

SEVILLA IN THE FIRST DECADE OF THE CENTURY: URBAN TRANSFORMATION FOR A NEW URBAN MODEL

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I. INTRODUCTION

During the first decade of the 21st century, Seville received a strong boost from public and private investments that translated into numerous infrastructure, urban development and economic projects which, under the banner of the new General Urban Development Plan (2006), gave rise to a notable urban transformation that is worth analysing in depth. Actions favoring public space (pedestrianization in the historic center), new mobility projects with new public transport (metro, tram) and investing in cycling (cycle lanes, rental system), very definite industrial developments (new Heineken-Cruzcampo, Airbus and Abengoa factories, Renault expansion, port expansion), as well as examples of signature architecture (the “setas” at Encarnación) and the city’s new (and only) skyscraper (César Pelli Tower). The fundamental question that needs to be asked is whether this catalog of elements that make up this urban process are part of a consciously formed city model, what are the aspects upon which this model is based and moves forward and what are the internal inconsistencies and contradictions that could arise.

The second key question we should ask in times of economic crisis and the almost total absence of investment is up to what point cities can prolong the profitability time of these urban renewal projects. The ability of a creative response by the institutional and political establishment and a constructive mobilization by citizens would be critical factors in order to attempt the emergence of a new city model with a future sheen.

II. SEVILLE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY: FROM SPECULATIVE DEVELOPMENTISM TO THE 1992 WORLD FAIR

After a long post-war period, between the late 1950s and the 1960s the city was becoming the main attraction for Andalusian rural emigration. The largest demographic growth in

Seville's history took place between 1961 and 1965, with the population rising to 106,245. Large groups came to the city and gradually went from living in precarious self-built areas to new neighborhoods of units built by public initiative (Melero Ochoa, 2005). At the same time, the original working class populations from neighborhoods in the old quarter and historic areas, such as Triana, were being driven out by speculative pressure from the property market to these new outer suburban neighborhoods.

The city's evolution in the final three decades of the 20th century was marked by two events of great urban and socioeconomic scope: it became the administrative and political capital of the new Autonomous Community of Andalusia and hosted the 1992 World Fair.

In 1975, Seville was a provincial capital with 600,000 inhabitants, the main city of the country's poorest region and without a particularly significant role on the national stage. However, this transition triggered a series of profound political and administrative processes, including regional decentralization that turned Seville into the capital of the most populous region, and the second largest of all the new autonomous communities (Carrillo Benito, 1997).

II.1. Expo'92: the great urban transformation

The city became the headquarters of a new administration that could demand territorial rebalancing measures from the central State for the poorest and most backward region in Spain and was faced with a State project, which was hosting the 1992 World Fair.

The influence of this event on the urban morphology was intense (Pérez Escolano, 1998), particularly because of the enormous flow of investment, around 6 billion euros, of which 90% was allocated to infrastructure works outside the actual Expo enclosure (Álvarez Rey, 2000).

The new General Urban Development Plan of 1986 proposed for the first time a balance between the city center and outskirts, the overall shape and re-composition of the urban network and also the comprehensive protection of the historic center as a valuable element to be conserved in its entirety, beyond specific heritage buildings (Lerdo de Tejada, 2004). With 1992 on the horizon, these objectives were achieved in record time. A new airport, new cultural spaces, such as the Teatro de la Maestranza and Teatro Central, a new railway station, which would receive the first high speed line built in Spain (Madrid-Seville—it would be 11 years until the next one, Madrid-Zaragoza, was inaugurated), six new bridges over the river Guadalquivir, new high speed bypass roads and internal connecting avenues in the city were built. All this entailed a profound transformation and modernization of Seville's urban scenery.

Hosting the Expo was a success with the public, pulling in 41 million visitors (one of the most visited world fairs in history) (Pablo-Romero, 2002), and an organizational success that, along with the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, proved to be a great public relations boost for the image of Spain, which had recently embraced democracy, was joining the then European Economic Community and whose economic perspectives began to improve substantially.

