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**PLANNED CITY VERSUS**

**SPONTANEOUS CITY**

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Cover image  
courtesy of  
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Does the land belong to all of us or is it nobody's? How is a spontaneous settlement organised? Are there any rules for living together? Are there any rules at all, short of "city formation" rules?... Do they relate to each other? Is there any control? Ultimately, what is a spontaneous city?

Could we apply some of the values of the spontaneous city to newly-created, planned cities, that is, to those cities that emerge uniformly from nothingness,

sometimes with no specific relationship to any adjacent metropolis, but already laid out or ruled by some type of urban planning?

Could we learn something? Could these values slow down the problem of the loss of identity and alienation that is characteristic of contemporary urban planning? As it seems we cannot find the answers we can at least make the questions...

By walking through the main axis of the royal cattle track "Galiana", located in the south-east area of the Community of Madrid, it turns out to be simple to mentally travel to a small village whose urban weaver had been preoccupied with a nearby city, with no strategic urban plan defining its expansion or growth. Its development has been based exclusively on the logic of the mutual respect and on the more or less coordinated action of a group.

Nevertheless, the image of the cattle track in a bird's-eye view differs much from this compact perception, since it is really a urban fabric net of seventy-five meters width and several kilometres length, inserted in the middle of crop fields of private property. Its territorial scarf is actually powerful and lasting.

This aerial picture presents the type of strange beauty that usually gathers together with the unexpected and spontaneous, with the manifestly experimental thing, with everything that places in the margins of legality.

Talking to its inhabitants means to penetrate thousands of different histories: the Andalusian immigrants who after the civil war looked for a place to live that did not belong to anybody —or probably a bit to all of us—, the young subversive that gathers and takes care of stray dogs, the neighbouring architect from a nearby village who saw in this space the opportunity to get in touch with rural

life and nature, the Moroccan who crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and who lives in a house constructed with his hands, etc.

They all know that it is public soil, they all try to regularize their situation, they all want to have access to drinkable water, light and electricity but none of them has found a better alternative.

“Cattle track”: pastoral route that crosses several provinces and whose width is seventy-five meters —approximately ninety sticks—. The cattle routes are former pastoral routes that cross the Peninsula and allow the travel of the migrating cattle that in summer migrate to the mountains of the north and centre of the Peninsula and in winter migrate seeking pastures in the valleys down south and in the west of the country. In Spain the routes of cattle tracks typically have a length of 125 kilometres. At present the migrating cattle have practically disappeared, maintaining a certain relevancy still only in local shepherding.

The reasons for the disappearance of seasonal migration of livestock are the use of motor transport for the movement of cattle, the assimilation of many parts of the cattle tracks into urban areas due to the growth of the cities, and the constant interruption of the tracing of the pastoral routes by overlapping roads and railway routes and even the fact that some of them were directly paved with asphalt to turn them into local routes.

During the whole Franco period the cattle tracks did not have consideration of “land of all”, but rather “land of nobody”, and this fact was used by many who were forced to emigrate. They took advantage of this legal emptiness, —**apart from the gradual disappearance of the migrating cattle and the abandonment they have suffered**— to establish themselves on these areas.

These lands of public and unprotected ownership have suffered from abandonment by politicians for many years. However they can

be the key to the new conception of the city we should be looking for, because they may become the veins that introduce new blood to urban areas and make possible a relationship with natural and rural environments.

Nowadays there is a larger social conscience about the need to recover the historical cattle tracks and their use, not only for the migration of animals, but also to foment the recreative contact of society with nature, although this is not always a simple task.

On multiple occasions the authorities collide with parts of these routes occupied by buildings and totally resembling the adjacent urban fabric or with some other stretches turned into a linear spontaneous city consolidated in most of their sections, as happens in the royal cattle track “Galiana” of our study.

