

**REGIONAL PLANNING AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE
URBAN GROWTH: A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE FROM CATALONIA**

Jordi Viguer i Pont

Attorney and planner at Uría Menéndez, Abogados.
Diagonal 514, 5th floor, 08006 Barcelona, Spain. jvp@uria.com

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the potential for regional planning to achieve the goal of sustainable urban growth.

Territorial governance has traditionally been based on local planning, while regional plans have had a secondary role. However, the limited scope of city plans seems to be insufficient to achieve the sustainable development objectives.

Regional plans are ideal for dealing with the core issues affecting sustainable urban growth, such as optimal land use and the adoption of integrated development policies. With this in mind, regional planners should assume a new methodology, orientated towards providing local authorities with practical guidelines. Fulfilment of these guidelines should be monitored to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures proposed. Also, as regional plans are more exposed to changes owing to their broader scope, the law should foresee softer and simpler procedures to bring their contents up to date.

Finally, the assumption of regional planning as a key instrument for territorial governance should also redefine the current role of local urban plans, turning them into more simplified and practical instruments.

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Keywords

Catalonia, regional planning, sustainable, territory.

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1. Preliminary considerations

This first section briefly summarise the main characteristics of Catalonia; its geography, demographic distribution, land uses and the role of public and private agents in defining how its territory is regulated¹.

1.1. Geography

Catalonia is a Spanish autonomous community bordered to the east by the Mediterranean Sea, to the north by France and Andorra, and to the west and south by the autonomous communities of Aragon and Valencia, respectively.

It covers an area of 32,114 km² and has 580 km of coast. The main relief features include the Pyrenees - Pre-Pyrenees, the Central and Ebre River Depression and the Catalan Mediterranean system, as well as the coastal plains and the Serralada Transversal mountain range.

1.2. Population

Catalonia has more than seven million inhabitants, who are mainly concentrated in the metropolitan area of Barcelona (2% of Catalonia's total territory), the country's capital. This unbalanced distribution of the population is one of Catalonia's main characteristics, and something which evidently conditions its territorial strategies.

There are currently 946 municipalities in Catalonia. Of these, 28 have less than 100 inhabitants; 492 have between 100 and 1,000; 254 have between 1,001 and 5,000; 120 have between 5,001 and 20,000; 31 have between 20,001 and 50,000; and 21 have more than 50,000 inhabitants. Nevertheless, 70% of Catalonia's population live in 45 municipalities with more than 20,000 inhabitants.

1.3. Land use

Despite the industrialization of Catalonia, its land is mostly undeveloped. Forest occupies 61.7%, while agricultural land occupies 28.3%. Urbanized land represents 6.5% of the territory's total area, and is mainly located in the

¹ Statistics quoted in this section are based on the 2008 database published by the Statistical Institute of Catalonia (www.idescat.cat).

metropolitan area of Barcelona and on the coast, 50% of which is already developed (NEL·LO 2005).

Although these percentages of developed land seem to be low, the urbanisation process was extremely fast: from 1987 to 2002, the amount of urbanized land grew by 72.9% (COSTA & FULLANA, 2007).

1.4. Public decision makers

After the Spanish Constitution of 1978, the Spanish political system adopted a *quasi*-federal structure. The country was divided into 17 autonomous communities, 50 provinces and 8,112 municipalities. Catalonia is a historical autonomous community, which is divided into 4 provinces (Barcelona, Tarragona, Lleida and Girona) and 41 counties (“*comarques*”). There are currently 946 municipalities in Catalonia.

The 1978 Constitution made provision for the devolution of power to Catalonia. The Statute of Autonomy drawn up by this community² guarantees its right to self-government. Catalonia has its own parliament, president, government, administration and high court.

The Spanish central government retains exclusive responsibility for foreign affairs, external trade, defence, justice, criminal and commercial law, civil aviation and merchant shipping. The Spanish central parliament cannot legislate on behalf of the autonomous communities on devolved matters embedded in their Statutes of Autonomy.

According to Catalonia’s Statute of Autonomy, the *Generalitat*³ has exclusive power over territorial, landscape and urban development planning. This notwithstanding, the Spanish central government is still indirectly ruling on urban development on the basis of its constitutional powers in certain matters that indirectly affect urban development, such as: land ownership rules, public participation in public matters, the right of free enterprise, the right to a suitable environment and the right to decent and adequate housing. Therefore, Spanish land regulations are the framework for the urban development policies and regulations drafted by the *Generalitat*.

