11. Urban National Policy in Spain?

A diachronic critical review of four decades of government action

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1. INTRODUCTION

Spain is one of the Member States of the European Union that has not developed over time an '*urban policy in explicit terms*' (Parkinson et al. 2013, p. 176). Even though over the last four decades the urban issue has continued growing in relevance in the international and EU policy-making context, being increasingly considered strategic for national and regional economies (Parkinson 2005) and crucial for 'creativity and innovation' (European Commission 2011, p. iv), the evolution of urban policy in Spain allows one to say that it has not been specifically integrated into the policy agenda across this period.¹ This does not mean that Spanish cities have not received support from the national tier of government to address their problems and more urgent challenges, but this support has been based on sectoral policies (mainly land, housing, transport and urban mobility), complemented with general social and economic policies that are not specifically urban. As a consequence, it can be said that Spain does not have a genuine and explicit policy understood as a policy for 'the City'.

This chapter aims to provide a critical and historical reconstruction of the process of evolution that has led to the present national urban policy framework in the country. To achieve this objective the analysis covers the last four decades using a diachronic approach that considers the sequence of events over time, taking into account that present policies and their design are the result of a complex set of issues and reflections (McCann 2015) in which some topics and objectives are prioritized over others. Adopting a critical perspective, this work aims to develop an understanding of the present situation that can contribute to an academic's or practitioner's reflection on the urban issue within the framework of the different urban agenda processes that are being

developed in the country at the moment and, importantly, in the context of the construction and implementation of the Spanish Urban Agenda.

1.1 Current Local Government System and Recent Elements of Change Impacting on Cities/the Urban Dimension

The factors that underlie the scenario mentioned above are complex and have economic, social, historical and governance roots. They also reflect the tradition of slow political reform that characterizes the modern history of the country. Many of those factors have been inherited from the past, and have determined the evolution of this policy field during the 40 years of democracy. One of the most important causes in this regard is the evolution of the multi-level institutional framework established by the Constitution of 1978. It sets out three main levels of government: the national, the regional (Autonomous Communities) and the local (the provinces and the municipalities). In regard to urban issues, the first level has retained few competences, devolving most of them to the regions and the cities under the subsidiarity principle. This has resulted in a policy scenario in which urban competences are exclusive, concurrent or shared by different tiers of government, requiring a level of coordination that has never been attained (Romero 2005). The division of the competences and the lack of institutional channels for collaboration explain to a large extent why the 'urban issue' has been kept out of the national policy agenda. Efforts made at the national level to change this at various moments in time have been considered unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court (since it considered that they violated regional competences) or have quickly lost momentum before creating any relevant transformation (see section 2). This explains, but is also a result of, other significant characteristics of the Spanish urban policy framework: the prevalence of a sectoral approach to urban matters, focused on construction and rehabilitation of buildings and public works (Tejedor 2013); and a tradition in which urban policies are addressed within the institutional sphere with little attention paid to the integration and participation of other actors.

To complete a general description of the Spanish scenario, it is necessary to take into account the accession of the country to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986, something that resized the multi-level governance framework described, giving rise to a more complex context in which the country had to apply transnational policies in coordination with the EEC institutions (Subirats 1992). Regarding the urban domain, very early on the EEC started to exert a notable influence on the national and especially the local and regional levels (De Gregorio Hurtado 2017a). The EU does not have competences on urban matters (Parkinson 2005), but the European Commission incentivized the Member States to commit to tackling the problems of the

most vulnerable areas of European cities at that time by launching in 1994 the URBAN Community Initiative, an instrument designed to give visibility at the European level to the topic and to introduce innovation in urban governance, urban regeneration and urban planning in the different countries (Reiter 2008). To achieve this it provided funding to the Member States to help them take action in the deprived areas of their neighbourhoods through an integrated and participative method of urban regeneration (the ‘URBAN approach’ (Atkinson 2014)). In Spain, URBAN started a journey that has led to important opportunities for cities to overcome the inertia of the national level and some regions and find funding and guidance for sustainable urban development, and particularly for the regeneration of their most vulnerable areas, through the programmes of the EU (De Gregorio Hurtado 2017a). The Urban Pilot Projects (1989), URBAN (1994–1999) and URBAN II (2000–2006), the Iniciativa Urbana (2007–2013), the ISUD approach (2014–2020), URBACT (from 2000) and, more recently, the Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) (from 2014), along with EU urban policy documents,² have played a crucial role in this regard. Interestingly, all these instruments have made important contributions in creating a link between the EU and the local level that explains the approach to sustainable urban development adopted by many cities from the mid-1990s onwards (De Gregorio Hurtado 2017a; 2018a) and the significant involvement and presence of Spanish cities in instruments such as URBACT and the UIA (González Medina and De Gregorio Hurtado 2018). Other instruments promoted by the EU in the field of urban policies, for example the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) and the Sustainable Energy Action Plans, have also had a notable influence on cities. The EU influence has also been significant in the regions that are most proactive when it comes to urban issues.³

