

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, GOVERNANCE OF THE TERRITORY AND LANDSCAPE IN THE REGION OF MADRID

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I. PARTICIPATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE TERRITORY: A REFLECTION FROM THE REGION OF MADRID

On what rung of this hypothetical ladder is territorial and town planning in Spain and in the Region of Madrid? The conclusion is clear: The involvement of citizens and social partners is still an unresolved matter in territorial and town planning. There is an authentic state of flux of participative processes on a local scale, many of which are directly or indirectly related to the future of the city and the territories commenced in a significant number of municipalities as from the second half of the nineties. The methodological and participative progress marked by the Strategic Plans, Local Agendas 21 and other similar initiatives coexist in many municipalities with town planning processes developed with a strong technocratic component, with no clear links between the different instruments of reflection and decision-making on the future of the territories. The scope of participation and the methodological change in regulated town planning processes has been very scarce.

Analysis of the national Land Act (Act 8/2007 of 28 May) and of the majority of the regional legislation confirms and reflects something very frequent as regards participation and town planning in Spain: the existence of a very advanced and well-structured discourse that commits to the promotion of participation, but which is not accompanied by similar progress in specific instruments to achieve this. Progress has been much more intense in development plan environmental assessment procedures, with transfer of participation on issues that, on many occasions, are not only fundamentally environmental, but also concern the determination of the municipalities' territorial model.

The reduced scope of citizen control over planning instruments has been parallel to what has been considered an intensification in the environmental control of the plans, subject to an increasingly comprehensive and complex environmental and sectorial assessment procedure. Experience in recent years shows that the addition of environmental reports has not been

sufficient as an instrument to rationalise town planning. The great problem faced by the technical services of Madrid's environmental and town planning departments (currently merged in one council) is that they have to inform and respond to municipal town planning initiatives without having a territorial strategy document or sub-regional territorial plan that guides and co-ordinates municipal urban development initiatives. As a result, the definition of the Region's future is left to chance in the juxtaposition of the municipal town planning initiatives. This situation arises in a context in which a large part of the master zoning plans presented propose extremely significant expansions of the buildable surface area and the municipal demographic and residential ceilings.

The non-existence of supra-municipal documents that set the basic guidelines for the territorial organisation of the Region transfers great responsibility in decision-making to the technical services on issues that, on many occasions, have content that is more political and strategic than environmental. Furthermore, these technical services have insufficient human resources and the personnel are totally overwhelmed by the number and importance of the town planning decisions. As a consequence of this, the already slow processing of town planning instruments is decelerating even more, lengthening the approval periods and delaying the transfer of the proposals included in the plans to the territory. Undoubtedly, and apart from the developers' interest in quickly obtaining land ready for building, the current situation contributes to reinforcing a rather opaque land market and is indirectly a clear incentive for speculation and non-transparent decisions.

The need to simplify the planning process and shorten the processing period is increasingly evident, not only for financial reasons, but also as a means of achieving a more transparent process and facilitating the incorporation of citizens and social partners in decision-making. It is very complex for any citizen to even follow a town planning procedure, let alone remain involved when it takes more than five years to see the light. The urgency of simplifying can also be extended to the environmental - and now also sustainability - assessment procedure for plans and programmes; in contrast to the trend towards new reports designed to expand and increase their control, experience should move the public administrations to define a single report with greater content and which also gives the social partners greater input. Logically, simplification of procedures does not guarantee the possibility of greater social involvement in town and territorial construction, nor does it ensure greater transparency, unless it is accompanied by specific measures to favour information and participation rights.

II. ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF THE LANDSCAPE DYNAMICS IN THE REGION OF MADRID

In the last decade the Region of Madrid has undergone a true urban development and demographic explosion. Throughout the decade of the nineties, the region increased its built-up surface area by more than 30,000 hectares (47%), according to data in the *Corine Land Cover Project*; residential developments have risen by 43% since 1991, with an increase of 550,000 properties between 2001 and 2006, whilst the population grew by more than one million inhabitants between 1996 and 2007. At the same time there has been intensive creation of new transport infrastructure, however, these dynamics have lacked the guidance of a regional territorial strategy. In fact, during the last decade, the Region of Madrid's

clearest strategy has been precisely to neither define nor set out its territorial project in a public document.

What is the social perception of this intense transformation process? In order to clarify this question, below we present some of the results of the study carried out within the framework of a project commissioned by the Region of Madrid. The project's aim was to study in greater depth the characterisation of the region's landscape, defining and evaluating types and units of landscape, defining its dynamics and proposing management criteria. It also included a survey for the population as a whole, the aim of which was to establish the social perception of the landscape and its dynamics.

The following points can be highlighted among the results of the survey. Madrid's population perceives a highly developed environment full of high infrastructure density. Hence, 94.3% of those surveyed state they are very and fairly in agreement with the description of Region's landscape as developed, whilst 87% considers that it has many infrastructures. However, perhaps the most striking element of the perception that Madrid's inhabitants have of their landscape is the absence of rural and specifically agricultural elements, as only 23.8% identify them as such. Both this and the other answers clearly show that Madrid's landscape is perceived as an environment of contrasts between the dominant urban spaces and natural areas, the latter almost exclusively identified with the Sierra del Guadarrama mountains. The population does not seem, however, to clearly perceive the Region of Madrid as having a predominantly agricultural nature, despite the fact that, according to the *Corine Land Cover Project*, the spaces used for agriculture occupy between 30 and 40% of the region's surface area.