² The current Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia was approved by Basic Law 6/2006 of 19 July on the Reform of the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, which substitutes the former Statute approved in 1979.

³ The *Generalitat* is the institutional system around which Catalonia’s self-government is politically organised and includes the Parliament, the Presidency of the *Generalitat*, and the Government (article 2 of the Statute of Autonomy).

The *Generalitat* has the central position in defining and implementing urban planning policies in Catalonia. The Catalan Parliament has approved laws governing the regional and urban planning systems in Catalonia, while the Government leads the drafting of the regional plans. The role of the Catalan Government in the approval of regional plans will be analyzed in further detail below.

Last but not least, the municipalities also have an important role in land policies, as they are the primary level of the Spanish administrative system - the closest to the citizens and the territory. Municipalities have considerable autonomy to regulate their local affairs. As regards land policy, the municipalities are authorised to draft their local planning rules, although final approval depends on the regional government. Besides, public powers assigned to the municipalities also include, among others, the awarding of land use authorizations and construction permits, sanctioning planning infringements, and supervising the development process.

1.5. Private decision makers

The Spanish urban development system was traditionally based on the initiative of landowners. This model was created to resolve the historical lack of public funds for financing urban developments (MARMOLEJO, 2008)⁴. The Spanish planning legislation assigns to landowners the gains from urban developments. In turn, landowners have to lead the developments and assume the cost of the urbanisation process.

The recent Spanish Land Act⁵ acknowledges that all individuals, regardless of

⁴ “At the same time it was a time of huge migrations from the rural interior and south of the country towards big cities and capitals, it was necessary to rapidly expand the urban fabrics to house such a population, nevertheless economic resources were scarce and real estate developers were inexistent. In this context, the law makers created a skilful invention: the virtual wealth. The 1956 Land and Urban Planning Act guaranteed to landowners the planning gains of the future urban transformations, by means of the planning system. That is to say, a valuation based on the future and uncertain urban expectative was imposed by law (that is to say, the market value of the building right minus the cost of land assembly), without considering the real and present land value. In these terms, land included inside the area classified as developable by the PG could be assessed according to its future urban use instead of its actual rural condition. The financial system agreed to finance the urban development taking the property rights as a guarantee. In that way the financial problem was solved, nevertheless the absence of urban developers still remained a problem. The Law also introduced another peculiarity of the Spanish planning regime. Since 1956 the land owners, without considering their entrepreneurial abilities neither their studies or aptitudes, have the duty to become in real estate developers and transform its rural land into urban land according to the PG (and other derived plans). According to Garcia-Bellido “farmers and landlords have become subsidiary entrepreneurs”.

⁵ The consolidated text of the Land Act was approved by Royal Legislative Decree 2/2008 of 20 June, published in the Spanish Official Gazette on 26 June 2008.

whether or not they are landowners, have the right to promote urban developments, provided that the development is not assumed by a public authority. This notwithstanding, fifty years after the first modern Spanish planning law was passed, landowners are still the primary agent in the development process in the Spanish system⁶. Catalonia is still very attached to this model, and gives a major role to landowners.

2. Statutory background to Spanish planning activities

The main origin of the current planning model is the 1956 Land and Urban Planning Act (“**LUP Act**”). This Act attempted to set up the legal framework to face the huge territorial transformations that took place in Spain after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The internal migrations from rural areas literally collapsed Spain’s main cities, which urgently needed housing and public facilities. In order to face the new territorial challenges, the LUP Act envisaged several planning instruments: (i) the national plan; (ii) the provincial plans; (iii) the regional plans (“*planes comarcales*”) and (iv) the municipal plans.

Although the LUP Act used a brilliant legal technique, its provisions were scarcely put into practice. The local authorities did not have the economic and technical means to develop the urban policies set out in the Act. Moreover, the larger Spanish cities (Barcelona, Bilbao, Madrid and Valencia) had already approved their own planning regulations before the LUP Act was passed.

