Managing Critical Moments in Urban Politics: Discussion on the future Urban Planning in Reus, Catalonia

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Managing Critical Moments in Urban Politics: Discussion on the future Urban Planning in Reus, Catalonia

Katsuyuki TAKENAKA

I. Introduction

Identifying the ideological orientation of the local government is one of the effective approaches to analyse urban policy. We understand by ideology those principles advocated by a political power to decide public actions, which can be placed conventionally between the poles of liberalization and regulation. Also important is the opposition between development and conservation, which does not necessarily coincide with the first opposition just mentioned.

If the ideological dimension underpins the actions of each government regarding the long-term programme, this can often be accelerated, deferred or even interrupted by the strategic or tactical factors. In the daily practice of urban politics, it is not unusual that a tactical matter prevails over other considerations, displacing the ideological question to the mere background.

Ideology and strategy also operate in the specific field of urban policy we are analysing: municipal urban planning. In this case, the ideological dimension tends to have its maximum expression in different sorts of actions over the territory. Meanwhile, the tactical factor acts fundamentally as control of time, i.e. determination of the key moments to intervene in the ever-evolving urban dynamics.

Departing from these considerations, we focus on change of government as the main mechanism, although not the exclusive one, available to civil society to demand or encourage changes in urban policy, more specifically urban planning. Redefinition of the urban policy prompted by a change of the political party in power will be analysed and interpreted according to the two points of view just described: ideology and strategy.

Mediterranean cities seem to us an appropriate empirical field to fulfil the purpose of the study for two fundamental reasons, besides the obvious framework of the publication in which this article appears: local administration imbued with a strong political leadership and urban development prospects changed radically due to the end of the expansion cycle.

In the following pages, we will centre our attention on the case of Reus (Figure 1), capital
of the Baix Camp county in Catalonia. Recognized internationally as an example of innovative urbanism, the city has been recently working on a new general urban plan. As will be seen later, the process had an important turning point in 2011 with a change of government, and after five years since then, has not yet reached its phase of completion.

After this introduction (I), we will describe briefly the territorial context of Reus from a historical perspective (II). Then, the public debate around the new urban plan will be traced chronologically (III). This analysis should give us a solid basis to understand in depth the proposals of the two government teams, before and after the 2011 local election (IV). To conclude, we will present our interpretation on that debate from the two viewpoints just introduced, with some complementary discussion on the future of urbanism (V).

Our analysis is based on a field survey conducted in two occasions, September 2011 and September 2016, and complemented by official documents concerning urban planning as well as the local press information. During the second field survey carried out in 2016, the author had an opportunity to interview Marc Arza, Councillor of Urban Planning and Economic Promotion in Reus city government, and Jordi Berguedà, architect and ex-Councillor of Urban Planning and Architecture in the same city.

II. The context

Reus is located in the middle of the Camp de Tarragona region, some 8km away from the Mediterranean coast. The city stands on a slightly inclined land, between 100 and 150 meters above sea level. Recognized since the modern times as the most important commercial centre in southern Catalonia, Reus today constitutes with the neighbour city of Tarragona the second most important urban agglomeration in Catalonia.

The history of Reus dates back to the 12th century. The first walled city had an extension of 3 hectares and was organized around the castle, already disappeared, and the parish church. The expansion of the town began in the 13th century starting from what is today Mercadal Square, where an open air market was held regularly. The following wall built in the 14th century would represent the city’s outline until well into the modern times. From that moment on, the successive phases of expansion followed concentric patterns, a series of rings connected one another by the main radial roads going straight out of the walled city. This form of growth, which is simple but characteristic, is represented by a famous local expression: theory of rings and radial axes. The first ring is called Tomb of Ravals and, of the remaining three, up to the third one is illustrated on the map (Figure 1).

1 See also Takenaka (2012), in which the recovery of Reus’ historic centre as a space of centrality is analysed in detail based on data collected from the mid-2000’s.

2 On the history of Reus, Anguera ed. (2003) is an important work for general reference. Concerning the city’s era of glory in the modern history, see Arnavat ed. (1998). Gort Juanpere i Gort Juanpere (1987) is also useful, giving us an illustrated synthesis of the urban evolution.
Figure 1   General view of Reus

Source: Elaboration based on aerial photography provided by the Institut Cartogràfic i Geològic de Catalunya (ICGC).
Figure 2  Evolution of land cover in Reus

Source: Elaboration based on aerial photography provided by the Institut Cartogràfic i Geològic de Catalunya (ICGC).
Areas to develop or in development
- Open space / green zones
- Facilities
- Landscape Ring (Green Belt)

Reus 2020 plan (2011)