The framework described witnessed much change in the period 2015–2016. In 2015 the Agenda 2030 of the United Nations was approved, followed by the New Urban Agenda in 2016. Also in 2016, the operational framework to advance towards an Urban Agenda for the European Union (the Pact of Amsterdam) was agreed. Spain has expressed its commitment to all these agenda frameworks. They are contextualizing and giving momentum to the development of the Spanish Urban Agenda, an instrument that could open a policy space to make progress in the identification of the main problems and challenges of Spanish cities and to give place to a consistent ‘urban policy’ aimed at overcoming traditional inertias and pitfalls in the framework of a coordinated multi-level action.

The creation of the international agendas is also having an impact at the regional level. Different Autonomous Communities are developing their own Urban Agendas: Andalusia has been the first to approve one (in September 2018), and other regions such as the Basque Country and Catalonia are working on providing such a policy framework for their territories. Also,

many Spanish cities that had been very active in the past in the development of their Local 21 Agendas (De Gregorio Hurtado 2017a) are ‘transforming’ them into Urban Agendas, using the Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda of United Nations as a reference in most cases. All this policy activity is giving rise to a new, and favourable, scenario with real potential to make progress in the creation of a collaborative multi-level urban policy aimed to coordinate and make coherent the action at the three levels of government. We argue that at the moment the greatest challenges in the Spanish scenario are to align and coordinate all these policy efforts and advance towards interinstitutional cooperation. Such a cooperation has the potential to prove particularly transformative in the medium term.

1.2 Current Challenges of Urban Areas

The urban challenges to be addressed in the country are many and of different natures. The most pending issue at the moment is the creation of a collaborative multi-level governance system in which, in respect to their competences, the national tier, the regions and the municipalities can agree on visions and legislative and budgetary frameworks aimed at supporting cities of all sizes in facing their problems. The complexity and scale of these problems requires the replacement of a defence-of-competences logic with a cooperative approach. This issue, which has been significantly limiting the efficiency and outputs of the efforts put in place by the different levels of government over time, is crucial today, in a time when many of the most challenging global, and therefore national, problems need to be addressed at the local level. The Spanish and the regional Urban Agendas could represent a turning point if this is understood. For that, they need to be fully aligned.

Other challenges to be faced relate to the most pressing problems of urban areas at present: the housing emergency (particularly problematic in big cities); the rise of urban poverty and the problem of urban segregation, with a special attention paid to peripheries; mitigation and adaptation to climate change; and environmental issues related to the ecological impact of cities and the necessity to advance towards a healthy and equitable urban scenario.

The concentration of these problems in the most vulnerable urban areas highlights another relevant challenge: the necessity to provide a policy framework for urban regeneration based on more flexible and ‘adaptive’ planning instruments that are able to formalize processes and mechanisms to operationalize the necessary changes to the existing social, economic and physical conditions of Spanish cities. This also requires a change of approach to urban planning and urban development in the country, evolving from a traditional vision that encourages the creation of new urban developments (see section 2) to an approach that fosters and incentivizes an integrated improvement of the

existing city (with a specific focus on the vulnerable neighbourhoods). The path to achieve this has been laid in recent years, at least discursively, as the government has adopted a policy narrative that pays attention to and enhances urban regeneration through the Law of Rehabilitation, Regeneration and Renovation, and the Revised Text of the Land Law and Urban Rehabilitation of 2015. Nevertheless, this change needs to be put into practice through the transposition of that legislative framework to the regional level by the Autonomous Communities, something that they are not finding easy. It also needs the provision of a sustainable financial/legislative framework.

2. EVOLVEMENT OF NATIONAL URBAN POLICIES. TOPICS, GOALS, TRAJECTORIES AND JUNCTURES FROM THE 1990S TO TODAY

This section examines the policy action developed by the Spanish government, taking into account its limited competences on urban matters (see section 1). It also looks at the role it has played as the institutional level that represents Spain in the framework of the urban policy of the EU (through the Ministry of Public Works). This section is structured on a temporal basis, using the government legislatures starting from 1982 as criteria. The reason underlying this decision is that the adoption of a critical and historical perspective allows for identifying different government approaches to the urban issue related to the policy priorities adopted by the parties in the government (De Gregorio Hurtado 2012b; 2013). The chronological review is preceded by an explanation of what we consider the ‘Spanish anomalies’. They explain to a large extent the evolution of the national policy framework over the last four decades.

