

TWO DECADES OF «SHOW-URBANISM» IN SPAIN: THE BIG EVENTS AS A TOOL FOR THE URBAN CHANGE

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In Disneyland we never see demonstrations

Michael Sorkin, 2004

I. INTRODUCTION

European cities are facing, according to Peter Hall, a series of processes that are having a profound impact on their physical and institutional structure and their dynamics: economic globalization and consolidation of large regional blocks, the transition to information economy; impacts of new technologies of transport and communication, the transformation of Eastern Europe, the role of international migration, adaptation to environmental sustainability paradigm and the international promotion of urban marketing (Hall, P., 1998). Traditionally city was not associated with industry. This is the fundamental change. Twenty years ago, the image that identified the city was that of a congested industrial area. Today this picture has changed substantially: now the cities are associated with shopping areas, entertainment, services or infrastructure of knowledge and innovation. In the era of industrialism, the working force was the main factor contributing to improve the productivity of an enterprise, while in the present mode of production of the information age is the human capital, white-collar professionals whose primary function is to provide knowledge, manage complex processes and innovate them (Castells, 2000). Production is increasingly fragmented, relocated and flexible, so companies no longer use chain-Fordist work in large industrial complexes. In cities, agglomeration economies, urbanization and scale become less important with respect to network economies to improve competitiveness, the urban economy of flexible specialization in the economy shifts to a more flexible network (Blotvogel, 2001: 158).

II. THE BIG EVENTS AS A DRIVER OF URBAN CHANGE

Cities are consolidated as important political actors and seek at all times to be located in polycentric urban networks to improve their competitiveness, purpose that from the industrial crisis becomes a strategic goal of all cities, because this way the territory may continue accumulating capital. This brings us to a central paradox: the less important are spatial barriers to the movement of capital and investment the greater the sensitivity to the differences between capital cities (measured from increasingly complex parameters associated with the leisure activities and culture, quality and standard of living, security, citizenship, landscape quality ...). Therefore most cities are encouraged to be attractive for capital (Harvey, D., 1990, quoted by Nel-lo, 2003). The public sector is no longer the instigator and promoter of local or metropolitan development, now that role is assumed mainly by private or privatized firms.

Cities, seeking a better competitive position in the current the industrial and economic crisis in the new context of globalization, strengthen and promote new sectors to attract international investment, from universities to sports competitions, museums, theme parks (with a notable expansion in recent decades) or technology parks (Dachevsky, 2001: 62; Antón, 1999). The organization of all types of events such as sporting events, exhibitions, secular, international summits and so on. helps build the brand and insert the city into new networks (Dachevsky, 2001: 114-129).

Spanish cities are experiencing as well these processes: deep urban renewal plans taking advantage of a large sporting or cultural event. They implement plans for urban renovation in old industrial areas, slums and so on in order to create or strengthen the city's image abroad, and the «position» or «consolidation» in different classifications run by magazines, international institutions and agencies that measure how attractive the city is for capital attraction. If a city is nominated to organize an international event means that it shall be subject to media attention at least during the celebration of the event and also serves to reach consensus from the different urban actors so that «our town» do a good job in the eyes of the world. In other words encourages the sense of identity among actors (what German authors call the «Wir-Gefühl» or «collective sense»). For this reason the cities that decide to undertake such actions, sometimes preceded by strategic planning processes as the case of Barcelona, are benefited immediately from a wide range of public investments, especially before and during the event.

III. CASE STUDIES

In this article we will review four examples of Spanish cities that in the last two decades have undertaken deep urban transformations taking advantage of the celebration of macroevents as universal exhibitions or sports championships.

1. The international exhibition of seville of 1992

The location chosen for the international exhibition was the Cartuja island, close to the historic center of Seville. On these extensive areas a new city was constructed to shelter

the pavilions of the countries and spectacles that were meeting. As a whole, more than one hundred of singular buildings as well as a great quantity of squares, gardens and walks were built. Concerning infrastructures, the exhibition supposed for Seville an undoubted modernization: the first high speed train of Spain from Madrid to Seville was unveiled, the airport was extended and six new bridges were constructed on the Guadalquivir river. The exhibition had a public's out-standing success as it received according to official numbers over 40 million persons during six months, but it supposed a cost not lower than a trillion of Spanish pesetas with an indebtedness that still was over 160.000 millions in the year 2000, eight years after the closing (El Mundo, 1997). The most polemic aspect of the extra charges of this project was the posterior management. A managing organism called Agesa was created to search new functions for the pavilions of the expo. The initial project had as aim to create a technological park and a theme park. The initial project had as aim to create a technological park and a theme park. Nowadays there are 329 firms installed, with a very important percentage of administrations and universities. Nevertheless it was not until 2008 when the totality of offices and pavilions of this managerial park were running. Concerning the theme park, only two years after the opening it was on the verge of closing for the millionaires losses that it was dragging. It was refloated by the savings banks that were taking part as shareholders. With the tenth anniversary, in 2007 more than five million Euros were invested in new attractions but again the public's expectations were not fulfilled since it did not come near to the million visitors. Nowadays only stay in foot 30 pavilions out of more than one hundred that were built. The following images show the transformations suffered by the Expo in less than two decades after the event