Afterwards, the development of the new planning rules highlighted some aspects of the LUP Act that had to be resolved. To this end, the Spanish Parliament approved Act 19/1975 of 2 May, which amended the former LUP Act. One of the aspects introduced by the new LUP Act were the Territorial Coordination Masterplans (“*Planes Directores Territoriales de Coordinación*”). These new plans aimed to “*fill the gap between physical planning and socioeconomic planning*”⁷, and as such, the Territorial Coordination Masterplans had to “*set the main guidelines for urban planning, taking into consideration environmental issues, and determining the material framework for economic and social planning*”⁸. Thus, the aim of the new territorial plan was to complement the

⁶ However, some autonomous communities, such as the Comunitat Valenciana, have adopted development models which are based on the initiatives of professional developers (“*agent urbanitzador*”).

⁷ As stated in the preliminary recitals of Act 19/1975 of 2 May, amending the former LUP Act.

⁸ As stated in the preliminary recitals of Act 19/1975 of 2 May, amending the former LUP Act.

technocratic economic plans, the so-called “*Planes de Desarrollo Económico y Social*”, approved during the latter stages of Franco’s dictatorship (HERCE, 2002). The Spanish central government drafted and approved these territorial plans.

However, the territorial planning system foreseen in the former Spanish planning legislation was never put into practice⁹. As mentioned above, the Spanish Constitution of 1978 transferred all planning powers to the autonomous communities. As a result, the planning regulations drafted by the Spanish central government were soon replaced by the regulations approved by the autonomous communities.

3. The Catalan regional planning system

This section analyzes the characteristics of the Catalan regional planning model. We will first explain the main legal provisions governing regional plans, and then analyze the different types of regional plans in Catalonia and the corresponding policies adopted by the Autonomous Government.

3.1. Legal framework

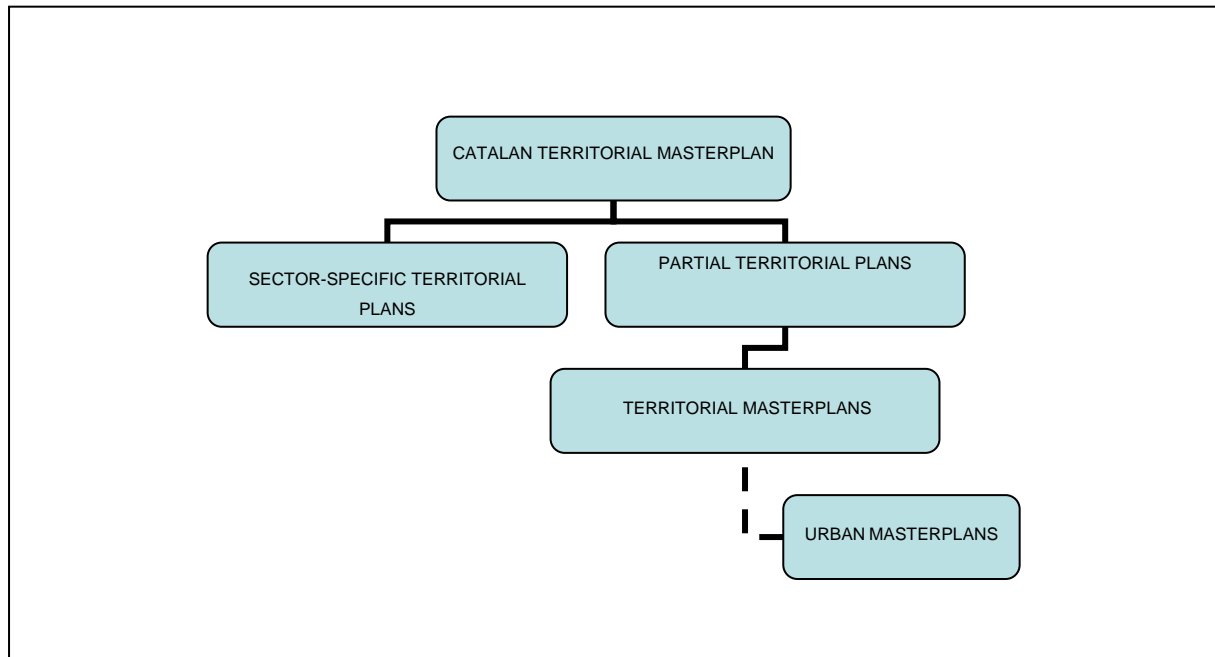
Catalonia’s planning system was laid down by Act 23/1983 of 21 November on Territorial Policy¹⁰ (“**TPA**”). The TPA was enacted in order to balance out the existing differences in the Catalan territory, which had been caused by the major economic and demographic growth in coastal areas and the larger cities at the expense of inland areas.

