

THE GLOBAL CITY: SOCIAL POLARIZATION AND URBAN METASTASIS. THE CASE OF MADRID

E. García Pérez¹, P. Molina Costa²

¹ Observatorio Metropolitano¹, c/ Piamonte 12, 3^oI, 28004 Madrid. evitalost@yahoo.es

² Observatorio Metropolitano, c/ Trafalgar 24, 2^oB, 28010 Madrid. patmola@yahoo.es

Abstract:

This paper focuses on the big transformation experienced by the city of Madrid in the last years, due to the impact of globalization in local territorial dynamics. The insertion of the city in global economy has come together with an accelerated economic growth and the spectacular expansion of Spanish corporative capital. These processes have printed a strong social footprint in the territory: big growth of transnational immigration, deeper rent polarization and new spatial segregation dynamics. At the same time, an expanding real state market cycle has caused a geometrical growth of the number of houses built in the region.

We will analyze how these financial-real state global dynamics have shaped the local territory of Madrid's region, how these transformations have happened, in which ways this change of scale is taking place in the physical reality, and which territorial model it entails, as well as the consequences derived at all levels.

Keywords: Globalization, Urban planning, Urban governance, Public participation, Inequality.

Madrid goes global

Apparently, that Madrid has become a “model for success” doesn't even need a statistical confirmation. The images of the urban explosion keep

¹ The Observatorio Metropolitano (Metropolitan Observatory) is a network of researchers and activists that takes as its object of intervention and research the metropolitan area of Madrid. Its purpose to produce analysis, information and cartography of a metropolitan reality in fast transformation that, in order to be engaged in an alternative political articulation, requires a conceptual precision that can only be reached by collective subjects mixing both transdisciplinary diverse knowledges, as much as hybrid vocations between politics and expertising. The main work of the Observatorio Metropolitano has been the edition of the collective book “*Madrid ¿la suma de todos? Globalización, territorio, desigualdad*” (Madrid, Traficantes de Sueños, 2007). The names signing this article, thus, simply enunciate a much broader research process, whose real subject can only be recognized in the collective name of “Observatorio Metropolitano”. For more information, please visit www.observatoriometropolitano.org.

reproducing themselves restlessly: the crane forests spotting its geography, new building areas or new shining skyscrapers, the multiethnic projection of many neighbourhoods, the spider web like infrastructure network following a seemingly unstoppable dynamic. In order to have a wider picture, we can add some data to these images: according to both its economical and demographical size, Madrid has reached the place as the third metropolis in the European Union, while its per capita income places it in the list of the 20 wealthiest regions in the Union. In only seven years (2000-2006), its population has grown by more than one million inhabitants and there are already more than 800.000 foreigners registered in the region of Madrid.

But beyond these figures, the key question is: where does this huge growth come from? How is it brought about? What characterizes, if existing, the “Madrid Model”? We have to list three basic aspects that have contributed to that explosion, all of them being much related to a very favourable globalisation process for Madrid (Rodríguez, E. 2007a).

1. *The consolidation of Madrid as a turistic centre, logistics and financial hub of international significance.* Madrid Barajas Airport has become the fourth largest in Europe by passenger volume and a major hub for intercontinental routes between Europe, Latin America and Northern Africa. In fact, this city is the world’s second conference and fair centre, only behind London. The size of its domestic market has built an important logistics muscle, based upon a radial transportation network that has placed Madrid as one of the most important European logistic platforms. Its global projection has been strengthened by a rather important stock market: while only being in a fourth or fifth European place, it has achieved great international acknowledgment.

2. *The formation of a decisional apparatus comprising operational headquarters and central offices of many multinational companies.* The 15-year-gap of international growth of the Spanish capitals came hand in hand with the setting-up of a group of Spanish corporations who have performed a major foreign assets buying policy. Thus, Madrid is today the eighth city in the world by number of head offices of large companies: it hosts 8 of the 500 listed in *Fortune* and 23 of the 2,000 biggest world companies. Being those processes based upon a strong privatisation and deregulation policy of such important sectors as the financial, energy and telecommunication markets, and protected (and also promoted) by the euro stronghold, doesn’t make any change to the result of Madrid becoming the decision centre of production and value cycles that are executed in a multiregional territorial scale.