- a. Reus 2020 plan (2011)

POUM draft (2012)

- b. POUM draft (2012)
The extramural expansion of the city accelerated from the 18th century. The driving force came from some vanguard activities, first the production and trade of wine and spirits and next the textile industry. The Floridablanca census of 1787 confirmed Reus as the second city of Catalonia with 14,440 inhabitants, a hegemonic position kept until the beginning of the 20th century. On the other hand, the arrival of the railway in the middle of the 19th century had a strong impact on the existing urban form. Those who attained a prominent position in that emerging modern city were the local merchants, whose richness would have its maximum manifestation in numerous works of modernist architecture, built at the beginning of the 20th century. It was the prosperity of the commercial town that gave character to the present urban landscape, with a great concentration of commercial establishments along the main streets.

Today, Reus is known, among other characteristics, by its widely diffused image of a compact city, justified by the low degree of settlement dissemination. This is confirmed in comparison with the city of Tarragona, where a large number of residential areas were developed along the coastline and mountainsides. However, we should take note that the demographic expansion of Reus in the Franco era (1939-1975) provoked by a massive immigration from other parts of Spain led to the formation of several peripheral districts with a deficient connection to the urban centre: Barri Gaudí, Barri Fortuny, Barri Immaculada, etc. Recomposing the image of compact city became a pending question for the city government after its democratization in 1979.

A series of aerial photography helps us understand the drastic changes that Reus underwent throughout the 20th and the early 21st centuries (Figure 2). In 1945, shortly after the Spanish Civil War, the urbanized area was roughly limited to the interior of the second ring, even with some land remaining inside to develop. The eastern limit was Riera de Miró street, an old river course, and the western one was a set of promenades. The city was surrounded by a large extension of agricultural land, the layout of which was clearly conditioned by the roads getting to the neighbouring villages.

Forty years later, in 1986, the urbanized area had already overflowed widely the second ring, and the third ring was subsequently showing the frame to which the city was expected to grow. Then, the western and southern limits were two newly constructed avenues going out from the Santuari de Misericòrdia (Mercy Sanctuary), and another avenue laid out on the old dismantled railway track became the eastern fringe of the town. The railway line from Tarragona was diverted to the eastern outskirts of the city, as we find it today. Anyway, we cannot miss the presence of some suburban districts mentioned before, constructed to absorb the strong immigrant flows.

The following image corresponding to the year 2000 catches a moment in which the whole city was soaked in the real estate bubble. We can see how the gaps remaining between the main nucleus and the peripheral districts were filled up with new constructions of both residential and commercial.
industrial use. Another important news of this period was the opening of the T-11 motorway which, replacing the conventional N-420 road, freed the city from the through traffic.

The intensive land occupation by urban development continues until 2008. Then, triggered off by the international financial crisis, the real estate sector of Catalonia and a great part of the Mediterranean began to suffer a serious recession (Figure 4). The number of newly built houses dropped from more than 10 thousand a year to an insignificant level of some 600 houses in 2012. The year 2008 was also the moment when the upward trend of the city’s population was interrupted after reaching its maximum with 108 thousand inhabitants, switching now to a stagnated or slightly decreasing situation. On the contrary, the unemployment rate suffered an unbearable rise, with more than 10 thousand unemployed people between 2011 and 2014.

Anyway, the last photography from a flight conducted in 2015 reflects, rather than consequences of the crisis that logically take some time to be perceived, inertias of the expansive process of the previous stage. In fact, one year after the outbreak of the recession, the Catalan government approved the plan for Strategic Residential Areas (Àrees Residencials Estratègiques: ARE) for the Camp de Tarragona, a decision that shortly afterwards caused a great controversy in the local politics of Reus.

**Figure 4** Evolution of some socio-economic indexes in Reus

*Source:* Elaboration based on data provided by the Institut d’Estadística de Catalunya (population and unemployment) and Reus city (newly built houses). The latter is an extract from the following publication: Ajuntament de Reus, *Revisió del Pla Local d’Habitatge 2014-2021*. February 2014, p. 24.
III. Towards a New Plan

Precedents in urban planning

The historical context we have just described helps us understand the evolution of urban planning in Reus. Since the first local democratic election held in 1979, the city administration was controlled for a long time by a left-wing government headed by the Socialists’ Party of Catalonia (Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya: PSC). When the moment came to prepare a full version urban plan, the government commissioned the work to a renowned architect, Manuel de Torres Capell. After several years of deliberation, the first General Urban Development Plan (Pla General d’Ordenació Urbana: PGOU) was approved definitively in 1989. At the same time, the Special Plan for the Inner Reform of Reus Old Town (Pla Especial de Reforma Interior del Casc Antic de Reus) was launched to recover the dynamism of the historic centre as a socio-economic motor of the city. An important event of that period was the creation of Rovira i Virgili University (URV). The denomination of the new institution, named after an important historical figure, as well as the shared campus system revealed once again the long-standing relation of rivalry kept between Tarragona and Reus.

