
FROM URBANISM TO PLANNING TO URBAN PROJECT – THE PURSUIT OF ‘URBANITY’ IN SPANISH PLANS AND PROJECTS

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Spanish urbanismo evolved from the late rise of the discipline, at the beginning of the 20th century, to the consolidation of planning in the 1950s and 1960s. In its origins, it paid special attention to urban forms, but in the years of exceptional economic development – 1950s-1970s – planning became more abstract, because of the dissociation between the scales of the comprehensive plan and the more specific definition of layouts and architecture, which remained in the background. Since the end of the 1970s, the functionalist urbanism gave way to a renovated ‘architectural urbanism’, again more concerned with architectural quality of urban forms. The aim of this paper is to illustrate the recurrent, complex and sometimes contradictory ways of recovering and updating that early Spanish urbanismo which produced some of the most interesting urban tissues. We refer especially to some plans and projects corresponding to three time periods with different levels of integration among them, focusing on three Spanish cities, which can be understood as paradigmatic exemplars: Madrid, Barcelona, and Zaragoza. Of course, this doesn’t mean that the forms and tools of the, in the words of Peter Hall, ‘lost art of urbanism’, have been recovered literally. Rather, we identify in this philosophy of integrating architecture and planning an important principle of a true high quality urbanism.

Keywords

urbanismo, urbanism, planning, urban project, urbanity, Spain

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INTRODUCTION

Is there a specifically Latin culture of urbanisme? Why should we presume some specificities of Spanish urbanism? Anthony Sutcliffe, one of the godfathers of planning history, referred to “a specifically Latin culture of urbanisme, which is used to contextualize both planning and architecture”¹. In fact, the history of planning and urban design reveals the existence of different traditions, as Donatella Calabi has also recognized: “there’s no doubt that there are different academic traditions in various countries, in which, for example, the relationships between planning history, urban history and architectural history are different”². However, in the case of Spanish urbanismo and Italian urbanistica it is important to note that even if the Latin cultural model is generally accepted, the lack of translations in English of the extensive literature on Spanish and Italian Planning History³ had led to a significant loss of information. This makes difficult the understanding of the specificities of both particular academic traditions, hindering its inclusion in a wider debate about Planning History. Placing Spanish planning historiography within a comparative context is important to understand the characteristics of modern urban planning in Spain⁴.

EMERGENCE AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF MODERN URBAN PLANNING: COEXISTENCE OF PARADIGMS (1910S-40S)

Spanish modern *urbanismo* evolved from the late rise of the discipline, at the beginning of the 20th century, to the consolidation of planning in the 1950s and 1960s. In its origins, during the first decades of the century, it was influenced first by the French School of Urbanisme (EFU) and later by German *Städtebau*. The fact that these both approaches paid special attention to urban forms could explain that they had larger presence in Spanish *urbanismo* – a discipline with a long tradition on what it is called now ‘urban architecture’⁵ – than the British ‘town planning’.

It is important to note that in Spain the emergence and institutionalization of modern urban planning arrived later than in UK or Germany, due to the slow process of industrialization of the country. Some Spanish authors have written about this late rise of modern planning⁶. The incorporation of this new discipline into the schools’ of architecture curricula have significantly become a field of research. The subject *Trazado, Urbanización y Saneamiento de Poblaciones* (with echoes to Cerdà’s concepts) was taught for the first time at the School of Madrid in 1914. In the 1920s a new name was adopted: *Urbanología*. And a similar process took place at the School of Barcelona⁷.

This delay in the emergence of a modern discipline of urban planning did not, however, prevent from international transfer and disciplinary interchanges, which took place through courses, seminars, conferences, articles, exhibitions and specialized journals⁸. Regarding international models in Spain and also in Italy, it is noteworthy that during the first decades of the 20th century the impact of the French School of Urbanisme (EFU) was more significant than the influence of the British ‘town planning’, even if some contributions to international planning conferences by Unwin, Abercrombie and other planners were translated in the 1920s (Terán, 1978). Following the French tradition, some *Beaux-Arts* plans were developed in several Spanish cities. They were made in correspondence to the opening of *grandes vías*, and monumental urban spaces, echoing the ‘Paris model’ and the City Beautiful movement⁹.