2.1 Background

In order to understand the present it is important to point out that government decisions have been linked over time to what should be considered a set of anomalies that makes the Spanish system quite unique. The first of these anomalies is a strong tradition of urban development understood as urban expansion. It began around 1860, setting the ground for an almost total exclusion of the possibility to transform an existing city (Bassols Coma 1973) from the urban policy framework. On 30 December 1861 the so-called Project for a General Act on Renewal, Renovation, Extension and other Improvements in Towns (*Proyecto de Ley General para la Reforma, Saneamiento, Ensanche y otras Mejoras de las Poblaciones*) was entered for debate in the Spanish Parliament. The Act, informally known as *Ley Posada Herrera* after the Minister’s name,⁴ would have in practice harmonized the Spanish urban planning system with the ones in Western Europe, particularly those in France and Germany. It was

finally rejected by the Senate on July 1862, who then approved the Act for Extension of Towns (*Ley de 29 de junio de 1864 de Ensanche de Poblaciones*) instead. This marked the starting point of Spain's seemingly unstoppable fixation with understanding urban policy as mainly a question of urban expansion.

The second anomaly is the institutionalized prevalence of private investment over public initiatives in almost all urban developments, with the exception of infrastructural actions or limited interventions legitimized on the basis of public interest (characterized by a lack of economic profit). This prevalence was 'institutionalized' through the first comprehensive Land Act (*Ley del Suelo*) of 1956. This instrument has shaped and determined the evolution of the Spanish urban planning system ever since. Every subsequent national or regional Land Act (after the 1978 Spanish Constitution) has been strongly based on that seminal one, with minor variations on the role of land ownership and on private and public sector roles.

The third important anomaly is also linked to the issue mentioned: in order to enable private investment and make urban development a profitable activity, it was determined that land value should be considered in terms of urban expectations (importantly related to economic potential) and not in terms of its actual physical value and 'rural' condition. As a consequence, planning – that is to say, the determination of which rural land is suitable for urban extension, together with simply determined global parameters (uses of future buildings and gross floor area ratio – FAR) – started to generate a large gap between the economic value of land based on planning decisions and that based on its natural capacities. In practice, urban extension became considerably more profitable than any kind of possible regenerative action. The monopoly of land property in Spain was a crucial driver in the design of urban policies at that time and afterwards. Urban planning, or more precisely the determination of land suitable for extension ('*suelo urbanizable*'), has turned out to be one of the most powerful instruments of wealth creation in Spain. This has had important consequences such as the dominance of economic policy over urban policy. The priority has been the generation of large extensions of new urban developments rather than the design of a rational urban qualitative model and the regeneration of existing cities.

These anomalies characterized the period of dictatorship in Spain and also explain many of the limitations and inertias that have been a feature of the subsequent democratic period.

2.2 Period 1982–1996: Three Legislatures of the Socialist Party (González's Governments)

During the 1980s cities were facing unresolved problems to which the new ones were added. The most vulnerable neighbourhoods, located mainly in the

historical city centres and the peripheries, were trapped in processes of decline, abandoned by private investment and with limited public investments in the supply of services (Arias Goytre 1996). Given this scenario, at the beginning of this period the Socialist government put in place a national legislative framework (*Real Decreto 2329/1983 de Protección a la Rehabilitación del Patrimonio Residencial y Urbano de 1983*)⁵ aimed at addressing some of the most important problems related to the physical decay of many urban neighbourhoods. It counted on an allocation of economic resources for the rehabilitation of residential buildings, and constituted one of the main contributions to urban policy at that time (Pol Mendez 1993). The instrument was important because it set the foundations for the advancement towards the consolidation of a national housing policy in the country. This policy was conceived from the beginning as a redistributive one, through which funds could be made available to the lower levels of government (Autonomous Communities and cities) with three main objectives: 1) dealing with urban degradation, 2) providing access to housing to people with fewer resources, and 3) creating employment in the construction sector. This policy has been formalized over time through the multiannual Housing Plan, an instrument that has evolved from the original sectoral approach, aimed only at the rehabilitation of residential buildings, to the concept of integrated regeneration in the last decades (see section 2.4). The first Housing Plan was passed in 1992 (Housing Plan 1992–1995 – *Plan de Vivienda 1992–1995*) with a vision that was complemented in 1993 by a decree (*Real Decreto 726/1993*) that introduced the operative concept of Integrated Rehabilitation Area (*Área de Rehabilitación Integrada* (ARI)) with the aim of concentrating economic investment in eligible areas (adopting an area-based approach) in order to avoid the dispersion of the economic effort.