3. *The upbringing of agglomeration economies in high value-added sectors such as advanced services to production.* The global projection of Madrid has been supported by a virtuous feedback with an uprising and highly productive army of advisors, publicists, lawyers, computer specialists, engineers, architects and all kind of professionals who have provided and supplied much of the informational and cultural inputs needed to make intelligent and agile corporation decision apparatus. The importance of this sector, which is already the main niche of well-paid and skilled jobs in the metropolitan area is also manifested in its ability to export and sell services to both the rest of the country, to Europe and even to Latin America.

The new centrality of Madrid, supported primarily on the three factors mentioned above, is anyhow far away from being completely satisfactory. The “success model”, resounding in macroeconomical terms, shows many other faces when considering other aspects such as social impacts and ways of governance.

On the one hand, Madrid going global can only be characterized by the archetypical fisionomy of the social dualization. The key aspects of globalization have generated specialised, usually highly remunerated job markets, but, obviously, that *global class* or *working rich* (as they have been defined elsewhere), has been counterbalanced by a parallel explosion of a number of precarious and underpaid jobs, corresponding to subsidiary sectors: jobs in hotels, catering, cleaning and security, domestic employment and the care sector, in the entertainment industry and moreover in construction and logistics. Jobs that usually have a high level of eventuality and rotation and that make up the bulk of the workload generated by the new metropolitan condition. Madrid region is, thus, the Spanish region with the biggest gap between higher and lower wages. That polarisation process presents, moreover, two factors that made it much more worrying: first, the growing feminization and ethnicization of the precarious work force: 60% of Madrid’s workers are foreigners and/or women, a percentage that tends to increase as we descend in the scale of occupations and income (Rodríguez, E. 2007b). Otherwise, differences in income are taking a particular spatial expression in the form of an increasing spatial segregation, characterized by the flight of middle and high incomes to the new suburban areas, typically characterized by single-family housing and individual motorized mobility, in parallel to the process of reconquering of the urban centres and gentrification of large parts of the city.

On the other hand, we can't forget that the new shiny global Madrid, pictured in the prints of the new corporation skyscrapers, has changed gradually, definitely and permanently the map of priorities and political influences. A new corporate oligarchy, the one that has been projected at international level, reclaims that, only by operating from it, it allegedly benefits the city. The recent prosperity, the influx of capital and public policy advocacy and the support of business opportunities, enabled and accelerated housing markets between 1998 and 2006 as perhaps never before in the history of the city (as in the rest of the country). Not paradoxically, the greater benefit of that financial orgy has gone to those same corporations. Besides, they have been able to subordinate public policies to their own benefit in an accumulative process of new inversions in infrastructures, added value hunting and public income transfers.

It is this "growth machine" that Madrid has been transformed into, in addition to the seemingly inevitable crisis of its model, what will be examined in the rest of this paper. How the dynamics that have entered Madrid in global economic flows are reflected in the physical territory, and under what forms of urban governance and management have they been implemented? We will examine what territorial model it entails, as well as the challenges and dangers it involves.

Dynamics of urban and territorial transformation

The sustained growth of real market prices in the last decade has provided the financial energy for an extraordinary urban explosion that has worked together, feeding each other, with the new global centrality of Madrid. Focusing on that reverberation, two different phenomena can be distinguished, each one of them related to one of the administrations that govern Madrid (at municipal and at regional levels). The municipal policies have been dedicated to create an urban scenario appropriate to the new global dynamics, using a so-called strategy of "urban branding". At regional level, the city has been involved in a territorial design policy based upon the production of land and housing as the key factor for economic growth, which has led to a big metropolitan expansion that has absorbed the strength of the real market sector and has worked as an experimentation, investment and development camp for the giant construction and real state corporations.

a. Large urban operations

The municipal government has shown a growing interest in urban intervention and development as almost the only available mechanism for

political action. The operations made during the last decade follow, in that sense, two different lines: on the one hand, the *urban acupuncture* in the consolidated urban fabric and, on the other hand, those operations focused in producing large amounts of residential land that announce an urban model that is also reproduced at metropolitan scale.