The construction years of Expo '92 led to an increase in employment and an improvement in the economic convergence rate with the rest of the country (Fig. 5), jumping from 70.5% in 1984 to 80% in 1992.

II.2. After the Expo: the exhaustion of a model

When the expo event was over, the city was facing a period of stagnation and depression, common to many cities that have made great socioeconomic efforts focusing on a specific project when it ends.

This post-expo depression was particularly hard, since the closure of the Fair in October 1992 coincided precisely with the start of the significant economic crisis experienced by the country between the final quarter of 1992 and 1995. In this context, tourism and employment fell and public investment stopped flowing.

At the end of the decade, the urban-territorial model of the city seemed over. Moreover, the lack of political interest in recent years in restoring urban planning favored the development of significant property operations planned in an ad hoc manner and using the purest speculative orthodoxy, such as the “Uralita” operation, which in 1998 led to the dismantling of a construction material factory and the change in the qualification of industrial land to residential, granting enormous benefits to its owners, while the city watched its industrial fabric reduce in size.

III. THE 21ST CENTURY: DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW CITY MODEL

At the start of this century, a new General Urban Development Plan (PGOU) was drawn up as a result of the political change in the city’s government, formed again by a coalition between the Andalusian Party, which held the balance of power, but now in a double coalition with the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) at Seville City Hall and at the Autonomous Government of Andalusia.

One of the characteristics of the new PGOU was its vocation to serve as an absolute guide and reference for the city’s urban development, given the pressing need to plug the hole in the model that had been detected several years earlier. The process of drawing up the plan was developed in an environment of greater participation, in particular of academic sectors, citizen organizations and social agents. This entailed a truly new start, which was joined by the 2010 Seville Strategic Plan (Seville City Hall, 2003) that was developed in parallel. This planning was favored by the reinforcement of municipal finances allocated to public works and urban projects, in a context of construction expansion across the country. (Romero, 2012). Thus, it was possible to execute a significant part of the city model defined in the PGOU during almost the entire first decade of the 21st century. (Patiño Rodríguez, 2008).

The five key objectives upon which the General Plan and the Strategic Plan were sustained, whose performance significantly influenced the current physiognomy of the city, are highlighted below.

III.1. Changes in public space

There is no doubt that reconsidering public spaces is one of the key and defining elements of the new city model described in the PGOU and Strategic Plan.

The new PGOU proposed a change in urban priorities with regard to public space, which has physical limitations. The priority moved to pedestrians and walking, particularly in the

historic center (Seville City Hall, 2000). One of the first actions to be taken by the new PGOU in this respect, and perhaps the most radical, was the pedestrianization of the “ceremonial avenue” in the city’s downtown, next to the Cathedral.

The impact on the city’s image, on the improvement of the urban quality of spaces that had become a central bus station (Plaza Nueva) or heritage at risk, such as the Cathedral façade (which was passed by 900 buses each day) was evident and notable. Once the works were concluded, other important pedestrianization projects were carried out in the historic center and on other commercial streets.

The restoration of the city’s image was also helped greatly by the execution of architectural showpieces, such as the Metropol Parasol by the architect Jürgen Mayer, a project popularly known as “las Setas” (Webb, 2011) (Shapiro, 2011) and the Torre Pelli skyscrapers.

III.2. Changes in urban and metropolitan mobility

The new PGOU led to a profound change in the city’s mobility model in three key areas. It moved the priority from the private vehicle to promoting public transport, from a network based on access to the urban center to a metropolitan conception of accessibility, including neighboring municipalities and from gasoil and gas based transport to electric transport and cycling. These objectives materialized primarily in three of the current symbols of sustainable mobility in Seville: Metro Line 1, the tram and investment in cycling. (García García and others, 2009). With regard to cycling, Seville has developed an extensive network of 80 miles of cycle lanes. Bicycle use in the city is calculated to be 70,000 journeys a day, which assumes that 9% of transportation is done by bicycle in a model that has received much praise and international commendations.