In this regard, the preliminary recitals of the TPA set forth the following objectives: (i) balance out the distribution of growth; (ii) organize developments in order to achieve greater economic efficiency and a better quality of life; and (iii) promote economic growth and tackle unemployment.

The TPA’s main provisions set out the contents and process of approval of the different types of regional plans. The Catalan system of planning can be summarized as follows:

⁹ The only plan approved was the Territorial Masterplan for the Doñana Natural Park, approved by Decree 181/1998 of the Junta de Andalusia of 3 May. However, this plan is focused on the environmental protection of the Doñana Natural Park and does not strictly adopt the integrated perspective of a territorial plan.

¹⁰ Published in the Official Gazette of the *Generalitat*, number 385 of 30 November 1983.



We will concentrate on the analysis of partial territorial plans and urban masterplans, since, for the time being, they are the core elements of the Catalan planning system.

Besides the planning regulations, which will be analyzed in detail in the following sections, the TPA also foresees complementary measures designed to achieve territorial balance, such as taxing industrial and retail activities in congested areas or subsidising activities inland. However, these measures have rarely been put into practice.

3.2. Catalan Territorial Masterplan

The Catalan Territorial Masterplan (“*Pla territorial general de Catalunya*”) is the global plan that laid down the general objectives of territorial policy in Catalonia.

According to the TPA, the Catalan Territorial Masterplan must include the following provisions:

- A definition of homogenous areas in Catalonia, taking into consideration their potential growth and socioeconomic situation. The homogeneous areas can be defined as: depressed areas, development areas or congested areas.
- Identify those cities that will have a significant role in the development and balancing strategies.

- Identify natural, forest and agricultural areas that should be preserved.
- Define the location of large infrastructures, such as transportation, energy, water treatment and public interest facilities.
- Define areas that should be devoted to specific uses (i.e. large logistics centres).
- Define the scope of the Partial Territorial Plans.

The drafting of the Catalan Territorial Masterplan is assigned to the Town and Country Planning and Public Works Ministry of the *Generalitat*, although it must take into consideration the input received from the Spanish central government and local authorities. The Catalan Territorial Masterplan must be passed as a law by the Parliament of Catalonia.

In practice, the process of drafting the Catalan Territorial Masterplan has been extremely complex. The consultations with the municipalities and local authorities could not be completed and, in some ways, the drafting process was not as transparent as desired (MENDIZÁBAL & MÓDENES, 1994). The Catalan Territorial Masterplan was finally approved by Act 1/1995 of 16 March, and envisaged a temporal scope of 30 years (1995-2026).

The sudden growth in the Catalan population, as a result of recent immigration, has exceeded the Masterplan's predictions: in 2007, some Catalan cities had already reached the population expected for 2026. As a result, the Catalan Government is considering reviewing the provisions of the Catalan Territorial Masterplan. However, this complex legal review process would have delayed the drafting of the Partial Territorial Plans (NEL·LO, 2005), which had not yet been developed¹¹. The Secretary for Territorial Policy of the *Generalitat* approved the territorial guidelines,¹² which provide coherent and up-to-date criteria for the drafting of the Partial Territorial Plans. One of the main objectives set out in the territorial guidelines is to achieve sustainable growth through a compact and integrated urbanization model.

¹¹ The first Partial Territorial Plan, which was for the *Terres de l'Ebre*, was approved in 2001.

¹² “*Criteris per al desenvolupament del programa de planejament territorial*”, drafted by the Secretary for Territorial Policy of the *Generalitat*, Barcelona, 2006.

3.3. Territorial Partial Plans

The Catalan Territorial Masterplan defines 7 functional areas in Catalonia¹³, which are made up of a central city and its dependant urban settlements.

The purpose of the Partial Territorial Plans is to develop the provisions of the Catalan Territorial Masterplan in each functional area, and to define their own territorial objectives. According to the TPA, the Partial Territorial Plans should:

- Define settled areas that may be suitable for the installation of regional facilities (“*equipaments comarcals*”).
- Identify natural areas of interest.
- Define agricultural and forest areas that should be preserved or enlarged.
- Identify infrastructures.
- Protect buildings and natural sites of historic or artistic value.
- Estimate socioeconomic growth.
- Propose urban planning guidelines.