Operations on the built environment have been aimed at improving the “urban scenery”, using, in first place, projects as emblematic as controversial: just to mention some of them, we can list the remodelling of the Prado-Recoletos Axis, the Madrid Río project and the Olympic Games candidature facilities, together with the whole remodelling of the historical centre (that includes the refurbishment of many public spaces and historic markets) and the improvement of some impoverished neighbourhoods (as the area of Paseo de la Dirección in the district of Tetuán). All of them have undoubtedly contributed to the progressive commodification of public space, turned into mere advertising stand and space for controlling the citizen’s insecurity. The result of these operations has only been a new process of museumization of the city centre.

Moreover, we find the projects of creating city *ex novo*, starting from big urban voids, usually on large public plots left without consolidation (as Chamartín and Campamento operations), the well known “Urban Planning Action Projects”, (“PAUs”, by their Spanish acronym) and other residential developments. Some of them have also responded to the new urban policy that enforces the role of Madrid as a global city, through the enlargement of the airport, the creation of a new financial centre (the “Four Towers” centre), the attraction of capitals (the enlargement of the conference and fair centre IFEMA) and the investment in transport infrastructures (the so-called “Calle 30”, the burial of the first ring road of Madrid that will keep the municipal corporation in debt for the next 30 years). In any case, in all these operations developed in public land, generation of added value (both for private companies and public organisms) has prevailed over functional balance, sustainability or social cohesion, to the extent that they have promoted a greater specialization of the areas, segregation practices, and urban inequality.

Take only one example here. The "Four Towers Dotacional Centre", the most scandalous of these operations, has drawn the new skyline of Madrid with four large skyscrapers to turn the headquarters of large corporations, can only be understood as a real state 'big hit'. Indeed, this complex has been built on the former sports ground housing the facilities of the Real Madrid Football Club. Through a reclassification of the land made by the municipal government, the initial sports use has change to offices and

commercial use, bringing the resulting in an incredible revaluation of land and capital gains that would repay the historic debt of the Club. Simultaneously, these football facilities have been moved to a peripheral area near the airport bought at rural land price –very cheap-, land which also included what is going to become a luxury residential development (Valdebebas). Moreover this operation means to lose the opportunity to rebalance the city environment, since the original conception of the area was to house a large park that would serve at metropolitan level and would have allowed green continuity with other major green areas. The beneficiary was not the only Real Madrid, but especially the company from its former president, ACS, receiving both the construction of a new skyscraper and the new neighbourhood (gated-community like) adjacent to the new Valdebebas Sports City. This action may nevertheless be small compared to what is expected from the so-called Chamartín Operation, on the grounds of a major train station, even here on public land: a major refurbishment that involves the construction of at least 16,000 homes, 10 or 12 major skyscrapers and the extension of 2.8 kilometres of the main axis of the city, Paseo de la Castellana, and its connection with the M-30 and M-40 ring roads.

Moreover, the municipality of Madrid also launched an ambitious program of building new neighbourhoods (the PAUs) justified after the demand for housing of young people in the city. These new neighbourhoods are important both in qualitative terms –as they occupy all vacant land in the municipality-, and in quantitative terms –for in total it is planned to build 200,000 new homes that could accommodate over 500,000 people-. These new neighbourhoods are perhaps paradigmatic of the new urban model, which we will see expanded in the metropolitan area. Development units are larger and less dense, with a uniform morphology, based on a grid of closed blocks with a private interior space, all hanging on infrastructure and with green areas that act as protection barriers, but where there is no trace of true public spaces. In short, a smooth and uniform social space.

b. The production of urban land and housing as a key factor of economic growth

Beyond the municipality, within the metropolitan area, the impacts of this new economic and social model have severely affected the territorial model. In this sense it is necessary to recognize two broad headings: the exponential growth of actual and potential urbanized land, and the development of large communication infrastructures in order to support such an expansion of the urban region.

The intensive use of land as a key factor of economic growth has led Madrid's region to increase its "committed land"² by 49% compared with a 12% growth of the population, what means that it has mortgaged the amount of land equivalent to half of what it has grown throughout its history (Calvo, García, Molina, et al., 2007). We see therefore that there is a clear gap between supply (land available for housing) and theoretical demand (population growth). Disaggregating these data of "committed land" by municipality, we note that over 16% of the municipalities of Madrid's region have doubled the land area occupied between 1993 and 2003. In fact, the relative values of this growth reach a 400% and 600% in some towns, reaching almost a 900% in the most extreme case of Arroyomolinos.