Besides this cultural impact of the EFU, the German notion of *Städtebau* exerted in Spain an increasing influence. The term had emerged at the turn of the 20th century, already with Stübben homonymous 1890 handbook, but acquired a more precise meaning some years later, almost at the same time than the concept of *Stadtplan* (Collins, 1965: 120-121, 146). Camillo Sitte’s theories about *Städtebaukunst* (artistic urban planning) appeared within this framework, between 1880 and 1930, together with other similar approaches. An extensive historiography echoes

the reaction which came against the ‘pragmatic engineering urbanism’ and the consequent dissemination of Stübben’s and Sitte’s theories¹⁰. This literature also shows how French tradition coexisted for some time with German *Städtebau*, being progressively replaced by the latter, which was increasingly dominant in planning thought since the beginning of the 20th century.

Some plans of the first decades of the 20th century exemplify the prevalence in Spain of this urbanism based on the reference of Civic Art¹¹ and especially attentive to urban forms and architectural quality. In this paper we will focus on three Spanish cities, which can be understood as paradigmatic exemplars: Madrid, a capital city; Barcelona, an industrial city; and Zaragoza, a medium-size city. Regarding the plans that characterize this first moment of Spanish *urbanismo*, we could mention following examples:

In Madrid, after the 19th century city extension, a specific concern for urban forms can be recognized in some planned interventions, such as the opening of the Gran Vía first and also some years later, even in some modern plans and projects of the 1920s and 1930s. They prove how formal visions and functional principles were synthesized and adapted to a specific Spanish urban planning tradition. Remarkable is the collaboration between S. Zuazo and the German planner H. Jansen in the important international competition for the Madrid Extension Plan of 1929. This is an example of the way *Städtebau* influence was relevant even in the advent of modernist urban planning¹². Zuazo-Jansen’s Plan incorporates international functionalist urban tenets, without overlooking to take special care to specific urban conditions.

In Barcelona, the case of Jaussely’s Plan (1905) is an exceptional example that deserves a careful reading. Despite its large scale, it shows a sort of ‘artistic urbanism’, not only as a reaction to the monotony of Cerdà’s Extension, but also as a way of introducing some formalist concepts, together with functionalist components, associated to the French School of Urbanism. Actually, this School, which had deep roots on the social studies and the Musée Social, with M. Poëte as pioneer of the ‘Science of villes’, combined ‘Beaux Arts layouts’ with functionalist interventions related to modern circulation issues, which had Henard and other urban planners as referents¹³. Jaussely’s Plan worked only as a reference in the planning strategies of the 1920s. In the 1930s the Plan Macià stood out as remarkable example of a new functionalist planning, even if it didn’t have a significant impact on urban development¹⁴.

In Zaragoza, a new urban extension plan was implemented, again by S. Zuazo, in 1928-1930s, almost at the same time than the plan for Madrid¹⁵. In this case, formal layouts combine with a hierarchical and functional system of avenues and streets, with diversity of blocks and housing typologies, as an example of urbanism concerned with the design of urban forms.

The specificity of these plans, among others Spain, is that they were conceived in continuity with the existent city (in a similar way than Berlage’s Amsterdam Zuid plan, for instance). They are paradigmatic examples of a way of understanding urbanism in Spain, a discipline that since the first decades of the 20th century reached a high urban quality level, influenced first by the plans of the French school of urbanism and later by the German artistic urban planning and preserving this quality and care for urban forms even in the advent of modern functionalism.



FIGURE 1 Barcelona: Jaussely Plan (1907)



FIGURE 2 2. Zaragoza: Zuazo-Ribas-Navarro Plan (1928)

PLANNING AND ACCELERATED URBAN GROWTH (1950S-1970S) OR THE LOSS OF THE "ART OF URBANISM"

In Spain, as in other European countries, the rise of urban planning in the first decades of the 20th century was followed by the emergence of modernist urban design tenets and the new paradigm of the 'functional city'. The Athens Charter principles (drafted in CIAM IV, 1933, and published in 1943), were applied after the World War II often by means of their vulgate. It was from that moment on that they had a real impact. Planning became more abstract, because of the dissociation between the scales of the comprehensive plan and the more detailed definition of specific layouts and architecture, which remained in the background. Instead, zoning became the main planning tool, the definition of urban spaces was made according to the universal principles of 'open urbanism', etc. The Athens Charter became the undisputed reference to design the new housing estates built in those years of exceptional economic development known as *desarrollismo* age (developmentalism). Besides this, the progressive complexity and autonomy of the new cars and transport infrastructures favored the shift from urbanism to planning, a discipline with its own rules and expertise, far from the Spanish tradition of 'urban architecture'.