Partial Territorial Plans, as initially defined in the TPA, were mainly concerned about geophysical aspects. In 2004, the Catalan Government changed the approach to the drafting of the Partial Territorial Plans, so that they adopted a more strategic perspective (ESTEBAN, 2006). As a result, newer plans have assumed additional social and economic considerations.

In accordance with this new approach to regional planning, the current methodology used in drafting new Partial Territorial Plans combines imperative provisions on land use together with strategic guidelines for town planners. The content of the Partial Territorial Plans has been focused on core territorial elements, excluding other important aspects (water, energy, waste management, retail planning, medical facilities) that are complex and may be dealt with in Sector-specific Territorial Plans. Thus, Partial Territorial Plans are structured around the following basic territorial systems (ESTEBAN, 2006):

¹³ The Catalan Territorial Masterplan originally defined 6 functional areas, which were modified by Act 24/2001 of 21 December.

- (i) The open spaces system, including land devoted to agricultural, farming and forestry purposes, natural areas of interest, ecological corridors and other protected areas. This system's regulation is based on three levels of protection (specially protected land, preventively protected land and territorially protected land), depending on the natural and strategic values of each location. Specially protected land includes areas of significant natural or rural value, such as natural parks and protected areas, and, thus, must be left out of any urbanisation process. Land subject to preventive protection may be developed when required by urban growth strategies. Finally, land territorially protected includes those areas that are of special interest or include elements (landscape, natural risks, strategic value) that should be specifically considered before promoting any future development.
- (ii) The settlements system, including the urban network, land devoted to housing, industrial and tertiary purposes, and reconstruction and renewal areas.

The plans adopt different strategies, depending on the origins and nature of the settlement. In the case of historical urban settlements, territorial partial plans define the strategy taking into consideration the growth in demand and the role of each settlement in the settlements system as a whole. The main territorial strategies adopted in these cases include: potential growth (locations that will advance within the system), medium or moderate growth and re-equilibrium (limited extension), renewal and change of uses (urban areas that will not be enlarged but will be internally renewed), and completion and improvement or maintaining of rural dispersion (small rural settlements).

In contrast, the territorial strategy for specialized or isolated settlements, such as housing developments and industrial estates, is always restrictive. The Partial Territorial Plans have abandoned the single-use zoning techniques¹⁴, which are based on the creation of single-use areas, and now promote the diversity and cohabitation of uses.

¹⁴ Single-use zoning, also known as Euclidean zoning for the type of zoning code adopted in the town of Euclid, Ohio, has been fiercely criticized by scholars: *“the land use patterns prevalent in the United States since the advent of Euclidean-style zoning have played a direct role in the development of a surprisingly broad range of problems: “[b]y fostering or requiring low density development with a high separation of uses, Euclidean zoning is one of the great generators of suburban sprawl, with all of its environmental, economic, and social costs.” These costs include pollution, loss of wilderness and farmland, racial and socioeconomic segregation of the population, and legal obstacles to effective urban rehabilitation. Moreover, in combination with prevailing patterns of local funding, the socioeconomic segregation caused by Euclidean zoning perpetuates itself by*

- (iii) The mobility infrastructures system, including rail and road networks, ports, airports and logistics areas. As explained in section 3.5 below, the detailed planning of mobility infrastructure routes is done through Sector-Specific Territorial Plans. This notwithstanding, mobility infrastructures do have a decisive role in the whole territory, and must be included, even as generic proposals, in the scope of Territorial Partial Plans.

The drafting of Partial Territorial Plans is generally assumed by the Autonomous Government, although the law foresees the capacity of the counties, municipalities and supra-municipal authorities to draft them. In practice, however, these plans have always been drafted by the Autonomous Government, owing to the complexity of the documents that have to be prepared. In any case, the decision to start preparing a Partial Territorial Plan lies with the Autonomous Government.