Ten years later, in 1999, the second PGOU of Reus was approved, drafted this time by an internal team of the municipal administration. As main objectives of the plan, the following was proposed: to promote the historic centre, extending its definition to the second ring; to attend the problem of communication; to solve the problem relating to industrial land supply; to improve the management to modify urban land (sòl urbà) and land for development (sòl urbanitzable); and to protect the rural land as an important element for environmental balance. This new plan, however, would be subject to numerous partial modifications, in total 65 up to today, to facilitate among other things large urban development projects in the vicinity of the URV Bellissens Campus. Two facilities of particular relevance, the new University Hospital Sant Joan de Reus and the exhibition and convention centre “firaReus”, were set up in 2010 and 2011 respectively (Table 1). We should remember that both of them play an important role, apart from their specialized functions, in highlighting the status of Reus as a capital city, always in competition with Tarragona.

In the period of validity of the second general plan, still in force today, there have been substantial changes in both Spanish and Catalan urban planning legislation. In addition to the revision of the Catalan Law of Urbanism, it is worth noting the creation of the already mentioned figure of ARE to solve the social deficit in affordable housing, a problem aggravated by the real estate bubble. In September 2009, the Director Plan of the Strategic Residential Areas for the Camp de Tarragona was approved, specifying the development to be carried out in Reus to the north of the railway station. Another aspect to be pointed out is the so-called Neighbourhood Law, enacted in 2004 with the aim of rehabilitating degraded neighbourhoods. Reus was one of the cities that first made an effective use of this new instrument. The Integral Intervention Pro-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>City Government Press Releases</th>
<th>Local Press Communication</th>
<th>General Context</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>July 25</strong>: Councillor of Architecture and Urban Planning, Jordi Berguedà, prefers to see how the upper level plans are defined before preparing the new POUM.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>July 3</strong>: Anton Pàmies wants to reconstruct unity among different neighbourhoods of the city and build the city’s urbanism for the 21st century.</td>
<td><strong>March 13</strong>: The Director Plan of the Strategic Residential Areas for the Camp de Tarragona is approved.</td>
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<td><strong>July 8</strong>: Carles Pellicer (CiU) criticizes the designation of Anton Pàmies as a personal treatment and claims public debate for the POUM.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>July-September</strong>: Some critical articles about the developments being carried out by the city, such as the Strategic Residential Areas (ARE) or the demolition of the old factory la Sedera.</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td><strong>July 3</strong>: City government incorporates Anton M. Pàmies as director of the POUM Technical Office. Agreement with the Catalan Architects Association, Tarragona branch, to set up the POUM Technical Office in a property of the Association in Reus. <strong>September</strong>: The Integral Intervention Project for Sol i Vista and Immaculada Districts was selected by the Catalan Government.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>May 7</strong>: City government announces the preparation of the POUM, approving the public involvement programme. Also opens a specific web site for that purpose (<a href="http://www.reus2020.reus.cat">www.reus2020.reus.cat</a>). <strong>June</strong>: Catalan Institute of Land (INCASOL) and the city of Reus constitute a consortium to develop the ARE Passeig Nord. <strong>September 24</strong>: The new University Hospital Sant Joan de Reus is inaugurated. <strong>December</strong>: The Integral Intervention Project for Carme District is completed.</td>
<td><strong>January 12</strong>: Catalan Government approves the Partial Territorial Plan of the Camp de Tarragona. <strong>November 28</strong>: CiU gains in the Catalan parliamentary election. <strong>December 27</strong>: Artur Mas is invested as President of the Catalan Government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td><strong>May 10</strong>: Carles Pellicer criticizes the ARE, considering it as a distorting factor to the POUM. <strong>June 16</strong>: Popular Party criticizes the ARE among other ad hoc revisions to the current PGOU. <strong>June 23</strong>: Opinion claiming an Urban Mobility Plan before configuring the POUM.</td>
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<td><strong>January 11-17</strong>: The public involvement process for the POUM starts with 4 informative sessions. <strong>January 20-March 24</strong>: A series of 6 conferences for experts and engineers to prepare the POUM.</td>
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| 2011 | **January 11**: City government intends to present a preliminary draft of the POUM before the local election in May. Mayor Lluís Miquel Pérez asserts that the POUM will establish the limit in urban growth with a “forth ring”. | | (continued)
2011

March 1: Advisory Board of Urban Planning. Councillor of Architecture and Urban Planning, Jordi Berguedà, presented the objectives of the POUM to the parties concerned.