According to international historiography, the 'golden age of planning' seems to have become consolidated during an economic upswing period: the great boom of the 1950s and 1960s that lasted until the oil crisis of 1973. In this period of spectacular urban growth postwar legislation was for several decades the basic framework for regulating urban development in most of the European advanced countries. This was also the case of Spain, even if the system was less effective in practice than in theory. A foundational law such as the *Ley del suelo* (Land and Urban Planning Act) of 1956 was the main legislative instrument of that period, a subject that has been widely examined along with the story of the explosive urban growth in Spanish cities during this period¹⁶.

It is interesting to note that in an early stage of transition, during the 1940s and up until the mid-1950s, modernist urbanism coexisted with new versions of Civic Art or renewed ways of understanding urban architecture. If 'modern Townscape' was trying to integrate planning and architecture in UK¹⁷, in Spain similar intentions can be found in some plans and projects where architectural urbanism was still the main concern, as a look back over some planning handbooks and specialized planning publications ^{shows}¹⁸. The attachment to monumentalism of Franco dictatorship's rhetoric also contributed in a certain way to maintain the linkage to the tradition of academicism and, therefore, to architectural urbanism. However, these attempts to shape new urban forms according to the ideology of the regime were not determining experiences¹⁹. In short, Spain followed modernity in urbanism, but the tradition of architectural urbanism and the semantic monumentality of the regime also converged in the urbanism of that period.

Some examples of the progressive change in contents and strategies can be found in every Spanish city, starting with the capital. In Madrid, in the early 1940s the so called Plan Bidagor (1941-1946) was still an attempts to give an image of an Imperial City. But we could also find continuities with the plans of the Republican period, both in the willingness to modernize the urban structure and in the attention payed to 'urban facades' and the city's appearance. Actually, Bidagor's plan followed Zuazo-Jansen's 1929 extension plan and 1939 regional plan, both from the Republican period²⁰. The big shift came in the 1960s, when a new 'generation of plans' arrived, known as 'development plans', as a reply to rapid urban growth. The Plan General de Ordenación del Área Metropolitana de Madrid (General Town Planning of Madrid metropolitan area) of 1963 is a clear example. Plans for sectors or 'partial plans' were a further complement for developing the sectors or *polígonos* (mass housing estates) of the General Plan. They worked as useful tools for speculation, since they allowed increasing building levels, which lead to high densification processes in extension areas and in new peripheries²¹.



FIGURE 3 Barcelona: La Mina and Sudoeste del Besós housing estates (1969)

