

## Atlas histórico del urbanismo español

by Fernando De Terán, Madrid, Fundación Arquia, 2023, 560 pp., €70 (paperback)

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Atlas histórico del urbanismo español**, by Fernando De Terán, Madrid, Fundación Arquia, 2023, 560 pp., €70 (paperback)

Fernando De Terán's *Atlas histórico del urbanismo español* (Historical Atlas of Spanish Town Planning) is a rigorous study of Spanish urban history intertwined with planning history, focusing on the spatial, organizational and morphological aspects of Spanish cities from the first urban manifestations around 2800 BC to the present day.

This fascinating handbook is the result of a reflection that is the fruit of the author's lifelong experience in the field of research. It is made up of a series of chapters that offer a complete vision of the evolution of Spanish cities, essentially referring to the city making process and physical configuration of urban reality as a sequence, juxtaposition and superimposition of a series of situations that have occurred over the centuries.

The atlas explains how the spatial organization, form and physiognomy of the Spanish city developed over time, based on how it was appreciated by those who saw it as it really was and represented what they saw. These views are twofold. Firstly, the direct visual, sensory appearance, through 'views', that offer knowledge of the morphological, volumetric and spatial aspects obtained through a direct apprehension of reality (although sometimes it may be an imagined vision of a past, present, future or ideal reality). This type of visual experience is always partial, because although it encompasses the city as a whole, it is only one of the many visions that can be obtained by changing the point of view around it. Secondly, the mental approach, the product of a rational elaboration that constructs a total image of what would be a projection on the ground of a reality that is too large to be encompassed by the human gaze. This second vision mainly encompasses the spatial plans.

De Terán also included bird's-eye images, but with a careful recommendation. The only method of obtaining a comprehensive overview of an area is through the use of aerial photography from a sufficient distance, which can be achieved through the use of a drone, helicopter, plane or satellite. However, this method does have limitations in terms of accuracy, as the perimeter of built-up areas may not correspond to the line of intersection of facades with the ground. Instead, it may correspond to the edge of the eaves.

The approach to planning history offered by this atlas is based on the general view of each town at each significant stage of its formation. On occasion, the author focuses on specific elements, as by considering the organization and configuration of the whole. He thus points to the role of certain fragments of urban spaces or singular elements in the configuration of the city, which includes particular architectural design. However, not only specific elements are highlighted, but also the territorial dimension of the described phenomenon, which encompasses the distribution of cities within a given territory, as well as the relationships between cities and their surrounding areas. These facets include the infrastructural networks that facilitate the connections between different cities and the transformation of the natural conditions of the territory itself, along with the manner in which each city is integrated into its geographical context, which can be understood as a natural support.

This book will undoubtedly appeal to readers interested in the evolution of Spanish cities, since it is the most up-to-date work on the history of Spanish town planning, understood as a form of knowledge of the process of formation and transformation of the urban environment. Although of significant importance, the reader will nonetheless discover that De Terán's main goal is not to recreate the past but to gain insight into the processes that have shaped current urban reality. This facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter among academic and professional communities engaged

in the field of planning. Furthermore, it enables us to comprehend the past, as the most intriguing aspect of the past is that it remains a living entity.

The reader gains insight into how urban planning in Spain has evolved from a distinct discipline and activity to an integral component of a broader political strategy. Despite numerous contradictions and difficulties, and in light of the indisputable necessity for a comprehensive revision of urban planning legislation, it is evident that the value of foresight provides a certain degree of continuity in planning.<sup>1</sup> At both the urban and territorial levels, some notable outcomes are still being achieved, with the incorporation of environmental considerations and the objective of sustainability in accordance with the Spanish Urban Agenda.<sup>2</sup>

In this context, the journey offered by Fernando De Terán is crucial for understanding and addressing the current challenges of Spanish town planning. It can be summarized with De Terán's assertion that in Spain 'an intense process of intellectual ferment is developing. ... It is undeniable that we are facing an important change of stage in history ... which coincides with the exhaustion of the traditional normative approach ... and with the consideration of town planning as part of state environmental policy, within the framework of international agreements for sustainable development' (520, author's translation).



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<sup>1</sup>Sanz and Luis, "El planeamiento urbano y sus enemigos, en España."

<sup>2</sup>Camerin et al., "Towards the Spanish Local Urban Agenda."