An analysis of these growth data, sorted according to the spatial and functional distribution of the metropolitan area, shows that the urban explosion has spread urban growth expectations on broad areas of the region previously considered peripheral. Dozens of municipalities are in process of reviewing their General Urban Plans (Master Plans). The territorial distribution of the newly planned houses (around one million) seems to confirm this trend towards the expansion of the urban area of Madrid. According to this tendency, the centre will lose weight -despite the fact that so far it accounts for more than 50% of the population of the Community-, most of the growth will take place in suburban rings (40%) and in adjacent areas of the rest of the region (35%), being southern and eastern areas those which account for most of future developments. It is very important to highlight the predictable growth of areas that had until now remained completely outside of the metropolitan dynamics (Sierra Norte, Sierra de Guadarrama, the southeast Vegas and the southern boundary of the region). Even beyond the Madrid region, the urban explosion is moving to neighbouring provinces: Segovia, Avila, Guadalajara and Toledo.

Predictably, this veritable explosion has been promoted by urban policy based on increasing the supply of land, invariably covered by the argument that the cause of housing price increase was the scarcity of available land and the solution to this problem was in the market liberalization. This idea is supported by the Autonomous Land Law passed in 2001³, heir to the 1998 state law, which is known as the "law of everything available for urbanization," as it requires classifying all land as potential urban land unless a sectorial law identifies the need to protect it (rivers, mountains,

² We call "committed land" to the addition of actual and potential urban land.

³ Ley 9/2001, de 17 de julio, del Suelo de la Comunidad de Madrid.

forests, etc.). However, this policy of liberalization has not led to the decline in housing prices, quite the contrary.

This huge display of urbanization has been supported in the development of large communication infrastructures that have served as a structural framework for the territorial development, which has enabled a huge growth in the construction sector, particularly through the transfer of a large amount of public money for the construction and the financial sector. As an example, we can mention the burial of the M-30 highway, that was meant to cost 4,000 million euros and will finally entail the payment in interests of another 12,000 o 15,000 million euros in the next 40 years. For the works, the project was divided into several pieces to be distributed among the main Spanish construction companies, so that everyone had its “piece of the cake”.

Through this display, a large amount of land that was unconnected before has been revalued, as it is now strategically well placed due to the new infrastructures. Therefore, unconnected fragments of the city are built, which has led to a disperse suburban model that entails more need to travel, more traffic congestion, etc. However, Madrid is among the great cities of Europe the one which has more kilometres of roads per million inhabitants, in total over 1,000 km. and yet the regional government is planning to build 200 km. more.

The urban explosion and inflation of infrastructures have been the two key factors in the formation of a new metropolitan model, characterized by urban sprawl and the negative consequences arising from it. Indeed, on one hand, the metropolitan area is growing by "jumps" to produce fragments of the city unconnected from existing urban fabric. This growth has been performed without any further environmental consideration, often occupying or threatening natural areas in the region, under the umbrella of a regional government that promotes urban growth ahead of protecting natural areas, and rewards urban sprawl, as well as unsustainable equipments such as golf courses. Of course, this growth model is also characterized by its terrible efficiency both in terms of occupation of the territory as regarding the wastage of resources (including unrecoverable ones as soil) and energy, which is already resulting in problems of water supply and a huge water deficit in the region. Likewise, it is an urban model based on hypermobility which is resulting in obvious problems such as permanent circulatory collapse and poor air quality, making Madrid one of the most polluted cities in Europe. Also, this model is causing the increase of easements and indirect uses of urban metabolism, that is, the proliferation of production and waste facilities (landfills, incinerators,

gravel, cement, water treatment plants, power stations) invariably concentrated in lower income areas of the region (in particular the Southeast arc).

Given this model, the key issue is how to solve the limits of the urban region concerning the water supply, the circulatory collapse, the air pollution, or the dependence of the regional economy in sectors of unexpected evolution such as construction.

Urban governance and the crisis of the model

Madrid has been presented as a model of economic and social success, with its spectacular growth, that has been the reflection of its advantageous insertion into the global economy and of a financial and real estate engine that seemed to have no end. In this regard, the role of local governments has been to facilitate the private enforcement of a city model inequitable and unsustainable.

