

## **The Changing City. Contradiction and Creativity in the Public Spaces of Historic City Centers**

### **1. The old European cities.**

Most European cities were conceived in the past, and have suffered from the new possibilities rather than benefited from them. Change could mean updating many aspects which could then become an improvement in the quality of life.

At the present time within the context of globalisation, suitable conditions are being created to facilitate changes in all aspects of our lives.

At the moment, inhabitants of the cities are working in parallel with the public administration. In some cases it is possible that the inhabitants are working in a more positive way or in some cases, transforming in a realistic way the spaces and uses that have been created and proposed by the public administrations.

The spatial distribution of the centre of the cities is at a greater level of development than the population which make them up, and it is influenced moreover by the new inhabitants (fundamentally immigrants).

There have been changes in communication, in economy, etc. and these have been or will be transferred to the social and urban structure, creating new opportunities which will arise and must be adopted so that they can be used to our advantage.

These changes have been occurring in the urban and social structure of the city. It is the design that is transformed because the citizens change the administrations' projects with new urban forms for living in them and using them.

In particular, the characteristics of old cities with new planning and global homogenisation are changing and it is not easy work in this way. We must direct our focus on the definition of work in two directions:

On the one hand, there is the internal reaction as this global uniformity can be the reason for local differentiation, understood as the encouragement of differentiating positive aspects of change. Initially citizens usually capture these changes into practice but after that is the public administration and finally the market who incorporate these non-organized acts.

On the other hand, there is external action. As the standardisation of the cultural frontiers leads to a loss of individuality at all levels due to the use of criteria which are perhaps excessively close to the interests of the market and communication, this area is a negative aspect of the uniform development.

These aspects can make the city and its architecture a market product; a thematic city. This affects the architecture behind the city as a consequence of the competitiveness between cities with the normal identification of creativity and the mass media event. In this moment it is probably better to build a museum without art works that educate citizens for doing creative works.

Business art has a concrete end result and gives us something that we are expecting. The artist and the architects are the officials there is no risk in their choice. We are utilizing art as a hallmark of excellence to municipal, autonomic or state politic.

If we chose the "genius" of the moment we are making a safe no-risk choice and we are guaranteed image, but probably not a content. However, we can ask: Are there not risks in this choice?

Finally we can wonder:

Should we be optimistic about the present situation?

In addition, what is the current role of urban planning?

In the end, with these conditions, can we carry out a positive a program of urban renewal?.

We can summarize this as a like a dichotomy: Creativity and innovation VS utilitarianism dressed up artistically!

## **2. The city of Madrid.**

In this study we are going to analyse the city with a particularly keen eye and we can do this with two different and complementary visions of the city and its urban landscape.

On one hand a physical vision with the main component being on objective vision. On the other hand, the subjective vision of the city and in particular of its urban landscape.

Using central Madrid as the key reference, and using photography as a tool, I am working towards producing exciting images of the urban landscape of the capital.

The project work begun three years ago, I have used changing light, leading to a more experimental and abstract approach to capturing images that emerge as time progresses. I have taken photographs in a methodological way, thus moving away from a the personal vision.

With these images about uses, art – life, non-conventional design, of urban dwelling, squares, public facilities, infrastructure, etc., I examine the space and develop a clearly defined artistic approach to these photographic projects in public cultural spaces and buildings. I have researched a range of issues surrounding planning, architecture, art and photographic representation and have looked at the following questions:

- a) How do the citizens in public spaces and buildings use their spatial design?
- b) How do the citizens in the public spaces and buildings relate to their urban and social setting?

The answer to these questions has to be obtained in the following way: The first one requires a physical analysis of the urban landscape and its objective vision. We can improve the analysis in this way with new projects and also on a daily level by being very close to the citizens.

This daily interaction has normally taken place in the old spaces in the city. In the end, there are new urban uses and habits. However the new projects are often of little interest to normal citizens

Even the new projects and new spaces are possibly more inflexible than the old ones. Moreover the utilization of different and non-traditional materials and designs can interfere with its use.

In the city, on its physical level, these changes have taken place and we can study them principally in the public spaces of the squares and streets.

We can examine: a) texture (pavements); b) urban furniture (benches, streetlights, etc.); c) parked cars; d) traffic signs; e) rubbish bins and alternative rubbish disposal by citizens, etc.