The process to approve Partial Territorial Plans has two phases¹⁵:

- (i) **Drafting process.** The authority undertaking the drafting of the plan has to issue a draft of the Partial Territorial Plan. The documents prepared at this stage have to be sufficient to allow a public discussion of their contents. In this process, the drafter has to take into consideration input from public authorities and other relevant territorial agents (i.e. associations, private entities, etc.). Finally, the draft is submitted to public consultation for a minimum period of 2 months. In order to allow for maximum participation, a public advertisement has to be published in the official gazette and in a local newspaper, in addition to direct notification to the relevant authorities and agents. The public consultation process includes public debates and meetings. The submissions and suggestions arising from the public hearing of the draft should be taken into consideration when preparing the draft Partial Territorial Plan.
- (ii) **Approval process.** Strictly speaking, the approval process for partial territorial plans starts with an initial decision of the authority undertaking the drafting initiative which, as mentioned above, is

channelling less well-off children into chronically underequipped public schools and stretching the resources of many urban municipalities too thin, leaving them to choose between raising property tax rates or allowing their infrastructure to decay” (HALL, 2007)

¹⁵ In accordance with Decree 142/2005 of 12 July, which approved the ruling for the drafting, processing and approval of the partial territorial plans (published in the Official Gazette of the *Generalitat*, number 4432 of 22 July 2005).

usually the Autonomous Government. Once initially approved, the territorial partial plan is subject to public consultation for one month. During this period, the relevant authorities and any individual can submit their statements on the plan. After considering the submissions, the plan is provisionally approved and sent to the Autonomous Council of Ministers for its definitive approval. The partial territorial plan acquires legal force when the definitive approval decision and the rules of the plan are published in the official gazette.

3.4. Territorial Masterplans

Territorial Masterplans were introduced in the Catalan regional system in 2002¹⁶. They are a flexible type of regional plan, since their territorial scope can range from supra-municipal to the functional areas that are assigned to the Partial Territorial Plans. The content of Territorial Masterplans is also broadly defined. According to the TPA, they aim to complete the provisions of the Catalan Territorial Masterplan in some specific matters.

The Autonomous Government is the only entity involved in the approval of Territorial Masterplans. The plans are drafted by the Town and Country Planning and Public Works Ministry of the *Generalitat* and afterwards initially approved by the relevant Minister. They are submitted to public consultation and, then, provisionally approved by the Minister. The definitive approval of the Territorial Masterplans is assigned to the Autonomous Council of Ministers.

In practice, Territorial Masterplans have been approved as a transitory instrument to provide specific territorial guidelines for areas with urgent issues that cannot wait for the approval of Partial Territorial Plans. Therefore, the final aim of such plans is to offer “*a partial insight into the future partial territorial plan in which they will be included*” (ESTEBAN, 2006).

3.5. Sector-Specific Territorial Plans

The Catalan planning system foresees an independent category of plans, the so-called Sector-Specific Territorial Plans, which set out the policies of the Regional Ministries that are of territorial significance. Despite their limited perspective, Sector-Specific Territorial Plans have an important role in practice, as they may regulate the structure of territorial elements. For example, through this type of plan, the Catalan Government has set out its policies regarding

¹⁶ To this end, article 86 of Act 31/2002 of 30 December on Administrative and Tax Matters (published in the Official Gazette of the Generalitat, number 3791 of 31 December 2002) modified the TPA.

natural interest sites, retail facilities, transportation infrastructures, ports and airports.

According to the TPA, Sector-Specific Territorial Plans should regulate the available resources, and the requirements and deficiencies in the specific sector throughout Catalonia. These plans are drafted and processed by the relevant Ministry, and definitively approved by the Autonomous Council of Ministers.

3.6. Urban Masterplans

Urban Masterplans are strictly speaking included in the urban planning system, however their scope and contents are close to those of the regional plans. In fact, scholars (LLISET, 2005) consider that Urban Masterplans are only urban plans in name, given that they regulate regional planning matters.

Urban Masterplans always cover supra-municipal areas, with their range depending on the regional policy aims pursued.

According to the Catalan Urban Planning Law¹⁷, Urban Masterplans should set: (i) coordination guidelines for local urban planning; (ii) provisions regarding sustainable development growth and transportation; (iii) rural land protection rules; (iv) the location of major infrastructures; and (iv) supra-municipal social housing policies planning.

Urban Masterplans are drafted and approved by the Catalan Government. The approval process starts with the initial approval of the plan, which is then submitted to public consultation for one month. After considering the submissions made, the plan is provisionally approved. Urban Masterplans are definitively approved by the Town and Country Planning and Public Works Minister.

In practice, these plans have been a useful tool to deal with territorial issues that could not be immediately dealt with through municipal urban plans (NEL·LO, 2005) owing to the complexity and length of the amendment processes to be followed. The Catalan Government has approved Urban Masterplans in order to promote the development of new urban nodes in certain areas (Conca d'Òdena, Pla de Bages), protect areas with special natural and cultural heritage values (Santa Maria de Gallecs, Serra de Rodes, the textile colonies of the Llobregat), and protect highly urbanised inland and coastal areas (Cerdanya, Catalan coast).