In 1992 there was an attempt by the government to establish a general framework for urban development on a national scale through the Land Act of 1992 (*Texto refundido de la Ley del Suelo de 1992*). It included an article (Article 66) that was declared unconstitutional in 1997 by the Constitutional Court because it violated the competences of the regions on urban matters. This was because it foresaw the possibility of developing a Territorial National Plan (*Plan Nacional de Ordenación*)⁶ through which the state might have an impact on spatial and urban development at country level. For López Benítez and Vera Jurado (2005, p. 168) the verdict of the Constitutional Court expressed clearly the incapacity of the state to enact laws that are genuinely urbanistic or related to spatial planning. This has conditioned the evolution of both policy fields. In fact, after that attempt, the state ‘limited’ its action to areas of policy through which it can exert an indirect influence on urban matters, legislating in few policy domains regarding urban issues (Esteban Noguera 2011). This has taken place mainly through its competences on transport, housing and land, avoiding giving rise to any ‘political action’ that could be interpreted by the regions as

an invasion of their constitutional powers. This explains to a certain extent the neutral and sometimes even 'passive' role played by the Spanish government in subsequent periods in the urban policy field.

The year 1985 marked a turning point in the Socialist government's action. During the XXVIII Congress of the Socialist Party, held in 1979, which commemorated the centenary of its foundation, the leader and later Prime Minister Felipe González forced the party to embrace an explicit Social Democratic ideology, banning any kind of orthodox Marxism from its programme. That allowed some political actions that had urban consequences. In 1986 a historical referendum regarding Spanish membership of NATO took place. This and the subsequent integration of Spain into the European Economic Community (EEC) had a huge impact on the country. New urban issues brought the political attention to cities for the first time. They were now viewed not only from a local perspective but also, for the first time, from a global perspective, as European cities.

The necessity of modernizing Spanish cities led the government to create the Department of Planning Intermodal Transport in Big Cities (*Dirección General de Planificación Intermodal del Transporte en la Grandes Ciudades*). This allowed the government to play an explicit active role in transforming the most important cities into modern European cities through an extensive programme that invested in the planning and construction of transport infrastructures. Much of the funding for this important programme was allocated by the EEC Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund. During the second half of the 1980s the main role of this new department was to develop a plan to improve the metropolitan transport system. This plan, informally known as 'Plan Felipe' after the Prime Minister, led Spanish cities to an incredible transformation just a decade later. In the case of Madrid, for instance, the construction of a network of metropolitan highways together with the improvement of the regional railway system turned the metropolitan system into a spatial framework that was not always compatible with local planning (Ruiz Sánchez 2000). The new transport system, together with a certain weakness of the urban planning policies and the conditions for land investment, marked the starting point of an unpredictable development of urban sprawl in Spain, particularly in metropolitan areas and along the Mediterranean coast.

In the early years of the 1990s, this department turned into the new Department of Concerted Actions in Cities (*Dirección General de Actuaciones Concertadas en Ciudades*). It is important to remark that in this period the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation (MOPT) gained the responsibilities on environmental policy, being renamed the Ministry of Public Works, Transportation and the Environment (MOPTMA). It developed the Infrastructures Plan of 1993 (*Plan Director de Infraestructuras* (PDI)), an

instrument that provided continuity to the precedent vision, including as one of the axes of action the so-called Policy for the Cities (*Política de Ciudades*).

The new department maintained the active presence of the government in urban policy, for the first time in recent Spanish history placing the focus on the existing city. As the holder of a significant amount of inner-city property consisting of railways, ports, defence and other facilities (many of them obsolete), this department designed a set of very important urban actions through the creation of strong management structures in collaboration with local and regional institutions and, eventually, private stakeholders. Interestingly, it adopted a collaborative approach that involved the three government tiers and achieved relevant results (MOPTMA 1997).

As an extraordinary example, the public partnership *Bilbao Ría 2000* was created in 1992. It was in charge of the transformation of the city of Bilbao, a city well known for its Guggenheim Museum and characterized by its radical transformation from an industrial city into a modern global metropolis.⁷ For the first time in the history of recent urban planning in Spain a process of urban regeneration of a great city was possible through the concerted action of different Administrations, leading to the regeneration of the Bilbao Estuary, a former obsolete industrial complex. Many other urban regenerations followed that of Bilbao, such as the Oviedo Greenbelt led by SEPES⁸ (Ruiz Sánchez 2013). This was a first step in the definition of what was called an *Active Land Policy* (Carreras et al. 1995), which consisted in a well-defined coordination between the design of urban infrastructure and comprehensive urban planning, based on the transformation of obsolete public infrastructures into modern new urban developments. Worth noting is that the PDI, with its programme for the improvement of the urban environment, had the potential at that time to kick-start the much-needed debate on sustainable urban development (Arce Ruiz 1994). This potential, however, could not be realized as the elections of 1996 led to a new government which replaced the PDI with a new infrastructures programme (see section 2.3) and abolished the Department of Concerted Actions in Cities.