To summarize, the universal exhibition of Seville was an impressive urban development action plan that demanded enormous investments both in infrastructures and in the own park. It was conceived as a magnificent and onerous macroevent to promote Spain and specially Seville but in that there were no posterior plans of reutilization, a great urban continent without content or plans for future use. Definitively it was a great investment of public money whose social and economic long-term effects turned out to be very poor, although it has to be remarked the improvement of the accessibility on Seville thanks to the AVE (high speed train).

2. Barcelona from the olympic games to the forum of cultures: show must go on!

The Olympic games in Barcelona were promoted as not as a spectacle during the celebration of the games but even during the previous years of works in which big advertising cartels were inviting the visitor «to contemplate the major European project of urban development» (Benach, 1993). As in case of the exhibition, the Olympic games supposed a great investment in infrastructures and facilities for the city: new roads, improvement of the airport, renovation of the port etc. The difference with regard to Seville is that as a result of this great urban transformation the internationalization of Barcelona increased considerably as the games supposed a great advertising and media platform for the set of the city so that twelve years after the Olympic games, a new flat in Barcelona was costing 236 % more than before the games (La Vanguardia, 2005). As a result of the economic success in terms of economic profits of the games and the good image projected by Barcelona on the outside, it

was conceived twelve years later to consolidate the «Barcelona brand « forged in the Olympic games. Planners and politicians were thinking to repeat the operation in north-east end of the maritime range that had not experienced the urban development fever of the Olympic games and that still a marginal space: the river mouth of the river Besòs and the end of the Diagonal. The idea was to organize for the first time the forum of cultures, an international cultural event intended to take place every three years to support for peace, sustainable development, human rights and respect for cultural diversity.

«The Fòrum expresses the economic bet for the sector that already was working, the most dynamic today but also of more uncertain future, that of the tourism, the leisure, the city of fairs and congresses. It is an easy option of oblivion of the necessary renovation of the productive fabric. The urbanism of the Fòrum in turn is a sample of ghetto for the new settlers». Jordi Borja, *La Vanguardia*. 25/7/2004. With this pretext the diagonal avenue was extended up to the sea, several skyscrapers were built as well as hotels and a conventions center. It was a pretext to attract tourism, to turn a zone without value into a new elitist neighborhood, to continue with the processes of gentrificación initiated with the Olympic games as the Vila Olímpica, to put on the market more land to speculate, to create a new oasis of consumption with new malls as the Diagonal mall. Again the operation has been onerous for the public sector (3000 million Euros of investment) (*El Mundo*, 26/9/2004) and a deficit of about 400.000 Euros owed fundamentally to that the affluence of public was poor, but nevertheless it turned out to be a great business for bank, construction companies and specially of the real-estate and hotel sector since at present the area of the Forum concentrates the major hotel density of the whole Barcelona (Tarroja, Castañer and Mercadé, 2005: 403).

From the social point of view also it was criticized since all this great performance changed the appearance or the aesthetic image of the coastal front of the Besòs (that was the principal aim), but it did not act on the root of social conflicts, exclusion and delinquency that lives still today in La Mina neighborhood. The problems of this neighborhood are still present, simply a very valuable zone has been «rescued» of the degradation to turn her into a productive space since it is the littoral of Barcelona whereas groups in risk of exclusion are now limited to the interior of this neighborhood opposite to the big urban renovation of the forum.

3. Valencia and the America's Cup

As Valencia was lacking in the eighties an image of consolidated modernity they started plotting a series of strategic actions that had as protagonist the final section of the old Turia riverbed with emblematic actions as the construction of the City of The Arts and The Sciences, the City of the Justice and the Aquarium. A deep transformation of the old port had been as well planned.

The aim was clear from the beginning: change the image of Valencia to convert the city into a great tourist destination like Barcelona. In spite of the big tackled works and the restoration of numerous monuments it was still needed something, a symbolic event to attract international media to Valencia in order to set the city as a great destination for tourism preferably of luxury. A sail competition followed especially by an elitist public, the America's Cup was the perfect event to organize. At the end of 2003 Valencia was designated

to organize this competition not known for most of the public in spite of being «the oldest sports trophy in the world».

