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CONCEPT AND ISSUES OF THE EUSS2013

0 INTRODUCTION

AT a time of abrupt changes, when the old urban models are quickly becoming obsolete and inefficient, there is an opportunity to look into the future to envisage new strategies. We intend to work on the wounds inflicted on the city by speculative urbanism: there is a need to bring into question the existing model of urban growth, working from the present situation towards new visions to recycle our cities. This is the opportunity to put forward proposals to challenge uncontrolled urban growth; to review the situation of the new suburban territories, and to regenerate the consolidated fabric of the inner city.

Conversely to speculative planning, new strategies may consider how to enhance citizen participation in the making of the city. Would a bottom-up urbanism be possible that deals in a more responsible manner with people's needs? Instead of simplistic speculative solutions we need a multiple and diverse urbanism, capable of adapting to complex situations. New strategies may include reusing the city, rethinking the territory, generating activity, diversity, complexity and density.

The 4th European Urban Summer School (EUSS), hosted by the Polytechnic School at the CEU San Pablo University in September 2013, has been an invitation to develop new ways of thinking of, and tools to respond to emerging issues about the future of post speculative cities. It aims to bring together postgraduate students, emerging and experienced academics and young and established design and planning professionals from all over Europe (and further away) to develop a better understanding of some of the most pressing contemporary issues related to the built environment and to amplify and strengthen the links between planning, design-relevant research and professional practice.

WHY MADRID?

The burst of the housing bubble in Spain has triggered a deep crisis regarding the city as project. Latent problems have emerged, such as the lack of a territorial model, the unsustainability of urban projects, precariousness of resources and urban poverty. The economic crisis and the different administrative problems have left behind ghost cities and abandoned oversized urban projects. All these aspects are in the midst of a debate over flexibility in urban planning enhanced by the process of revision of the current Madrid Master Plan, carried out by the local administration.

Participants in the EUSS explored the possibilities of spatial planning to deal with present day challenges affecting European cities within the context of a deep economic crisis. Based on the case of the city of Madrid as an example of expansive urban growth, the course aimed to recognise the economic, cultural, social and environmental assets and shortcomings of the recent urban planning practices in Europe, and to identify new planning visions for contemporary cities.

For this purpose, participants explored their ideas approaching the city from three different perspectives:

Existing fabric: After decades of urban improvement, the central area still has some patches of urban deprivation in need of regeneration projects which aim to improve the existing conditions. We propose a reflection on the problems and possibilities of the consolidated city. What new strategies can be implemented? How to preserve complexity and social diversity while improving living conditions?

Urban voids: Within the compact city, empty or under-used areas are requiring planning references and urban design proposals to allocate strategic urban demands. The next development of the city will take place within its limits, and the time of grand urban projects seems to be over. The idea is to locate potential sites of urban interest and work with them. Can we envisage new approaches for the urban design of our cities, which are sustainable, as well as exciting and responsible? Can we change the city from within?

Border areas: The construction boom in Madrid took shape in terms of a number of urban projects on the outskirts of the city. Often oversized and with deficient urban spaces, these projects remain in some cases uncompleted or largely uninhabited. In others they just leave enormous areas of vacant land raising a big question mark regarding the future of the city. We propose to work, reflect and develop strategies against the backdrop of these territories. Can we work with the reality of these failed urban fragments? How can we deal with this no-man's land that lies amidst a waste of infrastructures, new housing developments and old neighbourhoods?