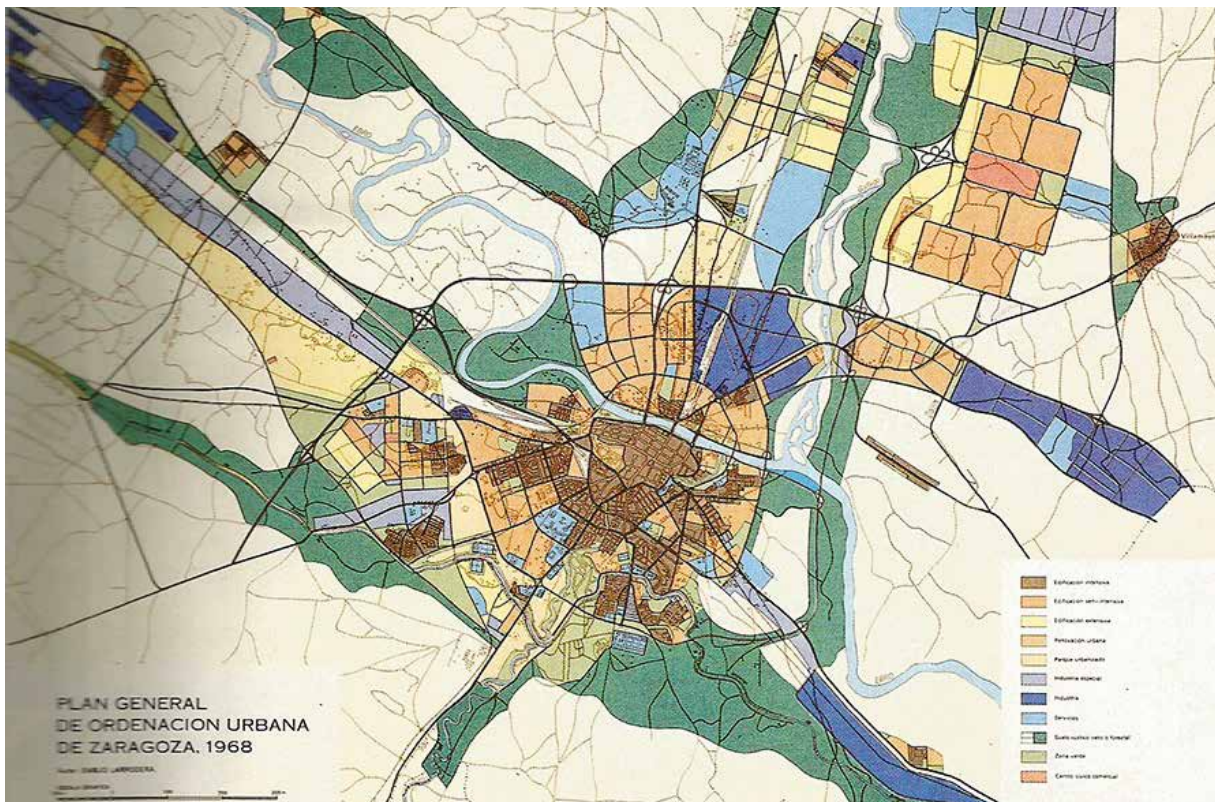


FIGURE 4 Zaragoza: General Master Plan Larrodera (1968)

In Barcelona, the loss of the ‘art of urbanism’ was also gradual. The Plan comarcal (Regional plan) of 1953 was the base for the new urban extensions. At the beginning, efforts were made to carefully control urban growth, especially in two areas: Levante (East) and Poniente (West). However, as in other Spanish cities, those partial plans “increased densities without a corresponding provision of public facilities—at times preempting spaces dedicated to public facilities (...) even approving housing estates without preliminary partial planning”²². The layout of new roads and streets became progressively more and more autonomous from the residential blocks. At the same time, the earlier ‘well planned’ *polígonos de viviendas* of the 1950s, more attentive to urban design, gave way to ‘an avalanche of low-quality architectural projects’ that characterized a large part of 1960s and 1970s modern peripheries²³.

In Zaragoza, the Plan of 1957 established also continuity with the ‘modern discourse on urbanism’ as it was codified in the Athens Charter²⁴. Even some illustrations were taken from the vanguard’s literature of the 1930s²⁵. But in this case plans for a controlled urban development were again overpassed by the real processes of urban growth (the goal of the plan was 500.000 inhabitants for the year 2000 but the city reached this mark already in 1975 (540.308 inhabitants). Another plan was approved in 1968, with much more ambitious goals. Also in this case, the focus on zoning the urban structure contrasted with the low attention payed to ‘partial plans’, which were thought more following quantitative parameters (housing densities, standards for facilities, etc.)²⁶.

The impact of those plans was positive in some cases, since they helped to structure urban growth. However, controlling urban forms was another issue²⁷ that required a higher degree of integration of the various scales of the project. On the contrary, in this period the dissociation between comprehensive plans and urban project, that demanded more attention for layouts and architecture, was drastic. In a sense, it could be said that the ‘golden age of planning’ came at the costs of the ‘lost art of urbanism’.

