitive, for investment in technological innovation, penetration of external markets and training the workforce. Terms such as competitive positioning, marketing actions, brand image, etc, are common when we speak of local or regional organisations or cities today (Van Bueren and Ten Heuvelhof , 2005).

In this way, just as the needs of cities have changed, so must Urban Strategic Planning be renewed, since it is a continuous, circular process, dependent on feedback and constant revision. At present many institutions, experts and persons linked to strategic planning have updated strategic thinking to adapt to these changes, imbued with globalisation and the gamble on sustainability (Albrechts, 2004).

4.1. Strategic Plans of Spain's Ten Largest Cities⁵

Madrid's strategic plans comprise several different sub-topics. Nevertheless, the main keyword is "infrastructure". Starting with commerce, one main objective is to convert traditional markets into more open space, accessible to everybody. The markets' infrastructure has to be changed and improved to fit in with a desired improved image. Furthermore, fostering and development are the necessary preconditions to make Madrid's virtual markets more attractive. Summing up, Madrid's main goal is to achieve a greater level of infrastructure in the fields of tourism, public transport, public agencies, as well as industry and other types of business.

Barcelona's strategic plan can be summarised by the key word "change". Here, the strategic plan focuses on high standards of services and supplies as well as the promotion of institutional coordination to develop metropolitan projects and therefore guarantee an efficient management of territory. This aspect also includes the provision of entrepreneurial infrastructure. Summing up, Barcelona focuses on its role as an innovator in the commercial field (key word "change"). Innovation as well as cooperation with other cities is listed high up in the agenda. Concerning the standard of life, the challenges of immigration and integration are tackled by fostering public services and support.

Valencia's strategic plan stands under the sign of renovation. First of all, the lack of provision of IT-infrastructure is admitted and therefore this has to be brought up to common

standards. The latter measure is also seen as an impulse towards reinforcing the local identity. Summing up, Valencia focuses on the development of (IT-) infrastructure and revitalisation of the city to become more attractive for businesses, citizens and tourism.

Seville's strategic plan is a continuation of the current development. The city wants to establish itself as a node for human development and cultural interchange. Summing up, Seville focuses on being an intermediary between the east and the west using New Technologies to support this trend and apply measures for sustainability. Tolerance and solidarity play a major role in the strategic plan, which is also used to foster and improve the image of the city for business and tourist purposes.

Saragossa's strategic plan has a clear focus on social aspects. Integration between different age groups and cultures is granted high priority. Furthermore, the production of renewable energy is stated as an outstanding goal. Along with this strategy, the reduction of water use and the improvement of the quality of water are seen as other crucial issues. Saragossa's strategic plan focuses on the improvement of social issues as well as industry in the field of high technology.

Malaga's strategic plan can be summarised by the terms "sustainability" and "transparency" and focuses on the development of visible capital, such as the maintenance of the city and environmental protection, so as to become more attractive for the important economical branch of tourism.

Murcia tries to catch up with other European cities in terms of employment and the creation of innovative companies and tries to establish its own identity as a link between Africa and Europe. One basic goal is to achieve diversification in the different economic sectors. Furthermore, a harmonized interaction between companies, the city and the environment is desired.

Palma's (Mallorca) main goals are to increase the attractiveness of the city (especially for tourists) and the meeting of basic infrastructure and housing as well as sufficient access points within the city. Las Palmas (Canarias) is focused on innovation to enable it to catch up with EU standards and provide sustainability, not just in tourism but more so in the education and employment sector.

Bilbao bases its strategic plan on the following issues: the improvement of the educational sector along with the provision of infrastructure should make Bilbao a city of interest for innovative companies. Taking interest in improving the quality of life by considering environmental aspects as well as social and cultural issues, the city of Bilbao should become a place for people with ambitions, innovative ideas and dynamics.

Each of the ten cities observed provides a strategic plan. Although the sizes of those places vary from over three million people in Madrid to about 350 thousand inhabitants in Bilbao, certain similarities are observed. To begin with, each city is covering several aspects, such as tourism, infrastructure, administration, business and education. Within this range, it is interesting to see how certain issues are dealt with. Two of the most striking strategic plans, because of their opposing methods of presentation, are those of Saragossa and Seville. While the first plan is written in quite a self-critical way, admitting several downfalls that have not been dealt with yet (e.g. social issues, such as housing), the latter is presented in a more self-confident way, which also transmits the optimistic view of the writers as well as giving the impression that something is being done.

Focusing on tourism, most of the cities observed follow the objective of increasing their attractiveness by implementing new measures such as transparent information (e.g. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), improvement in infrastructure (e.g. Madrid) or cooperation with the hinterland and other cities (e.g. Seville). While Malaga, for example, counts on language tourism in combination with its attractive location by the sea, cities like Saragossa, Seville or

Las Palmas focus on measures to improve their infrastructure and promote trade fairs and the respective branch of tourism.