March 3: Plenary of the POUM in which some 80 civic and professional entities participated.

March 4: Special Commission of Urban Planning is held, where the municipal political groups are represented.

March 9: The exhibition and convention centre, firaReus, is fully set up.

February 11: Councillor Jordi Berguedà explains in the Special Commission of Urban Planning key points of the POUM, among others, integration of Gaudí district and the new ARE into the city centre.

May 11: Civic platform “Reus Viu” presents 1,500 signatures to the city government claiming more public involvement.

May 16: Platform “MartiVerd” opposes new industrial estates.

May 22: Local election gives a narrow victory to CiU.

June 7: City government pact between CiU and the Popular Party.

August 26: New Councillor of Architecture and Urban Planning, Miquel Domingo, communicates the closing of the POUM Technical Office in November to reduce costs.

August 31: Interview to Miquel Domingo: The new city government aims to approve the POUM before its mandate finalizes. The ARE is not adapted to the current socio-economic situation.

November 20: Spanish general election gives an absolute majority to the Popular Party headed by Mariano Rajoy.

December 14: Catalan Association of Municipalities for Independence (AMI) is constituted.

2012

April 25: City government announces the procedure to present the POUM draft.

May 21: Advisory Board of Urban Planning is held to promote public involvement in the debate around the POUM draft.

June 8: City Council approves the POUM draft.

July 2: Exhibition on the POUM “Identity, Future” is open at the Art Centre Cal Massó until September 20. The exhibition is set up as a new channel for public involvement, with several informative sessions held during the period. Also a new specific web site (www.poum.reus.cat) is open.

December 4: Plenary of POUM is held to analyse the results of the public involvement process.

April 25: The POUM draft presented by Miquel Domingo lowers the population growth forecasts and seeks the future of Reus as a compact city.

October 11: The public involvement process of the POUM is closed with 63 suggestions, being the railway route revision the most commented topic.

November 20: An article by councillor Miquel Domingo: Switching from an expansive model to a compact one is being accepted positively among the citizens.

September 11: Massive demonstration for the independence of Catalonia.

November 25: Catalan parliamentary election gives a narrow victory to CiU.

December 24: Artur Mas gains support of ERC and is invested for the second time as Catalan president.

(continued)
### 2013

**January 23:** Catalan parliament approves the declaration of sovereignty and self-determination.

### 2014

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 14</td>
<td>The Urban Mobility Plan of Reus and the Special Urban Plan “Catalogue of Masos of Reus in non-developable land” are approved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 30</td>
<td>The Local Housing Plan is approved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 27</td>
<td>Advisory Board of Urban Planning is held to open a new stage of public involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 31</td>
<td>The Popular Unity Candidacy (Candidatura d’Unitat Popular: CUP) claims repeal of the ARE.</td>
</tr>
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<td>June 26</td>
<td>City government is working to include the green belt (V Verda) in the POUM.</td>
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### 2015

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 11</td>
<td>With a session of the Plenary of the POUM, the public involvement process is completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 11</td>
<td>City government plans to approve initially the POUM within a year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 22</td>
<td>An article summarizes what each political party proposes in urban planning and mobility for the 2015 local election.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 20</td>
<td>In the Spanish general election, the PP loses the absolute majority.</td>
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### May 24: Local election gives another narrow victory to CiU.

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>July 13</td>
<td>City council approves joining of Reus in the Association of Municipalities for the Independence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 9</td>
<td>After some of the pillars for urban planning are approved, such as the Urban Mobility Plan or the Local Housing Plan, the POUM will need more than one year to be approved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 19</td>
<td>Interview to Carles Pelliecr: I would like to finish the POUM in this mandate.</td>
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<td>November 5</td>
<td>Shopping Centre “La Fira” is opened near the city centre.</td>
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### 2016

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 25</td>
<td>City government pact to incorporate “Now Reus” (Ara Reus).</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 25</td>
<td>City government pact to incorporate ERC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 10</td>
<td>After the resign of Artur Mas, Carles Puigdemont is invested as Catalan president.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 26</td>
<td>Second Spanish general election gives the PP more seats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 29</td>
<td>Mariano Rajoy is invested for the second time as president of the Spanish government.</td>
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</table>

Source: Elaboration based on Reus city government press releases and local press communication (reusdigital.cat / Diari de Tarragona).
ject for Carme District was launched in the same year, and was completed in December 2010 with recognizable results.