It is also relevant to highlight that the accession of Spain to the EEC entailed at that time the participation of the MOPTMA in meetings to define the urban policy of the EEC. The beginnings of this policy can be dated to the end of the 1980s, achieving a milestone with the launch of the Urban Pilot Projects in 1989 and, particularly, with the call of the European Commission for the participation of Member States in the URBAN Community Initiative in 1994.

2.3 Period 1996–2004: Two Legislatures of the Popular Party (Aznar's Governments)

In contrast to the many different attempts of the previous government to act in the field of urban policy, the new one paid less attention to the issue. It also brought back the prevalence of private investment in urban development processes, which then led to the real estate bubble in the first years of the new century. It can be said that the urban issue was kept out of the policy agenda. This approach characterized the new Infrastructures Plan 2000–2007 (*Plan de infraestructuras 2000–2007*), which focused on the national road, railway, airport, port and telecommunication networks, aiming to connect the country with the transEuropean networks, without an explicit 'urban' vision.

The housing policy introduced in the previous decade was continued, confirming its status as one of the most important instruments that the state has used to tackle the physical quality of urban areas. Via a decree (*Real Decreto 1186/1998 sobre medidas de financiación de actuaciones protegidas en materia de vivienda y suelo del Plan 1998–2001*) passed in 1998, the new government aimed to adapt this policy to the economic improvement of the country. It did not include any significant changes compared to the previous period, the most notable innovation being the introduction of the concept of a Rehabilitation Area, which included the ARI defined by the previous plan along with neighbourhoods in the process of degradation and areas located in cities declared as World Heritage sites by UNESCO. This approach was maintained in the subsequent Housing Plan 2002–2005, an instrument that in combination with the National Plan for Social Inclusion (*Plan Nacional para la Inclusión Social*) tried to address urban vulnerability in the country. The Housing Plan 2002–2005 perpetuated the lack of policy ambition regarding social housing of the previous instruments.

During this period, despite the beneficial effect that the different sectoral policies implemented by the three main tiers of government was having on urban areas, the consolidation of new economic and socially negative dynamics started to result in the appearance of new processes of urban segregation and decline. At the end of this period, one of the most significant problems for the country was the increase in housing prices in cities.

Any action on urban regeneration at a national level was limited during these years to the development of programmes that were then implemented within the framework of the URBAN II Community Initiative launched by the European Commission in 2000. The good outcomes from the first round of programmes (URBAN) in Spain did not lead to the launch of a similar instrument endowed with national funds for the regeneration of vulnerable areas. Interestingly, other Mediterranean countries did put in place instruments of that kind (for example, in Portugal the POLIS Programme and in Italy the

Contratti di Quartiere, as mentioned in the chapters of this book that focus on those countries).

2.4 Period 2004–2011: Two Legislatures of the Socialist Party (Zapatero's Governments)

Rising housing prices also characterized the beginning of this period, along with the boom in the real estate sector (particularly in the most dynamic urban areas). Both trends resulted in serious social and environmental problems (Auken 2009). To address them, in 2004 the new government created the Ministry of Housing as a 'message of intent' to the population. It also had the intention of putting into practice the commitment that the Socialist Party had made in its electoral programme (Partido Socialista Obrero Español 2004, p. 129) to address the rising housing prices and to operationalize the transformation of the urban model based on land and natural resources consumption that characterized the previous period. One of the first actions undertaken to achieve this was the development of the new Housing Plan 2005–2008, through which the government intended to influence the residential market and to introduce a sustainable urban development model with three main objectives: 1) the achievement of a quality urban environment and its conservation, 2) equity and prevention of social exclusion and 3) efficiency and productivity of the economy (Real Decreto 801/2005). The Housing Plan, by having a more integrated vision for housing policy, also aimed to combat the processes of segregation which were reappearing in the cities and the rising levels of vulnerability, both of which were becoming an increasing problem in the cities. It maintained the ARI and, as a novelty, introduced the Historical Centre Rehabilitation Area (*Área de Rehabilitación de Centros Históricos*) and the Urban Renewal Area (*Área de Renovación Urbana* (ARU)). The Plan set as a condition for the development of the ARI and the ARU the creation of an integrated programme (with social, economic and physical measures) for the improvement of these specific areas. The ARU and ARI also had to adopt a participative approach to avoid gentrification, and develop a monitoring system for evaluating the achievement of the objectives. It is worth noting that all this reveals the important influence of the URBAN and URBAN II Community Initiatives on the Housing Plan at that time. This vision was limited by the sectoral approach of the plan, as it only funded the physical measures, resulting in the insufficient implementation of the social and economic actions. It should also be noted that the plan was not successful in limiting the rise of housing prices, something that only happened from 2008 onwards with the bursting of the real estate bubble in the context of the economic crisis.