¹⁷ The consolidated text of the Catalan Urban Planning Law was approved by Decree 1/2005 of 26 July, published in the Official Gazette of the *Generalitat* number 4436, on 28 July 2005).

4. The region as the optimal scale for sustainable growth planning

Territorial and urban growth policies in Catalonia have traditionally been limited to local urban planning. The Municipal Urban Plan (“*Pla d’Ordenació Urbanística Municipal*”) is still the central element of the planning system, since it sets out the detailed land laws for all the municipality. Public and private agents recognize urban plans as the main (and often, the only) instrument on territorial governance.

However, the municipal territory cannot be planned as an isolated entity with sole reference to local criteria. Urban settlements and natural areas are interdependent and cannot be dealt with separately. The limited scope of municipal plans can lead to inefficiencies and territorial tensions.

An example of this are the local urban policies adopted in relation to the development of industrial estates and economic districts (CASTAÑER & FERRAN, 2007). Many Catalan municipalities felt that the development of industrial estates would promote economic growth in their area. As a result, municipalities have individually undertaken development policies, without considering the real territorial needs. These individual local policies have caused serious territorial and environmental problems: the indiscriminate use of land, the lack of adequate utility supplies, and the isolation and lack of competitiveness of these local industrial estates. In contrast, the adoption of a regional policy on industrial estates would have avoided their sprawl and promoted the development of supra-municipal estates, which could be provided with the necessary services required by industrial operators. Municipalities could have taken advantage of the large industrial estates’ economic potential and at the same time cause only a minor environmental impact.

The inefficiency of local urban policies is one of the reasons why regional authorities have kept the power to definitively approve municipal urban plans. Thus, municipal urban plans drafted by municipalities have to be submitted to the Territorial Urban Commissions of the *Generalitat* for definitive approval. Nevertheless, territorial governance cannot depend on individual decisions adopted by the autonomous authorities for each local planning proposal. A territorial benchmark is required to give coherence to the local decisions.

In addition, the establishment of formal territorial guidelines enables the democratic participation of local authorities and private individuals, and provides a legal reference point, which also prevents arbitrary decisions of the regional authorities being adopted when approving the municipal plans.

It cannot be denied that municipal urban plans have an important role to play in defining the local sustainability strategy. This notwithstanding, local planning cannot be the sole instrument regulating territorial sustainability. First of all, as we have already pointed out, the limited scope of local plans does not give a complete overview of the resources that are available and need to be preserved. Most of the aspects affected by local planning (water and energy supplies, natural assets, land use) cannot be correctly assessed on a local level. Although sector-specific authorities (e.g. Catalan Water Agency, Regional Ministry of Agriculture) participate in the drafting process of local planning regulations through reports issued during the public consultation period, their input is reactive to proposals from local planners. Further territorial analysis of sustainability proposals is advisable.

Since municipal urban plans are very close to being a statutory definition of the rights and obligations of landowners, their strategic aspects are often an afterthought. Most of the submissions made during public consultation on urban plans relate to specific planning provisions concerning land use and building rights or specific developments, rather than the overall effects of the land policies adopted. However, adding strategic contents to urban planning may not be advisable at this limited territorial scale. As we have already pointed out, the local level does not seem to be optimal in order to set sustainable policies. Besides, extending the content and purpose of municipal plans in order to deal with territorial issues may hinder the drafting tasks, by requiring more processing time and more technical effort from municipalities.

The correct response to territorial strategic issues cannot be defined by local plans; it has to be done at a regional level. According to the European Spatial Perspective, agreed by the Informal Council of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning in Potsdam in May 1999, the regional level is the most appropriate for developing territorial policies:

“A key function of spatial development is [...]to achieve a better balance between urban development and protection of the open countryside. Urban and rural areas are closely interconnected, especially in densely developed regions. Rural areas benefit from the cultural activities of cities, while the cities benefit from the leisure and recreation value of rural areas. Town and country are, therefore, partners rather than competitors.”

The regional level is the most suitable for regulating and planning sustainable growth; it is wide enough to set strategic policies but at the same time manageable (TARROJA, 2003).