At this point, it is interesting to evaluate which are the forms of management and governance of the territory that have led to the transformations that we have described. Can we assume that Madrid has been incorporated in forms of governance to those described as *new urban entrepreneurialism* by English geographer D. Harvey (1989) for other western cities? In some sense it seems so, as shown by the kind of coalitions and alliances between different actors who build the city, with local government in a facilitative role and private actors assuming the implementation. These alliances are determining the direction of the urban project and the manner in which urban management has become a business.

“I want here to insist that urban "governance" means much more than urban "government". It is unfortunate that such of the literature (particularly in Britain) concentrates so much on the latter when the real power to reorganise urban life so often lies elsewhere or at least within a broader coalition of forces within which urban government and administration have only a facilitative and coordinating role to play. The power to organise space derives from a whole complex of forces mobilised by diverse social agent” (Harvey, 1989).

The first aspect highlighted by Harvey as a characteristic of this kind of urban governance is the strong partnership between the public and private sector and its business nature, in which private companies operate in conjunction with local authorities to attract external funding sources, direct investment or job creation. The implementation of their action is based on a

speculative design, where the public sector assumes the risk and the privates obtain the benefits. In Madrid, the most paradigmatic case of this partnership has been the remodelling of the M-30 ring road, which has meant a direct transfer of funds for major construction companies and banks, but also the operations we have described in the north of the city.

The second is the improvement of the competitive position of each city with respect to the spatial division of consumption, through the increase of the quality of life, the cultural innovation and the improvement of urban environment, all pursued with urban regeneration strategies focused in space as a place of consumption, leisure and events, and directly aimed at the attraction of tourists. This may be the direct cause of the creation of an identity of the city with the brand “¡Madrid!” as well as the candidacy for the organization of large events like the Olympic Games in 2012 and again in 2016.

Both aspects are working as well as tools for the acquisition of key functions of command and control in the context of competition between cities. Such functions of control and power need a position of centrality in communication networks worldwide. This is translated in substantial investments in infrastructure, of which the expansion of the Barajas airport may be an example, but also implies the need of a specialization of the city and the development of specific skills to meet the new activities, as explained above when describing the dynamics of incorporation of Madrid to the globalized economy.

The viability of the model described here should have been questioned by the outbreak of the current financial and real estate crisis. However, the situation is quite different. For the political class, the crisis is neither the clear manifestation of the failure of a model, nor the time of the alternatives. Rather, and perhaps expecting a deepening of the crisis, public policies seem to encourage a revival of the financial and real estate cycle, always trying to strengthen the new central position of Madrid. In this direction, the state has reacted by launching a series of anticyclical measures which merely "throw more fuel on the fire" and build an urban economic model that has proved to be unsustainable. It has adopted a Strategic Plan for Transport Infrastructure (Plan Estratégico de Infraestructuras de Transportes, PEIT) that plans to invest approximately 250,000 million euros until 2020, primarily to build more highways and high speed trains. Besides, the central government continues to feed the machine with direct subsidies to real estate developers and especially through the construction of nearly one million new public housing units, regardless of the data that show the oversizing of the Spanish housing

stock. However it is unlikely that all these houses can be built in the present scenario of economic recession, so the authorities have already announced their intention to restore the real state business through the intervention in the consolidated city. It is therefore likely that we assist to a "return to the city" framed by discourses of "urban regeneration", but in fact more oriented to the transformation, economic upgrading and gentrification of certain areas of the city centre, than to a real commitment towards the whole city and the diverse ways of inhabiting it.

Meanwhile, the crisis is expected to be reflected in the collapse of much of the families of Madrid trapped by unemployment and debt, who will probably suffer the tougher living conditions due to the expected wave of further privatization of public services, demanded by large companies that have no longer easy profit niches. As an example we are currently assisting to the privatization of the public health system in Madrid, as well as the capitalization of part of the public water company, a strategy of the regional government to obtain financial liquidity in times of crisis.

Conclusions and Proposals

“The new urban entrepreneurialism typically rests, then, on a public-private partnership focussing on investment and economic development with the speculative construction of place rather than amelioration of conditions within a particular territory as its immediate (though by no means exclusive) political and economic goal” (Harvey, 1989)

As we have explained before, this new *entrepreneurialism* uses the city and the territory as a form of economic production, resulting in urban public policies which leave aside the improvement of living conditions of the people in a certain territory, to mainly focus on economic profitability. It can be said that the aim of the new urban governance is to attract flows of highly mobile and flexible production, financing and consumption, and yet, as Harvey points out, these mechanisms have such a speculative character that it is impossible to predict exactly what package of measures will be successful and which will not.