The third plan

Another ten years after the approval of the second plan, in mid-2009, the city government began to drive the institutional machinery to prepare the third general plan. The department of urbanism and architecture was headed by the councillor Jordi Berguedà, who had already been holding the responsibility since 1999, the year of the second plan. He decided to entrust architect Anton M. Pàmies with the work of drafting the new Municipal Plan of Urban Development (Pla d’Ordenació Urbanística Municipal: POUM), giving him generous resources, in particular, a special technical office for the POUM drafting. It should not be forgotten that the new POUM was integrated in a broader vision on the future of the city, which encompassed aspects like natural environment and energy or mobility and sustainability.

From this moment, the whole process begins a complicated course, affected by an intense political confrontation. Attempting to present an impartial vision of the process, we collected information from both the official press releases and the local private press (Table 1).

In January 2011, socialist mayor Lluís Miquel Pérez communicates that the city government has the intention of presenting the POUM preliminary draft (avantprojecte) before the next local election, scheduled in May of the same year. Establishing the limit for the city’s expansion with a “forth ring” was one of the principles drawn on the roadmap. Then, a public involvement programme was launched with a series of conferences for experts and a plenary of civic and professional entities.

Criticism to the government’s management raised some key points. From the wing of Convergence and Union (Convergència i Unió: CiU), then the most influential Catalan nationalist party, the head of electoral list Carles Pellicer censured the government for choosing a too expensive formula with an external team to prepare the POUM. With regard to the plan’s substance, a supposedly developmental character of the draft aroused controversy. Several opposition parties began to call for an in-depth review of the ARE, considering the residential development to the north of the city as an unnecessary project, against the local residents’ interests. And the implantation of industrial estates contemplated in the plan was for the critical voice not adapted to the city’s current necessities and not promising for the future of the local economy.

In an almost pre-electoral ambience, councillor Jordi Bergudà presented on March 1st the objectives of the POUM to all the parties concerned. His discourse will be analysed later in

3 Takenaka (2013) analyses the Neighbourhood Programme, comparing four cities of Tarragona province: Tarragona (Part Alta), Reus (Barri del Carme), Cambrils and Falset.
4 Achievements of Reus’ urban policy in the first decade of the 20th century were presented in a book edited by the city government, with special emphasis on urbanism (Ajuntament de Reus ed., 2011).
5 See the strategic plan “Reus Demà”, elaborated by Reus city government in collaboration with Rovira i Virgili University (Ajuntament de Reus / Universitat de Rovira i Virgili eds., 2011).
some detail.

**New city government**
The local election held on May 22, 2011 gave a narrow victory to CiU. Weeks later, the nationalists managed to agree with the Popular Party (*Partit Popular: PP*) for the formation of the new city government. As is well known, the PP is the main Spanish party by the conservative and centralist wing, and the years it has governed at national level, has repeatedly collided with the political interests of Catalonia. All that, however, did not prevent the local coalition to be agreed between Catalan nationalists and the PP, at least until the issue of Catalan independentism came to the forefront of politics. And so it happened in Reus.

Shortly after, the new Councillor of Urbanism and Architecture, Miquel Domingo, expressed the intention of the new municipal government to approve the POUM before the end of its mandate. Closing of the technical office was the first measure taken by the new government. Return to the previous formula of internal preparation of the POUM meant a reduction of expenses, but at the same time gave a glimpse of a much longer period than foreseen by the previous team until the completion of the whole process.

In April 2012, the city government announces the procedure to present the POUM draft, with a special emphasis on the public involvement process. A great part of the year was spent to organize different participation forums, in order to fulfil one of the public commitments exposed during the electoral campaign. The most relevant event was the exhibition on the POUM draft, which was open from July to September in a public art centre. We will see in the following section the content of the draft to contrast it with the vision given by the former municipal government.

**Prolongation of the process**
The conclusion of the public involvement process did not mean speeding up of the drafting work. Rather the opposite happened, since the government had to work on several pending issues concerning sectoral planning and preferred to settle them separately to incorporate them into the POUM. In May 2014, three specific plans were finally approved: the Urban Mobility Plan, the Special Urban Plan “Catalogue of *Masos* (traditional farmhouses) of Reus in non-developable land” and the Local Housing Plan. The last made a radical downward revision on the housing demand in the coming years, giving justification to withdraw definitively Reus from the ARE projects. After another short period of participation, the government’s mandate ends without taking a clear step towards the approval of the POUM.