5. New methodology

The analysis of the evolution of Catalan plans highlights that the methodology used when drafting these plans has undergone significant changes. Regional regulations cannot be planned with the aim of achieving a detailed and stable benchmark of land uses. As we will see in this section, new principles should be taken into account when drafting regional plans. The fostering of regional planning should also have direct effects on the traditional approach to local planning.

5.1. Simplifying contents: a strategic regional perspective

The contents and provisions of regional plans should be proportionate to the larger scale of the territorial area being regulated. Regional plans cannot attempt to substitute local plans, which are legally defined and socially perceived as the instrument that sets out the exact terms of land regulations. Since municipal urban plans effectively regulate at a local level, regional planners should focus their efforts on setting the strategic guidelines for sustainable growth.

The Catalan Government has reoriented the original contents of regional plans, as originally defined in the TPA, giving them a more strategic perspective. This option is entirely compatible with the binding nature of regional planning. The provisions of regional plans may be even more effective if they are simple and limited, rather than extensive and complex. As explained above, territorial guidelines approved by the Secretary for Territorial Policy of the *Generalitat* have been sufficiently useful to update the provisions of the Catalan Territorial Masterplan, and have effectively orientated the drafting of the Territorial Partial Plans.

Regional plans should be regarded as useful strategic guidelines, allowing the local planners and private operators to easily understand the territorial diagnosis and the general policies proposed.

5.2. Adaptive planning

The broader the scope of plans, the greater their exposure to unexpected changes. The local scope is easier to analyse and predict. Regional plans are more fallible since they have to deal with many interlinked elements. As mentioned in section 3.2 above, the Catalan Territorial Masterplan is already out of step owing to sudden unexpected demographic changes.

Unexpected contingencies cannot be avoided, but may be mitigated if plans are defined flexibly. The fact that the Catalan Territorial Masterplan has to be

passed as a law greatly hinders its amendment. The law should foresee simplified procedures for updating the contents of the plans when objectively required to do so.

5.3. Evaluation of regional plans

Regional plans should be evaluated in order to examine whether their objectives are effectively achieved. Therefore, regional plans should contain indicators. In addition, plans should foresee an institutional monitoring structure, including the Autonomous Government, local authorities and private territorial agents.

Sustainability strategies can be evaluated on two levels (TORRES, 2003): internal performance, which evaluates the level of fulfilment of the proposed measures, and external performance, which consists of the evaluates the extent to which the development model is moving in the direction sought by the strategy. The evaluation of sustainable development strategies should be focused on the achievement of the principles which define them, not only on the effectiveness of the application of each of the proposed measures.

5.4. Reconsidering local planning

For the time being, most efforts have been focused on fostering the approval of regional plans, which are becoming increasingly important. However, the strengthening of the regional planning system questions the current role and contents of urban planning.

Municipal urban plans have been turned into very complex instruments, which require a considerable economic effort from local communities and take a long time to be approved. Besides, in order to carry out developments, further detailed local plans have to be approved (partial and urban renewal plans). Therefore, urban planning can be considered, to some degree, too complex and bureaucratic. The progressive complexity of urban planning not only hinders developments, but also makes public participation and monitoring more difficult. The Recent Spanish Land Act requires urban planning drafters to include an executive summary of the plans so that citizens can understand their content.

Since regional plans will determine the main guidelines for territorial policies, the formal requirements of urban plans could be significantly simplified. Many strategic aspects of the local territorial policy would have already been set at a regional scale. Therefore, urban planning could be greatly simplified, especially when regulating possible developments. Private individuals should acknowledge

urban plans as an easy and practical reference material, rather than a bureaucratic obstacle to their projects.

6. Conclusions

Although planning legislation has always provided for regional plans, their role has been secondary when compared to local urban plans, which are the central piece of the Catalan and Spanish territorial planning system. The sustainable growth paradigm has fostered regional planning, insofar as the local level is not optimal to face the current territorial problems, such as urban sprawl, environmental protection and mobility demands.

However, many citizens and private operators still consider regional plans as a mere theoretical benchmark, while local urban planning regulations are the main reference point for territorial policy. At the same time, local planning has become increasingly complex and bureaucratic, hindering the task of private developers and, even, the enforcement of public policies.

This scenario should lead to an integration of regional and urban planning in a single system. Strategic decisions and policies could be dealt with at a regional level, provided that local agents and private individuals have an active role in the processing of regional plans. In turn, the contents of local plans could be simplified, turning them into more executive instruments.

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