The same but more evident relationship in the aspects shown previously is apparent:

- a) The relational city (the relational space of the city). This refers to the way in which the city provides spaces for communication and relationships between its citizens. A spontaneous city where the inhabitants are living.

The design comes first but the citizens change these projects with new forms for living it in them; not only the squares, streets and automobiles, but also the benches, chairs, lamps, etc., too.

In a particular sense the car, one of the most influential elements (beneficial and disturbing at the same time) on our quality of life, it is not suitable for our historic centres and therefore must adapt.

- b) The amazing city. The city that the inhabitants, the protagonists of these spaces, are living like a physical platform, a stage for them. As a physical platform in which the inhabitants live. In this sense it provides storage for them and sometimes the urban elements have been transformed into “urban inventions”.

In the end, there are new urban uses and habits in the old city, in its old or, sometimes, obsolete spaces. However with anonymous architecture (soul of the city) looking for a remote representative of hidden parts of the city.

- c) The skin of the city. Principally in squares and streets.

Firstly the horizontal surface with its pavements, which reflect the idea of the new projects. We can see that now to give the right way of this kind of intervention, is a very important question.

Secondly the vertical surface, where graffiti has developed; colours and textures.

We can see different urban elements:

- a) Traffic signs: diverse and fortuitous
- b) Shop windows: colour
- c) Graffiti. Very interesting like an example of different interventions and different degrees of attempted approximation.

In particular with graffiti we can see:

- a) Streets with anonymous and spontaneous walls
- b) Shop windows integrated
- c) Buildings: colouring – buildings as an, like a intellectually or commercial resource;
- d) Neighbourhood: council planning with a business concept.



**1. The Main Square.**



**2. The Main Square.**



**4. De la Paja Square.**

Finally, Another new and different point of view is possible:

- d) The sensitive city. The subjective vision of the city and in particular of its urban landscape.

This analysis is also done by photography, but in this case in a sensitive way, forcing a creative point of view of the city that reflects the most relevant aspects analysed through sensation.

The city is analysed like a platform where the citizens act. In the end, there is a city but with many different readings of it have chosen some of them.

In particular in some places, this subject has taken place on different levels and via different concepts.

The urban landscape can be analysed like a scenario with a subjective vision of the city because in our cities there is not only one city, there are many different cities!, perhaps one for each inhabitant living in and using the city.

In addition we could say that there is a different city for different moments. Changing light reflects on the buildings and spaces, and the habitants can see how the spaces also change not only in a general sense, but also in particular way for each of us.

Every visit to a city represents in addition, for each of us it depends on our individual moods or viewpoints, around its urban spaces. We use our moods, memories and past experiences as a subjective filter to interpret the city.

Why does the city sometimes look so friendly and at other times, so unwelcoming?.

At different moments we have different visions and so, we are using a multidirectional space with at least five dimensions: the three spatial dimensions, time, and our personal sensibility too.

### 3. The development of Madrid's urban centre.

The approach is the analysis of the development of Madrid's urban centre and the problems raised by the integration of nearby historical areas, areas that must benefit from opportunities generated by global development.

The city of Madrid with a population of approximately 5,000,000 inhabitants, clearly illustrates these problems both as regards on the one hand the intervention of public administrations and the role of public enterprise in urban development, and on the other hand the inhabitants and the use that has been made of these spaces. Moreover important changes have taken place in social factors and in the design of the new and old public spaces.



5. Graffiti close De la Paia Square.



6. Graffiti close Tirso de Molina Square.



7. Graffiti close Tirso de Molina Square.

Until now there has been tremendous passivity in the public sector as regards the global aspect. In the city centre some aspects have been functioning like a thematic city, mainly at the service of Madrid (XIX developments and in the periphery in recent years), particularly on weekends, but also during the week with a consolidated idea of a theme; a historical heritage park.

However, thanks to new uses in the old spaces by the people which are finally being created in the city, the opportunity may be there.

Fortunately, there are signs of change thanks to the new impulse given by the local corporation and fundamentally for an alternative use with new significance. It seems that the existing opportunities may be taken advantage of and alternatives offering a better quality of life than that which exists in the city centre may be established. Current passive growth may be alleviated by managing planned development and, fundamentally, by innovative uses by the population with an adequate analysis of the environment.



**8. The Main Square.**

As regards the analysis of the external influences such as the possibility of receiving tourists, the following should be taken into account:

- Positive Consequences are the creation of wealth and influence and an increase in the quality of human resources due to education and training offered by the city. There is also the possibility of the generation of more work due to growth.