FROM COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING TO URBAN PROJECTS: THE PURSUIT OF URBANITY

Since the end of the 1970s the predominance of the functionalist urbanism gave way to a renovated ‘architectural urbanism’, once again more concerned with architectural quality of urban forms. This kind of urban approach materialized in the so-called ‘urban projects’ that acquired a clear predominance over the previous general plans based in rigid zoning tenets. Somehow, this resulted in a paradigm shift that helped to recover and reaffirm a specific urban culture, which since the beginning of the century had tended to develop an urbanism closely linked to architecture and urban landscape. This design-oriented and strategic approach to urban planning, associated to social and economic goals, can be seen as a clear innovation with roots on the tradition of Spanish urbanism²⁸. Integration between urbanism and architecture was a key strategy in the pursuit of urbanity, despite the complexity of this term²⁹.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a sort of ‘reformist urbanism’, which was first theorized in Italy by left-wing urban planners, began to gain strength. The emergence of the new urban projects should be understood in a context of generalized reactions to the modernist functionalist urban planning, but also as a way of recovering and developing the strong and best traditions of what began to be called ‘quality urbanism’. Recent planning history research shows that, as happened in other periods, the impact of urban planning in Spanish cities since the 1980s has been ambivalent³⁰. On one hand, low quality ‘standardized planned piecemeal disasters’ as well as large urban sprawl processes have led to a huge increase of land consumption and the destruction of urban and natural landscapes, especially in seafronts and touristic cities. Nevertheless, the recovery of old historical centers and the modernization of cities through the creation of quality public spaces, infrastructures and new facilities has been the rule, exactly the opposite as what happened in the former period.

The organization of some international events, such as the 1992 Olympic Games (Barcelona) or the International Exhibitions (1992 Seville, 2008 Zaragoza) worked as urban planning and design laboratories that brought with them important structural transformations. Urban projects and landscape urbanism were paradigmatic in this sort of strategic urban planning³¹. It's true that private developers were increasingly responsible in shaping the new peripheries. But it would be a mistake to believe that planning was weak – or not relevant – in those years because of the emergence of urban projects. On the contrary, it may be said that the intense transformation that has deeply changed the shape of Spanish cities since the 1980s up to the crisis of 2008 has been the result of numerous planned interventions – often consisting in large-scale projects – which were responsible of the general improvements of cities, especially of the inner peripheries

Maybe the best example of that 'reformist urbanism' was the Madrid plan of 1985. Using quite conventional planning tools, but with detailed local scale developments, the Madrid plan activated a relevant process of urban improvement and regeneration of its extensive peripheries³². The General plan of 1985 included also detail urban projects. Moreover, some of the best urban projects that have changed the shape of the capital city were implemented in the last two decades. Integration between urbanism and architecture was a key strategy in the pursuit of urbanity. The works to expansion the Atocha station, and also the extensions of several museums such as Prado, Reina Sofía or Thyssen, for instance, were part of a wider plan of improvement and requalification of public spaces, such as the axis Prado-Recoletos. At the same time, the "new urban extensions" recovered the morphology of traditional urban blocks, with avenues and squares, even if they lack the "urban intensity" of old 19th century *Ensanche* (city extension)³³.

The 'Barcelona model' is a paradigmatic example of this sort of new urban strategies. Again, a General Metropolitan Plan (GMP), approved in 1976, was the main basis for developing urban projects in Barcelona since the 1980s. Of course, the economic upswing period that started on mid-nineties was not the only factor that made possible the development of those strategic projects. However, it helps to understand the transformation processes that the city experimented within the frame of the 1992 Olympic Games: projects changed from small piecemeal interventions in the 1980s to large-scale urban projects in the 1990s³⁴. In this sense, it is meaningful the way Barcelona's urbanism was received by the professional UK milieu. In 1999 Barcelona was awarded the prestigious Gold Medal by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). It was the first time that a place – instead of professionals – was awarded. The prize intended to recognize and value the city's "commitment to urbanism over the last twenty years" including its "mix of eye-catching landmark projects, small scale improvements to plazas and street corners, and the team work between politicians and urbanists." Two types of urban interventions were thus remarked, from small to large-scale strategic urban projects, both of them associated to different periods of urban renovation and improvement³⁵.