In this particular case, the use is mostly residential but there are also storage buildings, small business, gardens, zones of shepherd-

ing and farming. Most of the inhabitants, close to 40,000, are organized in Associations and pay a rate for the maintenance of the public zones. On the other hand, surprisingly the majority of them they pay the Tax of Real Estate to their respective Town Halls.

The royal cattle track “Galiana” is not exclusively attacked and invaded by these “nonlegal” settlements, but also by multiple road and train structures that cross it at the same level or at best turned their direction aside across top steps that do not even respect the original dimensions and their limits.

It seems to be clear enough that in this case, the recovery of the cattle track for public use is a utopia, since not only the individuals but the different administrations have devastated the tracing.

There are many voices that propose a modification of this tracing through a system of barter of areas with the settled neighbours, assimilating this linear spontaneous city to the different surround-

ing cities and recovering the cattle route for its original use, besides public enjoyment, so it may turn into an Ecological Corridor that allows the city inhabitant contact with nature.

Once reviewed, the social, geopolitical and conceptual parameters would allow its integration into planning and would give a response to the problematic of all cattle routes in general. We are now interested in analysing the structural mechanisms that rule the formation of spontaneous cities and the manners of life and behaviour in society that regulate this type of settlement in comparison with what we will call “planned cities”, meaning cities ruled and constructed by an urban development regulator.

Basically, the ostensible objective of the urban development regulation is to control the urban development activity, public and private in order to guarantee, in constitutional terms, the right to enjoy worthy and suitable housing, the right





*Miradas,*  
2006, 8'05".  
Belén  
Butragueño.  
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to enjoy an environment adapted for the development of people and the conservation, promotion and enrichment of a shared cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, the regulatory effort leads in many occasions to the total homogenization of cities, with alienation and identity loss, since the final user of the city does not take part in the process of its creation. In addition, decisions are not always taken on the basis of urban fabric development criteria but with the influence of political or economic interests.

In all big metropolises, large, previously rural areas are being developed more or less close to the centre, generating new cities without real relation to the traditional city. Their layout are fundamentally configured to obtain the maximum potential for building and the maximum economic performance in the immediate environment.

The result is in general excessively homogeneous: merely residential in character and generally

with a serious lack of services and equipment, no type of cultural infrastructure, unvaried individual units —**with medium-high acquisitive level** way—, total dependence on the private vehicle for the internal transport in the area and for communication with the rest of the metropolis, hardly sustainable, unconnected in any way with nature or with the rest of the inhabitants, eliminating the concept of local life, with a really worrying uniformity of spaces and criteria, that takes to an absolute limit the alarming lack of identity before mentioned. This is definitely what becomes of the new planned cities.

In contrast to this phenomenon, the spontaneous city appears as a melting pot of cultures in which there is fomented local collaboration and mutual aid, a structure ruled by basic concepts of universal logic and of living together, whose users also live in permanent contact with the nature.

Certainly, the spontaneous city suffers from multiple problems,

from the merely logistic of dependence on nearby cities for subsistence, and the problems related to the progressive deterioration of quality of life due to the proximity of many of its inhabitants to each other.

In the last few years the possibility of many people settling in a “free” area has worked as an attractor for a great number of immigrants who do not have any type of means of subsistence when they come to Spain and this fact, together with many other aspects we have already mentioned has brought a progressive degeneration of the fabric of this linear spontaneous city, condensing it without a definite criteria.

Our approach, therefore, is not directed so much towards an abolition of urban development regulation (which is totally naïf), since we are strongly defending the need for the application of some basic criteria at the moment for studying the growth of these cities, and the creation of

a territorial plan developed with timetables of application along the years.

What we firmly defend is the urgent need that the regulation be created from many different disciplines and in its development would involve input from architects, town planners, politicians, sociologists, scientists, geographers, psychologists, philosophers, civil and environmental engineers, historians and even philosophers.