The 2015 local election left a more complex political panorama than in 2011. Up to eight months were necessary to see a new government formed, this time among CiU, Republican Left of Catalonia (*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya: ERC*) and a local political group, called “Now Reus” (*Ara Reus*).
After describing the long process to the POUM not concluded today, let us now take a look at the different political visions on urban planning to see what kind of innovation was possible with the change of government.

**Reus 2020 plan (2011)**

As is mentioned before, the former councillor, Jordi Berguedà, presented in early 2011 the main objectives of the POUM, named “Reus 2020” plan (Table 2). This “Decalogue” makes continuous reference to Reus’ attraction in a broad territorial context: “lead the metropolitan Camp de Tarragona”, “territorial attractiveness to gain population and qualified activities” or “creativity as the city’s brand”, to pick up the most remarkable expressions. Aiming at that attractiveness as a capital city, they defended rather ambitious actions like “keep and intensify land developments for industrial activities” and “consolidate and expand housing policies to attract residents over the demographic forecasts”. These lines of action seem to place the general plan in continuity of the expansive economic cycle coming from the previous decade, either because the plan began to be prepared when the most dramatic consequences of the crisis were not yet felt, or because politicians and experts put their expectations in an early recovery in the local economy.

Obviously, they did not pursue a constructivism at all costs, but sought a renewed balance between urban and non-urban land, as reflected in phrases like “sustainable urban development with a rational land use” or “urban and natural landscape as a sign of identity”. That balance would be symbolized by the fourth ring, which would define the “maximum” Reus roughly inside the two motorway routes. Special attention was paid also to the promotion of commercial activities, another key aspect for the city’s historical identity.
Finally, the commitment to the position of Reus as a capital city should be remembered again. Facilities for different uses would be what guarantees that centrality of the city at metropolitan level. In this sense, projects already undertaken like the area of the new university hospital or firaReus can perfectly be considered as antecedents for the progress in the coming years. A map extracted from the presentation shows in a synthetic way the pillars supporting the whole plan: land to develop, non-developable land, facilities and the green belt as the last ring showing the limit of urbanization (Figure 3a).

### Table 3  Key actions in the Reus POUM draft (2012)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The POUM draft proposes a new model of growth, adapted to the current economic cycle, and adjusted to the estimation of population growth and the available land. This model will be based on a compact urban core, a rational land occupation in time, planning of particular areas for economic and logistic activities, and the revision of the programmed but not developed residential areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The new POUM should enable actions in the existing city to improve its quality and economic activities. Those actions will be centred on the empty areas in the city and a new housing policy adapted to the current necessities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The new POUM desires to preserve and integrate harmonically values related to agricultural fields, footpaths, water streams and mobility network. For that purpose, it will connect the squares and streets of the urban area to the green belt (<em>Verda</em>) going through the rural area, and protect the traditional farmhouses (<em>masos</em>) as a representative construction with social value.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>For an efficient and sustainable mobility, the new POUM will improve the transport network for cars and persons, defending solutions like a new railway route to keep the freight traffic away from the city centre.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on “Avanç del Pla d’Ordenació Urbana del Municipi de Reus”, Ajuntament de Reus, 2012.

POUM draft (2012)
The new city government presented the POUM draft in the exhibition held a few months after its mandate started. The plan was outlined in four points (Table 3).

Analysing carefully the document, compact city comes to the surface as a key concept of the whole set. The main actor for the city’s future continues to be the city centre, defined now as a compact urban core. Based on the quality and attractiveness of that centre, new areas of development will be added according to the population growth and the demand from emerging economic activities. This idea justifies a thorough revision of the housing policy with the consequent withdrawal from some areas, programmed but not yet developed, which they consider as oversized. On the contrary, more attention will be paid to fill up the underutilized spaces located inside the existing city and, above all, to preserve and value the agricultural land, still remaining in a large extension in the environs of Reus. In this sense, an improved communication between the urban core and the green belt is proposed to integrate again the city in its territorial context. The idea is perfectly reflected in one of the maps accompanying the draft, in which free spaces, areas of environmental and scenic interest and agricultural fields are highlighted, with the green
belt, named *V Verda*, as an integrating element (Figure 3b).

The POUM draft must be understood not as an active intervention in the physical environment of the city, but rather as an attempt to manage the connection among different urban and periurban pieces to recompose the functionality and appealing image of a city like Reus, recognized as an example of compact city. Therefore, the aspect of communication and mobility is considered with care in the proposal, although their effective management depends largely on the public urban transport policy, rather than the physical planning. It also requires agreements with institutions of higher levels, concerning interurban road and rail networks.

**Innovation and continuity**

Let us now review the reorientation of urban planning after the change of government. An effective way to do this is to remember the relevant points of the POUM draft presented by the new government to contrast them with what the previous team proposed in their Reus 2020 plan.