Zaragoza planning followed the trend of 'corrective' or 'reformist' plans – somehow in the line of the 'Madrid model' – and got a new general plan in 1986. Thanks to this plan together with the impulse of the socialist council, several actions were implemented, with more control of urban growth, building of new facilities, preservation of natural surroundings, improvement of urban spaces in the historic city center, etc.³⁶. The attention to urban forms through urban projects was one of the most important issues regarding residential areas³⁷. Again, the last upswing cycle from the mid-nineteenth until the crisis of 2008 had an ambivalent impact: it led to the construction of new facilities, infrastructures and a renovated system of open spaces along with a new wave of suburbanization and land occupation at metropolitan scale.

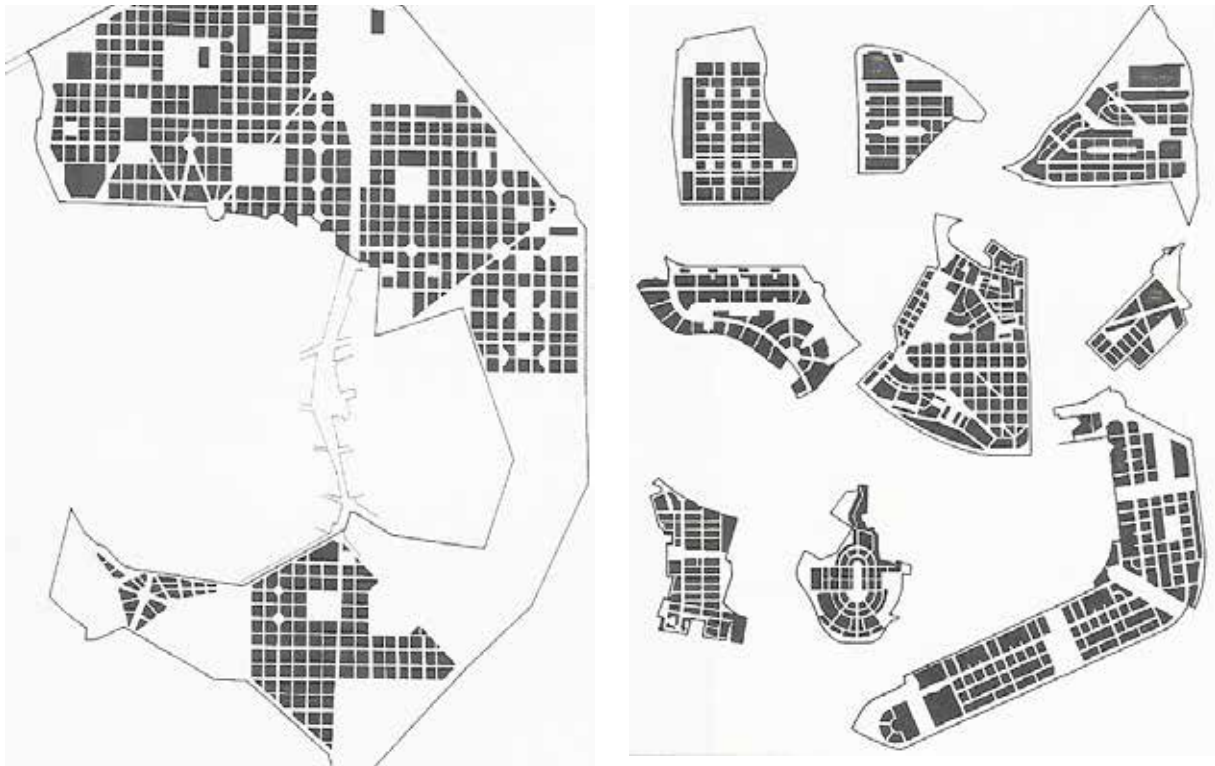


FIGURE 5 Madrid: Old Ensanche and new extensions (1980-1990s)



FIGURE 6 Barcelona: plans and urban projects (1992-2000)