Dealing with social aspects, cities with a high number of immigrants, such as Barcelona, Seville and others, set the objective towards better integration of migrant groups as well as the improvement (by means of provision for housing, infrastructure, etc.) of social conditions. Saragossa, on the other hand, situated in the northern central part of the country, deals more with integration according to different age and social groups.

Commercially seen, each city wants to establish its own branch, on which a certain image should be constructed. Every strategic plan contains references to different aspects of cooperation among businesses and institutions as well as Universities. Another trend of focusing on new technologies is seen as well. Especially bigger cities such as Madrid, Valencia, or Seville focus on the establishment and expansion of IT-networks.

Another interesting aspect is observed when going into detail concerning the level of development. While bigger cities have supposedly started earlier to develop their infrastructure, (this feature can be explained by the fact that cities like Madrid have to invest more to improve the infrastructure because of an increased demand), smaller areas such as Murcia, or Las Palmas de Gran Canaria focus on reaching certain EU standards in relation to infrastructure and development. This indicates that the awareness of the importance of development in those supposedly smaller towns has appeared later than in bigger cities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The language of sustainability requires the determination of those common basic minimum thresholds on the basis of which we must design the priority strategies that will allow us to draw up global political guidelines, to be specified in the short, medium and long term. The prior definition of environmental indicators is a fundamental part of this new language. The indicators are quantitative and qualitative parameters that allow the state of the environmental question to be evaluated and, above all, permit us to analyze its evolution by comparing the same indicators over a period of time.

According to the proposed scenario, cities offer varied and diverse challenges and opportunities depending on their size and population, geographical, geopolitical and environmental situation and their production profile. These will also depend on the culture of their inhabitants, the policy on quality of life, the administrative capacity of their leaders and the degree of organisation of the civil society. For all these reasons it is difficult to make general statements, since sustainable development and planning depend on many private and public agents. So each of the weak points must be faced as a priority in each city.

The transfer of strategic planning to the area of urban development can be explained by a series of significant phenomena that have forced the ruling *status quo* in urban planning to be modified. Firstly, the dynamism of the environment, reflected in economic change, geopolitical turbulence, incessant technological innovation, modifications in socio-cultural attitudes and complete changes of direction in social structures, have exercised intense pressure on the traditional instruments of urban planning, demanding appropriate responses to the new situation.

Secondly, the various social and economic agents, who have traditionally acted in the city, have started to insist on compliance with a series of requirements of competitiveness and habitability as a condition for their remaining in a specific urban area, which has made public managers consider their demands and count on them in the decision-making process.

Thirdly, the integration of nation-states into continental blocks and the opening of markets at a global level have given rise to open rivalry between cities to capture investment,

jobs, visitors and public funds. This competition has demanded from the planners and managers a huge capacity for anticipation and, in its absence, a reaction to the strategies of their most direct competitors.

Finally, the complexity and interlinking of the problems lashing modern cities has pushed them towards using multidisciplinary and intersectorial approaches that overcome the limitations of traditional sectorial planning.

In Spanish cities, most administrative initiatives are related to urban development. The experience of these ten cities provides compelling evidence of the emerging complexity in governance of planning. The contradictions are deepened through the promotion of particular governance arrangements as being essential to the creation of better places. In Spain this is illustrated by the ideology that networked governance is integral to achieving sustainable communities.

The proposed assessment methodology may be incorporated into a country's own strategic planning process, to provide for the review of the effectiveness of the entire planning process as a strategy for sustainable development. It also provides support for any other systems that may be in place in the country to monitor the implementation of strategic plans for the achievement of economic, social, and environmental objectives. It is intended that countries may use the methodology proposed here, to undertake an initial assessment of their progress towards implementing effective strategies for sustainable development, and repeat the assessment periodically as part of the overall strategic planning process.

Spanish cities have potential for improvement. While bigger cities have to cope more with the expansion of their territory and increase in population as well as infrastructural problems (due to altered needs), smaller cities tend to either surpass certain steps of development and focus on the latest technologies and provision of the respective infrastructures, or try to catch up with EU levels in terms of quality and provision of basic infrastructure. All in all, those different stages of and focuses on development have a lot to do with the geographical situation, the history and the people behind the administrative body.

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Endnotes

¹ Local Agenda 21, product of the Rio world environment summit held in 1992, proposes a significant number of local management actions to attain sustainable development.

²Plan estratégico al 2011 del Ayuntamiento de Vitoria (Vitoria, Spain, city council strategic plan for 2011).

³ <http://www.nodo50.org/worldwatch>, last accessed on June 2008.

⁴ <http://www.iclei.org>, last accessed on January 2008.

⁵ City councils strategic plans. The webpage of each city council contains their strategic plan.