Firstly, compaction of the urban core does not appear in identical terms in the Reus 2020 plan. Nevertheless, the latter defended to complete the city centre, extending it conceptually up to the second ring configured by the promenades. Also, the former plan proposed to define the fourth ring, the green belt, as an almost definitive limit of the potential urban growth. The difference between this idea and a rational use of territory claimed in the 2012 draft does not seem excessively large. Actually, a rational land use is an essential demand found in both documents. A clear discrepancy comes out when dealing with specific areas to develop. The most important example of that is the ARE, located to the north of the train station.

Secondly, the 2012 draft prioritizes the transformation and regeneration of the existing city with the aim of improving the urban quality and activating the economic activities. Here too, similarity seems to prevail over difference. The Reus 2020 plan wished to promote a creative and diversified commerce, especially in the centre. Creation and consolidation of cultural and creative facilities was for them the formula chosen to increase the city’s attractiveness, a formula which had to be complemented by new public spaces. Difference of some relevance appears when the Reus 2020 plan proposes to launch new development areas, such as the directional axis of Tarragona Avenue. It should be remembered, however, that it was also the previous government that undertook projects to rehabilitate degraded neighbourhoods, as exemplified by the case of the Carme district project implemented inside the urban core.

A similar observation can be made regarding the value of agricultural land and the green belt. Taking care of the agricultural mould of the city and the landscape value seem to be original terms of the 2012 draft. And the proposal to connect urban streets with rural paths, too. However, the idea of making non-developable land a key player of the POUM, and understanding landscape, including the natural one, as a sign of identity is present in both proposals. The elaboration of the Catalogue of *Masos* was begun by the former government and completed in the first years of the new mayor’s mandate.
If something distinguishes both proposals from the viewpoint of substantial contents, it is the continuous reference made by the Reus 2020 plan to the leadership of Reus at metropolitan level, over a wide radius covering the entire territory of the Camp de Tarragona. Regarding the 2012 draft, it is necessary to underline again the importance given to the aspect of mobility. Anyway, the organization of transport network depends to a large extent on the upper level planning, in this case, designed by the autonomous and central governments. To show an example of special interest for the land use planning in Reus, an alteration of the railway route to take it away from the urbanized area is a local claim since years ago. The inclusion of the demand in the Partial Territorial Plan of the Camp de Tarragona, approved by the Catalan government in 2010, is an important support to the city in their attempt to agree with the central government, which controls the railway network throughout the country (RENFE).

On the other hand, looking at the temporal aspect of planning, the variation from one proposal to another is quite remarkable. If the previous city government pursued an early initial approval of the third general plan with the intention of concluding the process shortly after the 2011 local election, what the new government did was postponing the issue for an uncertain period to open different types of public involvement forums. Since then, the city government together with the technical team have been making important efforts to conclude the sectoral plans considered indispensable to configure the POUM, but they have not presented up to today a promising overall vision for the future city. Naturally, such a way of managing piece by piece has the advantage of being able to mould to changing situations without locking in a predefined framework.

V. Discussion

Tactics or strategy
Suspending the implementation of the housing project does not necessarily mean a negative to the objective of the policy that sought to alleviate the unbearable problem of housing in the midst of the real estate boom. And foreseeing a population increase of 10 thousand inhabitants for the next 10 years instead of 30 thousand does not seem to originate from a different ideological position either. In fact, what has changed is the forecasting about the city’s demographic and economic trends in the years to come, that is to say, a strategic shift from a vision too conditioned and tied to the expansive cycle of the prior period to another more adjusted to the current dynamics of the city, which has got evident a few years after the outbreak of the crisis.

The criticism we have just made, however, does not detract from the significance of the change that has taken place in the city government. When elections are held, what is presented to civil society is not only the ideological position of each political entity. The strategic dimension of the politics is also caught by people, and that is closely linked to their perception about the changing dynamics the city is going through. For anyone governing the city, rectifying
themselves in that perception is not easy, because sometimes rectification is only possible with a change in the political leadership, i.e. a change of the team directing the public policy. When tactics work as an intelligent reading of the moment in which we live, it becomes a political strategy.

**Urban planning in a broader context**

On the other hand, it is much more complicated to evaluate the time that has elapsed since the change of government until today: more than five years without a significant advance for the approval of the POUM. In our opinion, this question needs to be analysed in relation to a much broader context than the strictly local one.