Given this scenario, the question that arises is what role can urban planning play, what urbanism is possible in this context, and what alternatives there may be to this new urban model. First, it is necessary to reveal these new forms of urban governance, which are implemented within a framework of apparent consensus. Urban planning should not only focus on the physical conditions of the city and the territory, the morphology or the regulations,

even if it tries to steer it towards a greater respect for the environment or social issues. This means that we don't need to refound planning, but we need to understand to which interest the planning decisions are being subordinated. It is necessary, therefore, to recover the redistributive objective of urban planning: against the speech of competitiveness of cities in the global market and the attraction of investments from public and private, we should defend the city as the construction of the collective project of its inhabitants, as a space for individual and collective emancipation, and therefore the primary objective of any action should be to improve the quality of life of its inhabitants.

At present, this process of construction of the city and the territory will occur in a context of widespread economic and environmental crisis, and it is difficult to point in what direction it will evolve. We advance two possible directions:

- The situation could result in a strong environmental crisis and the collapse of the territorial model, requiring a new reformulation of capitalism, this time linked to the notion of limit. As exemplified in the case of Madrid's region, there is a strong contradiction between the current model of urban development and the physical limits of the territory where it displays, some of whose effects are the threat to natural areas, increased water consumption compared water supplies of the region, air pollution and related diseases, and the uneven distribution over the territory of the infrastructures of production and waste attached to the current urban metabolism. In this context one would expect a restructuring of the model attempting to adjust it to a new paradigm imposed by the physical limits. In this sense, we might think that the hegemonic blocs can not ignore the implications that this scenario of depletion of resources can have on their paradigm of continuous growth, as it is beginning to manifest not only in the advertising of energy companies (Iberdrola, Repsol) but also in the direction taken by certain government policies (the reduction of 20% of CO2 emission marked by the EU in 2020, and others).

- However, we can also expect a much more flexible resolution of the economic crisis that separates from the territory and environmental conditions, thus obviating the supposed rigid limits. Are there clear physical limits to the growth of Madrid? Can this situation lead to a process of containment and reflexivity on the part of the elites, or to a more intensive pattern of growth, through yet another reinvention of some kind of financial-real estate bubble?

In either case, the key question is: how can we seize this moment of crisis

and restructuring to develop alternatives? It doesn't seem that the economic and political elites are willing to a radical restructuring of the economic system, so until the crisis is not manifested in the form of social and political crisis it does not seem that there will be a "reform from above". It is also interesting to wonder how will the alliances between different hegemonic blocs in the region (real estate, financial, enterprise) be affected by the crisis, and what may occur if they are broken or if they will be reset again under the same logic, pushing the privatization and exploitation of other minor, but very safe, niches of profit (such as health, education and other public services).

We believe that alternatives must be built from the bottom at the local level. The city is materialized as an expression of life projects of different social groups and as the scenery of conflict between opposing projects. It is in this field, therefore, where the common interest of the citizens must put up a fight over the interests of the market and economic power:

- First, applying Gramsci's concept of hegemony, it is necessary to reveal the negative side effects of this urban model that enjoys an apparent consensus, for it is so assumed that it prevents both social mobilization and the transformation of the model. This is one of the goals that guide the work of the Observatorio Metropolitano and specifically the book "Madrid: ¿la suma de todos? Globalización, territorio, desigualdad" (Observatorio Metropolitano, 2007).

- Secondly, it is necessary to generate a critical capacity and a sense of ownership of space in the citizenship, through effective participation in the processes of space building, something highly unlikely under the current model of urban production. Participation, as we understand it, is the ability and right of the inhabitants of a territory to analyze critique and transform the environment in which they live, to build a city that represents their collective interests, to achieve, in short, their "right to the city".

From the Observatorio Metropolitano we are trying to combine and convey technical and activist knowledge, as we believe that only by getting involved in the formal and informal social networks we can intervene in this complex and changing territory that is Madrid, which is at the end of the day, our living space and, therefore, our stage of social and political struggle.

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