To sum up, a new period highlighted by the willingness of recovering a 'lost' urban culture succeeded the previous modernist urban experiences. The conciliation between architecture and urbanism that had been a distinguishing feature of Spanish *urbanismo* since the origins of the discipline allowed reinterpreting the tradition of 'architectural urbanism' at different scales, from small urban projects to large strategic projects. The pursuit of urbanity that characterized the last decades of the 20th century followed sometimes contradictory ways, swinging from old models to new experimental plans and projects.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the last decades substantial transformations are changing the features of the so-called Mediterranean compact city model, among them the loss of urban quality in the new peripheries. Those processes have led to explore other ways of urbanism, sometimes looking to old traditions. If we want to understand the complex and often contradictory ways of recovering and updating an early Spanish *urbanismo* – the one that produced some of the most interesting and qualified urban tissues – more specific research is needed. We had referred especially to some carefully plans and projects characterized by their high levels of urbanity. Of course, this doesn't mean that the forms and tools of the, in the words of Peter Hall, 'lost art of urbanism', have been recovered directly. Rather, we mean that this philosophy of integrating architecture and planning has been seen an important principle of a true high quality urbanism.

As happen in other countries, only some urban planners realize that aesthetic values are a main part of the discipline of urban planning in Spain³⁸. In any case, the analysis of urban planning and design with a wide historical perspective should be useful not only for better understanding past planning episodes in Spanish cities, but also for allowing us to learn what is valid and also what is already obsolete in modern urban planning. The pursuit of that "quality urbanism" is not only a matter of economy and urban policy, but also a matter of recovering the own tradition of good urbanism³⁹.

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Image Sources

Figure 1: Author's private collection.

Figure 2: Guàrdia, M., Monclús, F. J., J.L.Oyón (dir.), Atlas histórico de ciudades europeas, vol. I Península Ibérica, Barcelona: CCCB-Salvat, 1994.

Figure 3: Guàrdia, M., Monclús, F. J., J.L.Oyón (dir.), Atlas histórico de ciudades europeas, vol. I Península Ibérica, Barcelona: CCCB-Salvat, 1994.

Figure 4: Guàrdia, M., Monclús, F. J., J.L.Oyón (dir.), Atlas histórico de ciudades europeas, vol. I Península Ibérica, Barcelona: CCCB-Salvat, 1994.

Figure 5: Author's private collection.

Figure 6: Author's private collection.

Endnotes

- 1 Sutcliffe, "Foreword".
- 2 Calabi, "Editorial. Thirty Years On".
- 3 Piccinato, G. "A brief history of Italian town planning after 1945".
- 4 Monclús, J., Díez, C., "Urbanisme, Urbanismo, Urbanística. Latin European Urbanism".
- 5 See. J.L. Cohen, "L'architecture urbaine selon Pierre Lavedan"; see also Monclús, "Arte urbano y estudios histórico-urbanísticos: tradiciones, ciclos y recuperaciones".
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- 15 Guàrdia, et al., *Atlas histórico de ciudades europeas*.
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- 18 Just to mention two of them: Brunner, *Manual de Urbanismo*, Auzelle, *Enciclopedia de l'urbanisme*.
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- 21 Terán, *Historia del urbanismo en España III. Siglos XIX y XX*; Wynn, *Planning and urban growth in Southern Europe*; Lopez Lucio, "Urban planning and spatial transformations in Madrid".
- 22 Calavita, Ferrer, "Behind Barcelona's success story".
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- 24 Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*.
- 25 Guàrdia, et al., *Atlas histórico de ciudades europeas*.
- 26 Ramos, "Evolución del tejido residencial de Zaragoza. 1908-2008".
- 27 De las Rivas, "Spain".
- 28 Sainz, *El Proyecto urbano en España*.
- 29 An extensive literature on the concept of 'urbanity' has been produced from different disciplines in the last decades, especially in German cultural world. Among the authors that have dealt with this subject should be mentioned: Edgar Salin, Hartmut Häußermann, Walter Siebel, Werner Durth, Peter Breitling, Hans Paul Bahrtdt, Christoph Shneider, Thomas Würst, etc. A recent, impressive contribution is the monography by Wolfgang Sonne: Sonne, W., *Urbanität und Dichte im Städtebau des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Dom Publishers: Berlin, 2014 (Book review Díez Meinda, C. in *ZARCH, Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Architecture and Urbanism* n. 6). See also Díez Medina, Monclús, "On urbanity and urban forms. Some remarks on modernist urbanism's legacy".
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