Other important policy actions carried out by the central government at that time were also contextualized as an answer to the unsustainable urban-

ization trend described, something that was underlined by two resolutions of the European Parliament (in 2005 and 2007) in relation to urban planning in Spain. In 2009 a new resolution based on the Auken Report (Auken 2009) pointed out that the national, regional and local administrations had allowed an unsustainable urban development with serious environmental, social and economic consequences. In response, but also as a result of internal reflection and the growing demand to address urban issues from some sectors, the government began to become more proactive by providing guidelines that explicitly addressed urban regeneration among other things. To a large extent, these actions emerged as a result of transposing EU guidelines and strategies into the Spanish framework (De Gregorio Hurtado 2012b). At that moment, many of those drivers for change were integrated in the document that was guiding the government action: the Spanish Strategy for Sustainable Development (MARM 2007a). It framed other documents such as the Spanish Urban Environment Strategy (EEMAU) (MARM 2009a) and its programmatic document, the Green Paper on the Urban Environment (MARM 2007b); the Spanish Strategy for Urban and Local Sustainability (EESUL) (MARM 2011); and the Spanish Strategy for Sustainable Mobility (MARM 2009b), which included a relevant focus on urban areas. Importantly, this activity was led and coordinated by the Ministry that had the competences for environmental policies (Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Medios rural y marino (MARM)), which started to work in coordination with the Ministry of Public Works from the beginning of this period. As a result it can be said that the government's action was not only characterized by a proactive interest in the urban issue, but was also characterized by a less sectoral understanding of city dynamics (as during the period of the MOPTMA, see section 2.2).

The vision developed to advance all that positive activity set the basis for the main contribution to the urban dimension of the EU policy during the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council (first semester of 2010). The Spanish Presidency proposed the so-called *Toledo Declaration*, which was then approved by several Member States including Spain. This declaration made an important contribution to the Urban Acquis of the EU, supporting the adoption of 'integrated urban regeneration' as a way forward in the EU. The political activity that led to the Toledo Declaration contrasts with the passive role played by the government in the previous period analysed in relation to the EU framework regarding the urban issue, and marks the most important contribution of the country to that policy framework so far.

The Spanish Strategy for Sustainable Development proposed, as the urban model to be adopted, the compact, complex, efficient and socially cohesive city, focusing on urban regeneration. The government implemented its vision for urban regeneration through two instruments that counted on the support of the Cohesion Policy of the EU: 1) the *Iniciativa Urbana* (see section 3.2), an

instrument aimed at continuing explicitly the URBAN method of urban regeneration in the country, building on a collaborative, participative, integrated and area-based approach to improve the most vulnerable neighbourhoods in Spanish cities with more than 50 000 inhabitants along with capital provinces; and 2) a similar instrument for cities with 20 000–50 000 inhabitants. Both instruments contributed importantly to diffusing the integrated and participative approaches of urban regeneration introduced previously by URBAN and URBAN II. The vision underpinning all this activity was also central for the development of the Land Act of 2007–2008 (Real Decreto Legislativo 2/2008), a law that has been considered a turning point because it established as a basis for urban policy the paradigm of sustainable urban development. Nevertheless, its potential was limited, as it was not accompanied by innovative mechanisms to foster the regeneration of the existing city and prevent the urbanization of green fields (Cerezo and Tejerina 2018).

The infrastructures policy was continued in this period through the Infrastructures Plan (*Plan Estratégico de Infraestructuras y Transporte 2005–2020* (PEIT)). It reproduced some of the intentions of the PDI of 1993, particularly regarding the relevance of the urban issue within the plan, paying unprecedented attention to urban mobility and trying to exert a positive impact on urban areas in a framework of cooperation with the regions and the municipalities. It also showed the relevance of urban mobility in achieving healthier and efficient cities. The vision was fully in step with the previously mentioned Spanish Strategy for Sustainable Mobility (De Gregorio Hurtado 2013). Urban mobility as an emerging issue was given prominence by the Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Commerce, which through the Institute for the Diversification and Saving of Energy (*Instituto para la Diversificación y Ahorro de la Energía* (IDAE)) launched a financial framework to support cities in the development of their Urban Mobility Plans, and to implement actions such as the installation of public bicycle systems, the construction of cycle lanes, the promotion of electric cars or the introduction of walkability measures. All this was framed by the Strategy of Energy Saving and Efficiency (*Estrategia de Ahorro y Eficiencia Energética en España 2004–2012*) that was implemented through two consecutive action plans.