It is all-important that newly-created cities are not executed to the margin of any criteria of relationship with the historical centre. A map of the historical centre of a traditional city appears curious in comparison with these new neighbourhoods or “planned cities” of big oversized and empty avenues; they seem to be realized to different scales...

But, what are the qualities that we can learn from the spontaneous city, which we might apply to our planned city with “spontaneous traces”?

1  
*New Babylon*,  
 1958.  
 Constant.  
 Manipulation  
 of existing  
 cities to get an  
 urban fabric  
 in which  
 there is no  
 distinction  
 between the  
 centre and  
 the periphery.  
 Urban  
 planning as  
 a changing  
 habitat for the  
 homo ludens.

2  
*Society of  
 the spectacle*,  
 1973. Guy  
 Debord

First and as a priority aim, we might focus on qualities such as the cross-sectional configuration, that is, to avoid archaic, expired and unsuccessful strategies such as “zoning” that promote static cities, without vital places, dependent and isolated from the environment. We must speculate with polynuclear cities, in which there exist multiple areas of attraction, in which the diversity is a value, so that we can claim the difference and the space for all, instead of the space for nobody.

It is fundamental, in addition, to plead for the recovery of public space, as a point of meeting. We want to make ours the approach of the situationists<sup>1</sup> that understood the city as a repository and as a source for their experimentation, the “new theatre of cultural operations”, the street as the place for action.

Urbanism has forgotten the man or, let's say, has “quantified” the man, packed and turned him into statistics... Let's recover the

psycho-geographical vision of the city explored by Constant and Guy Debord,<sup>2</sup> let's lay claim to the “homo ludens” — the PLAYFUL THING as fundamental in the life of the man and in his development as a social animal — we believe in “the city of the eternal game”.

For that, it is fundamental to recapture the scale of the traditional city. The dimensions of our avenues cannot be calculated exclusively by the flows of rolled oversized transport that it is not necessarily positive to promote. Fundamental values, such as perception, empathy or intensity, are not contemplated at present by “creators” of a city but, as we have already mentioned, just by taking a look to the map of any average European city everyone realizes that the centre and the periphery do not seem to be to the same scale, that intensive and extensive systems are combined without stable criteria, so that, in spite of being adjacent, each are impermeable with each other.

Finally, it is fundamental to recover a fluid relationship of the urban inhabitant with natural life, but not in the way we do now, across an artificialization of the landscape, but by looking for the recovery of natural degraded bordering environments or in occasions, by grafting nature onto the cities as open wounds.

The aim is to create links of union and relation between city and nature, through relatively simple integrating strategies, such as promoting the use of non-pollutant means of transport, to facilitate the access to rural green spaces, to recover the indigenous flora and fauna, to realize campaigns to promote awareness in citizens to the respect the natural life, etc. Let's plant a garden on our one square meter terrace!

If a Martian saw Sanchinarro's image (Madrid) he would not have any possibility of recognizing it as an image of a city of the interior, coastal, of Spain or of Denmark, there are no traces left of its own

identity. We want to promote the diversity, the integration with place, the exceptions to the norm, the direct relation with the traditional city, the creation of spaces of leisure, sociability and relationships in the street far from the malls, the life of neighbourhood, the football matches in the square, "have you a little salt?", the card game in the bar around the corner...

It is necessary to act and it is necessary to make it fast, before the situation is irreversible and in 20 years we cannot assume the corpses of brick and cement that are going to remain of these cities without soul and without expectations.

### *About the author*

Belén Butragueño is an architect from the Technical Superior School of Architecture of Madrid where she also did her post-graduate studies. Currently, she is Professor of Graphic Expression at this university and has been Professor of Projects at SEK University in Segovia. Nowadays she works in the configuration of a creation space called B2bConcept, which is intended to be an experimental architecture laboratory in contact with many other artistic and scientific disciplines in which the creative act is based on the research of fields of opportunity that are opened in the contemporaneous world. A selection of her works can be found in [www.b2bconcept.es](http://www.b2bconcept.es)