At the technical level, urban planning is now conditioned by different sorts of territorial planning. Just remember that until 2010 the Partial Territorial Plan of the Camp de Tarragona was not approved, when it can affect many aspects of the local planning. In addition, there are more and more sectoral policy figures that regulate aspects relating to territorial planning, such as mobility, energy, transport, ports and airports, natural spaces or commercial facilities. Trapped within that dense planning layers, it is extremely difficult to determine the optimum moment to complete the municipal planning, and even more, to maintain a certain local autonomy in the large territorial settings.

Apart from the institutional constraint just commented, we should not miss the turbulent situation undergone by Catalan society as a result of the well known independentist movement. This is not the place to analyse the theme in depth. So, just let us remember that the intensification of the movement after the PP attained the central power has coincided with the mandate of Reus’ municipal government controlled by nationalists (see Table 1). Although the debate around independence has little to do with urban planning, it can affect the political leadership on which many important decisions depend.

Certainly, in a country where the technical structure in the public administration is consolidated, even if a tense political situation does not give scope for decision-making on specific issues, the daily management does not necessarily get paralysed. In fact, several sectoral plans of Reus have been recently concluded. The new “La Fira” shopping centre was planned by the former socialist government and, after raising a strong controversy among local merchants, was finally opened with the nationalists in power. The continuity of the scheduled programmes seems to be guaranteed by the professionalism working in the public affairs.

However, in a political situation where the leadership is continually contested, it is difficult to undertake new policies to transform society. In our opinion, that is what is happening in Catalonia, at least as far as urban and territorial policy is concerned. The lack of initiatives is not clearly perceived, while the measures decided upon in the previous stage continue bearing some fruit. However, if after several years the government does not know how to react to emerging needs in an ever-changing society, the situation becomes a political paralysis. Just re-
member that Catalonia has been especially productive in territorial policy for some years, with innovative instruments exemplified, among others, by the Neighbourhood Law or the Law for Improvement of Urbanizations\(^6\). The absence of innovative actions is getting evident.

**For a long-standing innovation**

To conclude, we raise two questions aimed at the future of urbanism in the long term: one of them related to the particular situation of Reus and another of a more theoretic nature, also inspired by the experience of this Catalan city.

An outstanding feature that characterized the management of the Reus left-wing government was its tenacious desire to compete with the city of Tarragona. Continuous efforts to maintain the status of Reus against its neighbour city resulted, as we have pointed out, in the creation of large facilities, such as the university campus, the new hospital or the large exhibition centre, which are actually working as the city’s trademarks. All these actions undoubtedly helped the external recognition to Reus in general and particularly to its ambitious practice in urbanism, awarded internationally.

However, we are now living in a time when the sea and the port work as an efficient device to generate wealth, the remains of the ancient city as a stage of representation and the high-ranking capital cities as focus attracting service and financial activities. All these factors give Tarragona a huge, truly enviable potential. How to manage Reus’ relative position in a network of increasingly interdependent cities, and above all, in a globalized world that exerts both hierarchical and banalizing force is a pending question that should be answered sooner or later.

The other inquiry is much more long-standing. It is open today to be solved possibly by the next generation: the future of urban planning in the contemporary city. Modern urbanism was born as a unique union among accelerated urbanization, functionalist thinking and advanced engineering. Its most effective instrument has been the design of the urban physical framework, accompanied by the regulation of land uses. Today, it seems like that the premises that underpinned the birth of modern urbanism are increasingly questioned. Urbanization is stabilized in the major part of the developed world; Functionalism has been contested for decades in a society that claims complexity as a positive value of the city; And innovation in engineering is being produced in fields like communication and mobility.

We should ask if a complex and inflexible organization that lays over a large number of plans at different spacial scales and concerning different sectoral policies is the most appropriate methodology to solve problems of an ever-changing city, which is full of uncertainty. When the current government of Reus is postponing the POUM to settle first issues like the mobility plan, what we are witnessing is possibly not only a simple delay in the public actions. Joan Subirats,

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\(^6\) All these actions and experience are compiled in Nel·lo (2012) from the viewpoint of the person who directed the territorial policy in Catalonia during the period of the left-wing autonomous government (2003-2010).
a Catalan political scientist, asserts in a volume dedicated to the cities in the 21st century that it is necessary to strengthen and rethink urban policy as a framework in which to place integrated actions, and that those actions should be designed and implemented from proximity, integrating the many multi-level intervention mechanisms and seeking dynamics of complex sustainability. Critical moments of the city are when we should begin asking ourselves if a new model of society is requiring a different way of managing the city.

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Selected bibliography:
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The volume (Nel·lo and Mele eds., 2016) is in itself a illustrative synthesis of the challenges that are being faced by contemporary urbanization and urban policy. The contribution of Joan Subirats appears in a chapter titled “Towards new scenarios of innovation and governance”.

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