The momentum gained in the first years of the Socialist Party government started to decay during the second legislature (2008–2011). Adopting a diachronic approach, it is possible to link this to the change of Ministers leading the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Environment. This had important consequences. For example, the framework documents developed did not have any impact, as they were not adopted by the Autonomous Communities and the cities. Also, two important projects that had been planned to create two new laws – the Mobility Law (on the basis of the *Anteproyecto de Ley de Movilidad Sostenible y Segura*) and the Law for the Quality and

Sustainability of the Urban Environment (on the basis of the *Anteproyecto de Ley de Calidad y Sostenibilidad del Medio Urbano*) – were blocked. Both of them could have made a relevant contribution to advancing an institutionalized and collaborative framework for action in the urban domain.

2.5 Period 2011–2018: Two Legislatures of the Popular Party (Rajoy's Governments)

The arrival of the Popular Party to government following the election of 2011 marked a period when once again less specific policy attention was paid to the urban issue. An indicator of this was the fairly passive role played by the government in a context where the topic was gaining increasing attention within the EU. During the Dutch Presidency of the EU (2013), the idea of developing a common urban agenda for the EU gained momentum, and this eventually led to the approval of the Pact of Amsterdam in May 2016. The Pact was approved during an event in which, significantly, all the Ministers of urban development (or with urban competences) of the 28 Member States were present with the exception of the Spanish Minister.

In any case, observation of the period 2011–2018 shows that the changes that were taking place at a global scale, which were putting the city at the centre of policy attention, led to a more focused policy action on the urban issue than in the period 1996–2004. This resulted in the continuation of some drivers of change that had been introduced by the Socialist Party. In this regard it is very relevant to note that the approach that had been embedded in the Land Act of 2008 was reinforced through a major action: the development and approval of the Law of Rehabilitation, Regeneration and Renovation (3R Act) (Ley 8/2013) that provided rules for the preservation of the existing city (Cerezo and Tejerina 2018). It defined a new instrument (called Action for the Urban Environment), the objectives of which are 1) the rehabilitation of existing buildings and 2) urban regeneration and urban renovation processes that can adopt an integrated approach (introducing social, environmental and economic measures) under a unitary and global administrative strategy. For the first time the Spanish government was proposing to the Autonomous Communities and cities, through the Housing Plan, an instrument aimed at systematically regenerating the existing city (*ibid.*). This legislative effort focused on the rehabilitation of existing residential buildings with the aim of reinvigorating the construction sector after its tremendous decay caused by the economic crisis. The 3R Act was integrated in the Land Law through the approval of the revised text of the Land and Urban Rehabilitation Law of 2015 (*Texto Refundido de la Ley del Suelo y Rehabilitación Urbana*) with the aim of aligning both regulations and clarifying the legislative content and procedures.

This government also launched a new Housing Plan (Housing Plan 2013–2016). In relation to housing, in this period the discursive effort was put into the necessity to advance towards the inclusion of the renting option as a feasible and attractive possibility for the Spanish population. This objective was not achieved in time, and the housing problem remained a key issue for citizens, particularly for younger generations. In fact, at the end of this legislature, once again one of the most important urban problems, particularly in the most dynamic cities, remained the incapacity of young people to access the housing market or to rent an apartment.

It is worth mentioning that in this period the Ministry of Finance started to develop the Spanish Urban Agenda, in the context of a commitment made by the country to the European Commission through the Association Framework 2014–2020 (Ministerio de Hacienda y Administraciones Públicas, without year). The process of constructing this instrument started in 2014 with the creation of a Working Group within the RIU (Network of Urban Initiatives (see section 3.2)) under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance. In 2016 the Ministry of Public Works decided to proceed with this commitment and used the momentum gained following the introduction of the Agenda 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda of United Nations to exert a political influence on urban matters. The instrument also evolved in the framework of the construction of the Urban Agenda for the European Union.

2.6 From June 2018 to the Present: Legislature of the Socialist Party (Sánchez's Government)

In this short time span the most relevant action has been the continued development of the Spanish Urban Agenda. It appears that it will be an instrument that is full of potential (De Gregorio Hurtado and González Medina 2018). The Ministry of Public Works has confirmed that it will be a strategic non-regulatory framework of a voluntary character, to which Autonomous Communities, provinces and particularly municipalities can choose to adhere. In order to incentivize the commitment of subnational governments to the instrument, it will be linked to national and EU financial resources (Baiget 2018). At the time of writing, the Ministry is not contemplating the advancement towards a more collaborative framework, something that could limit the transformative capacity of the Agenda.

Along with this, the government is working on different legislative frameworks to deal with some of the most pressing urban problems. It is interesting that in this regard cities are now more able to have an impact on the government's agenda than in previous periods. This is due to a more emphatic approach from the national to the municipal level, and also to the lobbying

that big cities in particular are able to do. The role of some mayors is proving crucial in this regard. An example of this is that the government is taking into account local demands in the design of its future Housing Plan, as well as in mobility measures. It is also expected that the commitment of some cities regarding climate change will have a impact on the Climate Change and Energy Transition Law that the government is preparing at the moment.