A city which forms part of the heritage, a relatively small-sized nucleus inside a big city with the possibility of consolidating quality environment.

While the new development is going to have a significant quantitative impact on the demography, economy and social fabric, we will focus on its qualitative elements, especially if the opportunities granted by new uses and new ways of life are properly used.

The proposal merges very different elements together, resulting in very specific features.

On the one hand, global features (tube, bus, internet, new shopping centres, etc) must co-exist with very marked local factors (urban landscape, churches, squares, etc), but on the other hand, it is an example of unsustainable development with its high population density and poor environmental protection. At the same time, the people with their social and urban life with the spatial coordination in the streets and squares coordinate and consolidate an important urban area with its own possibilities

More precisely, we analyse the new use of old spaces. In the near future, how this urban area uses the opportunities offered by new technologies will be important, and therefore, must shift toward a new idea of a multiethnic and diverse city.

- Negative consequences, as regards a decrease in quality of life, which include the difficulties of rush hours and busy days, and the consequences deriving from the rise in prices of goods, such as housing, and services which are affected by the former.

Moreover lack of commerce, employment, education, etc. Entrepreneurial initiatives are lacking and there is a certain amount of exclusion as regards the provincial nuclei and the autonomous communities they belong to.

The development of a central area (Madrid) and how it impacts on other consolidated areas presents many problems:

- a) Resulting in the collusion of very different cultures, with a consequence being the difficulty in co-ordinating very different people, with their own problems and expectations.
- b) Difficulty integrating very different areas: on the one hand a degraded isolated area with very little heritage but certain potential socially and open to new alternatives, on the other hand several historical areas with less social potential but significant heritage
- c) The spatial distribution of the centre of the city is at a greater level of development than the population which makes it up, and is influenced moreover by the new inhabitants (immigrants fundamentally).

#### 4. The changing city.

The new urban use in old areas of the city center of Madrid have problems of a very different nature stemming from their history and the different ways of life, management and government styles.

As a consequence of the design of new public spaces and redefinitions of the old spaces many different questions arise. In this sense we can ask these questions:

- a) How were the spaces designed and how lives in them?
- b) These spaces absorbed influences from the people?
- c) Is a wide and clean design without inhabitants adequate for the public spaces?

The situation today, perhaps, it is very important in relation to design and deterioration wear and tear and obsolete public spaces and buildings. It is not only physical, it is fundamentally functional and in economic sense.

In the spatial context of architecture, there is a inexorable process of change. In this sense, the individual and social changes are related to the built – up context.

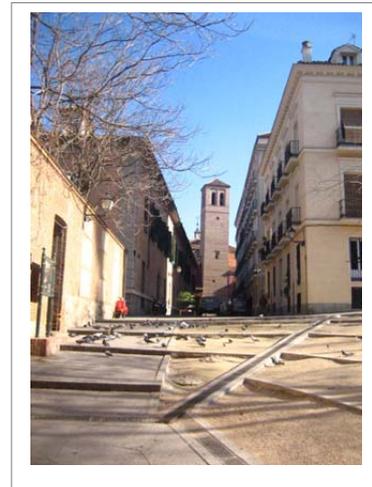
The factors that affect the life of the buildings, such as adaptability, the urban context and land value can give added values that the public and private agents can get back the cost of the interventions.

It suppose different point of view and has been doing a different signification to the city centre. The new elements are in the Quarters, in the Squares (Open and Cover spaces) and finally in the Streets.

Quarters:

With a representative sense and in a general context of the city:

- a) Rastro Market. Open space with a important significance in the quarter, an influenced area and as a tourist place too.
- b) De las Letras Quarter. It is part of a route through the old centre.



9. De la Paja Square.



10. De la Paja Square.

## Open Squares:

a) With a representative sense, and in several contexts. Always with a traffic diversion and a pedestrian intervention with a subterranean public car park. These public spaces have been completed and the surrounding area has pedestrianised streets.