III.3. Changes in the economic model

Seville’s economic activity increased by 46% between 2000 and 2007, measured by activities subject to Business Activities Tax (IAE). Of the economic activities sectors, it was the industrial sector that experienced most growth, given that it was dedicated to services, the main economic activity sector.

Seville’s per capita GDP was 74.2% of the national average in 2000. Since 1992 it had stopped converging with Spain. Between then and 2005, convergence with the national average grew at a sustained rate until it reached 81.2% of the Spanish average. The city’s unemployment rate, which in 2001 was 18.9%, fell during this period by 6.8%, hitting a historical minimum in 2005 with 10.5% (Sevilla Global, 2009).

The growth bases of Seville and its urban region are no different, basically speaking, from those of the rest of Spain, with a construction sector and auxiliary sectors such as motors (Caravaca Barroso and García García, 2009), which also explains its current problems after the property bubble burst, (Cano Fuentes, 2013), and service and commercial sectors established on the strong growth of consumption during this cycle of growth.

The overall vision of Seville’s economy during that decade would not be complete if no mention were made of this decade’s final years, which were intensely marked by the global and national economic crisis. Seville’s provincial GDP fell by 3.3% in 2009 alone. Public

bids dropped from 1.7 billion euros in 2008 to 600 million in 2010 (-65%) and the unemployment rate rose from 12.4% in late 2007 to 20.8% in late 2010, with 33,600 more unemployed people in the city (Sevilla Global, 2010). though worse statistics were yet to come in the early years of the next decade.

III.4. Changes in the social model

Despite this expansive economic cycle outlined above, during the first decade of the 21st century, the city was still dealing with significant social problems concentrated in certain areas and that required a solution in this first decade of the 21st century.

With an investment of over 108 million euros, the Neighborhood Plan was carried out during the 2005-2007 period, covering 67 areas of urban improvement and roads spread out over the entire city, el Plan de Barrios. The city's most significant case of inequality, social exclusion and marginalization is located in a group of neighborhoods that make up the sector called Polígono Sur. The Andalusian Government, in coordination with City Hall and the national government delegation, initiated in 2003 the Comprehensive Polígono Sur Plan, whose main new aspect consisted of executing a plan where inhabitants of the zone would participate and the different services and administrations would be coordinated under a single figure called the Polígono Sur Commissioner.

III.5. Change in the values system

The vision of Seville's evolution in recent years would not be complete without looking at the values system and the community's self-image.

Values of maintaining and conserving traditions in every respect definitely occupy a central place in the city's mental cartography. We must agree that in the world of intellectuals and opinion generators, through books and articles, defenders of the most traditionalist subculture have borne much weight, based on the belief that the city's future can never be better than its past. Nonetheless, it is important to ask ourselves if all citizens participate in this subculture and if it is a majority subculture. And here we begin to consider a feature of the Sevillian personality that explains a lot: ambivalence. Ambivalence is a characteristic of communities with a long history, who have seen many things happen and hold onto ancient memories of events, which in general makes them distant and dual, often as a defense mechanism, which demonstrates their realistic sensibilities and ability to adapt. (Rodríguez Sacristán, 2010).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

During the first decade of the 21st century, the city of Seville was able to take advantage of the positive national economic situation to carry out significant changes in different key urban dimensions (mobility, public space, urban quality, facilities, housing, economic development) that formed a coherent part of a model expressly established during the planning of the early years of the century: the General Urban Development Plan and Strategic Plan.

The dimension, continuity and medium-term effect of this renewal is currently influenced and called into question by the intense economic crisis being experienced by the city with extremely high unemployment figures and the slow economic pulse of all sectors except tourism, which still present some growth data.

The current city model and its extension and pledge may have gained prestige with the passing of the years and seem to have the support of the majority of citizens. An important reflection is that the social urge to participate in political construction at all levels is also a fact at an urban level, and in the near future it may not be possible to consider the development of urban renewal processes, such as those undertaken in the city of Seville in the late 1980s and first decade of this century, without the presence and direct participation of citizens increasingly connected, increasingly demanding to control public management and increasingly active and activist.