The assessment of the current state of Madrid's landscape is relatively optimistic, since 54.3% of the population "fairly agrees" that the landscape is well-preserved, although other readings could also be made as only 3% "very much agrees" with this statement. The perception of the recent evolution of Madrid's landscape is not, however, as favourable and there is widespread agreement that Madrid's landscapes are undergoing a rapid process of degradation. Thus, over 65% of the population considers that in recent years the loss in the region's landscape quality has accelerated, whilst only 9.3% disagree with this statement.

The citizens of Madrid clearly identify the dynamics related to development as the dominant element in the recent evolution of the landscape and also as the main cause of its loss in value. Hence, it is striking that 93.2% agrees that the developed surface area has been increased, whilst 80.6% also considers as a characteristic of the regional landscape the *excessive* presence of detached houses. The fact is that a large majority of Madrid's inhabitants perceive all the dynamics related to the artificialisation of the landscape that has occurred in recent years, both in terms of power lines and mobile phone masts and in terms of the increase in the quantity and density of transport infrastructure.

The last of the dimensions surveyed in the Madrid population were the proposals. A total of 14 proposals of possible strategies to preserve and manage the Region of Madrid's landscape were defined. The results have considerable similarities with other survey and participation processes carried out in other areas of the country, given that the population's first options are proposals of a proactive nature, that is, those that involve physical intervention on the territory and which will, therefore, have fast, specific and tangible results. Thus, the measures that over 85% of the population surveyed considered fairly or very necessary

include the regeneration of degraded spaces, forestation of deforested areas, burial of power lines and elimination of rubbish tips. Therefore, support is given to both regeneration and landscape improvement measures and proposals to eliminate some of the more significant impacts.

Regulatory proposals for increasing protected natural spaces, as well as the incorporation of specific measures to provide landscaping design criteria for urban development, also receive significantly high support. The population gives priority to those actions that do not involve restrictions for economic activities. Thus, all measures that contemplate containment of development or extraction activities or committing to compact growth received less support than the aforementioned proactive actions. However, the hierarchy of actions cannot conceal that 72.4% of Madrid's population considers that it is very or fairly necessary to limit development in the Region of Madrid as a strategy to maintain, regenerate, protect or enhance regional landscapes. Likewise, 65.8% of the population considers it very and fairly necessary to restrict dispersed urban growth and focus on compact growth. Support for restriction to exterior publicity and infrastructure construction is markedly more reduced. Finally, it is very striking that 60% of Madrid's population considers it very necessary to increase the protection of the landscape in the Region of Madrid (and 94% fairly or very necessary).

III. CONCLUSIONS

Knowing the perception that Madrid's inhabitants have of their landscape offers some keys that should be considered in the future governance of the regional territory. Perhaps one of the most outstanding aspects is the need to go into greater depth regarding the dissemination and knowledge of the Madrid region, with the aim of increasing the population's territorial culture. The absence of rural spaces in the collective imagination of Madrid's inhabitants is a significant indicator of the urgency in disseminating both the characteristics and the values of spaces that are key to maintaining the character of the region's landscape. In contrast, the population does consider that Madrid's landscape has been intensely degraded in recent years, a perception that should be yet another motive for the various administrations to place among their priorities the implementation of a landscape policy that corrects the territorial processes that have the greatest impact. The intense development in the Region of Madrid during the last decade is perceived clearly by the population, which considers that there are already excessive artificial elements present in their environment and, for the most part, calls for the restriction of development expansion. It would be desirable that this perception, which is also starting to become widely held in other regions of Spain, would contribute to future proposals limiting the use of territory for new urban developments.

In the Region of Madrid, and within Spain as a whole, one of the priorities on the agenda of the future territorial and development planning processes should be the incorporation of increasing levels of public participation. The gap needs to be narrowed between an apparently agreed discourse, which urges the promotion of the involvement of citizens and social partners, and the current practice in the preparation of plans, in which progress in this respect is less than would be desirable. The intensity and the instruments of participation need to be adapted to the social and cultural reality of the territory.

Experience in recent years also shows the need for the citizen participation processes that were set in motion by several local administrations (on the occasion of the preparation of the Local Agendas 21, Strategic Plans or other similar initiatives) to be linked to the proposals included in the urban development plans. In any case, for most regional and local governments, the first challenge today is still to make updated and understandable information on the current urban and territorial development plans available to citizens, through electronic means, and on a suitable scale. In too many instances, this endeavour for transparency and this first rung on the ladder of participation still remains a long way off. However, the challenge to improve transparency in town planning issues should not only lie with the regional and municipal governments, it is also urgent to improve information on the future of the processes related to development and their consequences in each one of the territories, a task in which university and research institutions and professional organisations should also be involved, together with the administrations responsible for town planning. Improving the population's territorial culture is a complex, long-lasting and deeply significant process that should commence with making intelligible and current information available to the population.

Another key factor to facilitate transparency and the incorporation of citizens and social partners in decision-making in town planning issues is the simplification and shortening of the processing periods for planning instruments and their environmental assessment. Analysis of the current situation in the Region of Madrid shows that multiplication of the reports necessary for the environmental assessment and approval of a plan does not guarantee the rational nature of the plan or provide citizens and social partners greater capacity to become involved. Furthermore, the decision-making process has become full of delays, uncertainties and great complexity, which only increase suspicions of discretionary actions. It would be a good time to study the convenience of choosing a simpler comprehensive report, faster to write and process, accompanied by specific and efficient actions to favour the right to information and participation.