One of the most polemic aspects of this great project is that it supposed an important disbursement of public funds for the port renovation with completely elitist purposes as it was the creation of a pole of attraction for nautical tourism of high purchasing power. In contrast, few repercussions had these big investments on the immediate neighborhoods of the Cabanyal and Malvarrosa. These neighbourhoods drag still today problems of exclusion, delinquency and drugdealing, especially as a result of the inaction of the public power in these areas.

Nevertheless the major challenge that this project faces today, as it has happened with the examples previously analyzed is what use the port of the América's Cup might have in the periods of time in which there are no competitions. Concerning the public administrations, they are attempting to attract the organization of future events in the same port in order to consolidate the port as a theme park for sport competitions. The next challenge was the construction of a street circuit for formule 1 (another case only exists in Montecarlo). As a result of this many citizens demonstrated against this project because of the impacts in noise and air pollution.

4. Saragossa and the international exhibition «water and sustainable development»

Saragossa also has followed the stela of many other Spanish cities that had decided to bet for the internationalization and terciarización of their economies towards a tourist - leisure sector from the organization of big international events. In this case the chosen format was again a universal exhibition, the 2008 International Exhibition «Water and sustainable development».

According to the organizers, the principal aim was «to create explanatory and cultural event together with the will to realize an exercise of reflection, debate and meeting in relation with water and sustainability». With this end it was absolutely necessary to urbanize 25 hectares of Ranillas's meander where previously there were suburban gardens, instead of organizing the debates and exhibitions concerning water using the net of cultural facilities of the city.

Undoubtedly this great event has obtained a few big economic benefits, but basically for the hotel, construction companies and saving banks that have made important profits in comparison with the public power (headed by the town hall of Saragossa) that must have contracted a large debt (El Periódico de Aragon, 23/10/2006). The organization of the expo has been financed by the sale by the local administration of multitude of plots of public soil for the later urban development and by the reduction of municipal budgets so that in the year 2008 the General Municipal Budget ascended to 112 million Euros for the city of Saragossa of which 67,8 million were in use for supporting the numerous costs of the international exhibition. Budgets of culture and education diminished respectively 19,3 % and 45 %.

Not only is the cost of the event one of the principal deficiencies of this international exhibition. The quality of this «universal» exhibition also can be verified analyzing the international projection that had. First in the set of countries participants we already observe important absences like the USA, Canada, United Kingdom or the Nordic countries, countries

that might reach very much to the debates concerning water. In the first month 62 % of the visitors was coming from the city of Saragossa and only 3 % from foreign countries (El País, 14/7/2008). At the end of the exhibition only 4,5 % of the visitors had come from other countries, more than the half from Portugal and France, in whole it was about one million and a half the number of visitors that came to the exhibition, a million less than expected (El País, 15-09-2008).

Definitively the interest to turn Saragossa into a city - brand attractive company for the national or international tourist as well as for the managerial sector has occupied first place among other criteria as an exhibition organized with quality in the contents, the budgetary containment in a context of economic crisis or a real respect for the environment and the heritage.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The economic traditional basis of Spain (agriculture of exportation, tourism and manufacturing industry) were replaced by two motive forces that have pushed the Spanish economy in the last years: construction and tourism. Most of these actions of «show urbanism» that we have revised answer to the strategy of stimulating the metropolitan economies with impressive urban redevelopment plans financed by the public sector hidden behind the veil of an international exhibition or a sailing competition. All these big actions generate a great business for hotel, construction, real-estate companies and especially bank companies but they leave doubtful benefits to the citizenship: big economic obligations and therefore a reduction of investments in culture, education, social services etc., privatization of spaces previously public, slightly usable enclosures after the celebration of the event and enclosed environmental, landscape impacts and on the patrimony.

The distinction between these new urban pieces that are constructed with the excuse of celebrating big sports or pseudocultural events and the consolidated city is not complicated to find. It is not a contrast between the old city and the new city, but between the socialized city, the complex city, the city of the conflicts and the city where (as we quoted at the beginning) the demos do not exist, the city where complexity and urban and social contradictions are expelled. These new urban suburbs are examples of «show-urbanism» because in many cases they are conceived as «bundles of using and throwing», as big facilities only usable while the spectacle lasts. Then all these «bundles», from the forum of Barcelona to the pavilions of the international exhibition of Seville are difficultly reusable since they have not been conceived to create city, but as temporary spaces for the massive consumption. They remain as vast spaces without symbols or history, non-places that are rejected by citizens as a neighborhood or emblematic space more in the imaginary group, as monuments to the irrationality of political officers pawned in creating an image of city based on huge plans that are supposed to transmit an idea of modernity of the city for the national and foreign tourist.