- In the general context of the city:
  - a) Orient Square where the traffic was separated from the pedestrian space;
  - b) Main Square, in addition with the colour of the buildings walls;
  - c) Sol Square, the physical city centre and the centre too of a important commercial and representative area.
- In a significant area: Felipe II Square. It is a new space which very representative of new and “important projects”, with the pavement as the main protagonist and without organic elements.

b) In the local context of the old quarter:

- Old spaces are very representative of the new –projects, with the characteristics of the old public spaces (in contrast with the previous projects), with soft - surface pavements as the main protagonist and with organic elements. For example: Conde de Barajas Square and De la Paja Square.
- Old spaces with new projects without the characteristics of the old public spaces and with a emphasis on a functional sense: a) A flower market in Tirso de Molina Square; b) A artisan market in Santa Ana Square.

c) In the “residual” public spaces of the centre:

- With serious problems of delinquency such as Soledad Torres Acosta Square, which finally has been done in collaboration with the neighbours. The result is a wide space without character but it look seems to be safer.
- With problems of indefinitely of the space as Santo Domingo Square. Safer the local government should improve the layout of the area.



**11. The City Hall Square.**



**12. Santo Domingo Square.**



**13. Soledad Torres Acosta Square.**



**14. Reina Sofía Museum Square.**

### Streets:

- a) With a representative sense in the general context of the city: Castellana Avenue, the most important avenue in the city and with a projected extension: the Prado Avenue that has been the object of a important reform that has taken place in the last months.
- b) With a commercial sense and pedestrian projects. Among others it is convenient to highlight Arenal Street in the centre of the city and close to Sol Square.

In addition in a general context, and principally for their relevant importance in the city, we can highlight the Cover Squares with a representative sense and localised into a representative building, in particular in the Reina Sofia Museum and Atocha Station.

To recap I have been looked at some of the principal public spaces of the City centre of Madrid.

Its significance has not a global sense because, in general they are isolated public spaces without articulation between them. In addition its characteristics, its texture and use are changing and, I think, partially in negative sense.

However the inhabitants are using those public spaces in the same way as other times and probably this use will be the normal use in the future.

The several cases of the publics spaces mentioned above be shackled from that we can study it in different points of view with different readings and with different kinds of changes and always having a physical point of view, and so I have chosen some of them:

- a) Changes in the design of the city.

As a consequence of this creativity and definition of spaces have taken on assume new alternative functions.

By taking private and public spaces that collect new and alternative uses of the design, people are sometimes ahead of designers.

- b) Changes in the significance of the historic public spaces.

We can do this study from different points of view. Without the initial significant old facades are taken and reformed into a new and commercial projects:

1. Historic spaces and museums are becoming thematic spaces. For example the Main square and the Orient square which sometimes have been rented for use by the public administration and by for the private interests.
2. Historic buildings and museums are becoming commercial centres. For example Atocha Station and the ABC Building where some rested a few part of the old construction remains and a new and very different use has been adapted.



**15. Atocha Station Square.**



**16. De la Paja Square.**

c) Changes in how we are living the public spaces.

Comparison between modern and traditional ways of design, in opposition or working together?

In this way we can play with contrapositions between them and examine how the places have been used. It is necessary note that in recent years several squares and public spaces in the centre of Madrid have been reformed in a attempt and improve their appearance and function.

## 5. Conclusions.

Although it is not easy to choose the most appropriate developments, the present time may be crucial when planning the future of our cities. Action must be taken in the light of the general approach while taking the following questions into account:

> Mixed strategy combining and coordinating liberty and planning.

With different points of view. Although the unifying objective would be long-term, it would be advisable to include partial /additional objectives which are welcome and involve people in the urban process (participation, civic culture and social consensus).

> Diversification.

The opposite to uniformity and consolidation of the existing elements. Initiative and competitiveness as regards the management of the options to be developed in the urban environment.

Diversity Management. Several approaches in relation to the way people live. Quality of Life - quality growth, by reaching a consensus on urban development, sharing out posts and benefits and involving the population in the illusion of a city project. This will affect the production and use not only of HOUSING but also PUBLIC SPACES (SQUARES AND STREETS), and lead to competitive results in relation to other urban areas.

> Flexibility and approaches.

The near future and the adaptation of the possibilities provided by new technologies and the progress which can fit in with a new concept of city. This is necessary if the possibilities arising from this new development are not to be wasted (as has sometimes occurred).

Finally we can make some remarks:

The social, spatial and urban morphology of cities is changing and consequently, we need to reconsider how we approach cities.

Therefore, creativity in the acceptance of new social approaches and criteria which favour the standard of living of the community and the participation of citizens could lead to these aspects finally materialising and it could encourage the community to get involved with these new projects.

In the end about our planning, we can say that the urbanism makes the proposal about how to use public spaces and finally, the people use it in relation with their preferences and not necessarily as originally proposed.

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