3. ACTORS: WHO IS DRIVING THE CHANGES?

3.1 Who Are the Relevant Actors?

The Spanish government develops its urban policy action through the activity of the different Ministries with competences on policy fields that have a direct impact on cities. As explained, the Ministry of Public Works has the competences on urban matters and can therefore be considered the actor that has contributed the most to shaping the national urban policy scene over the last four decades. It has set the approach laid out in the housing, public infrastructures, mobility and land policies. It also plays another important role, as it represents Spain in the institutional framework that defines the urban policy of the European Union. As such it has been participating in the activities of all Member States to define the position of the EU Council on urban issues. This role has been carried out with varying degrees of commitment in the different periods analysed in section 2, ranging from significant involvement (for example through the work done to launch the Toledo Declaration in 2010 (approved at the Meeting of the Ministers of Urban Development of the EU in 2010)) to a relative disinterest in the matter (for example in process towards elaborating the Pact of Amsterdam and the Urban Agenda for the EU).

The Spanish government is playing another interesting role in relation to the urban dimension of EU policy. It is being carried out by the Ministry of Finance and consists in the management of the urban instruments launched in the last four programming periods of the Cohesion Policy⁹ (1994–2020) funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (see section 3.2). The role developed by this Ministry has been crucial for maximizing the effect of the urban dimension of EU policy in Spain from 1994 to the present. It has coordinated this activity with the Ministry of Public Works, developing at the same time the internal capacity to cope with the urban issue. Its experience and commitment has resulted in the recent creation of a Sub-directorate General of Urban Development, which is managing the 181 strategies of integrated sustainable development (ISUDS)¹⁰ in Spanish cities.

The review and analysis undertaken by this chapter also takes into account the role developed by other relevant Ministries and public entities at different moments in time. The Ministries with competences on the environment and

energy have been particularly important actors. In this regard it is worth noting the role played by the MOPTMA in the period 1982–1994 and the role played by the MARM and the IDAE (a body that is part of the Ministry of Industry) in the period 2004–2011. The government is currently working on a Climate Change and Energy Transition Law that will have important implications for cities. It is being developed by the Ministry for the Ecologic Transition (Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica). It is expected that this law will introduce a policy and budgetary framework aimed at supporting cities in their efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

As mentioned, the competences on urban matters that the Constitution assigned to the regions makes them major actors on the urban policy-making stage. They implement many of the policies of the Spanish government in their territories (this is, for example, the case of the Housing Plans). As a consequence, these two levels of government need to coordinate their policy action in this and other urban policy fields. On the other hand, the regions have complete competences on spatial planning and share with the municipalities the competences on urban planning. This all goes to shape a multi-level scenario from which arises the necessity for mechanisms of coordination and adequate spaces for decision-making and conflict resolution. In the early 1980s there was a legislative attempt to put in place a sustainable framework for coordination between the different government tiers in relation to their actions directly impacting on the territory (*Anteproyecto de Ley Básica de coordinación y concertación de las actuaciones administrativas con incidencia directa en el territorio*). Ultimately, however, it did not pass since the Constitutional Court (Decision 76/1983) declared that part of its text was unconstitutional. This explains to some extent why in this policy field interadministrative collaboration and the development of collaborative mechanisms remain an issue in Spain (Benabent 2006). The coordination between the Spanish government and the regions takes place in the framework of meetings between the Ministry of Public Works (or other relevant Ministries) and political representatives from the regions. At the moment there is not a Sectoral Conference¹¹ on urban issues.¹² The lack of a formal arena for collaboration on urban issues, which should also include provinces and cities, means that the influence of the regional level on national urban policy is greatly reduced. It also minimizes the influence of the municipalities when it comes to shaping such policy.

The municipalities exert their ‘influence’ on the national level mainly through the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (*Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias* (FEMP)). This organization represents the interests of the local level and aims to make their requests and interests visible to upper levels of government and other stakeholders.

The regions and municipalities, along with other actors, collaborate with the different Ministries, and particularly with the Ministry of Public Works,

on the development of specific policies within the framework of thematic working groups. The participation in working groups along with lobbying are the most important ways in which non-institutional stakeholders influence national policy. Regarding non-institutional stakeholders, it is worth noting the capacity of the real estate and financial sectors to exert an influence on the urban national agenda, something that has determined to a certain extent the approach and scope of the land and housing policies developed so far (Comisión de Expertos sobre Urbanismo 1995).

Another important actor is the EU. This has especially been the case since 1994. The following section explains its relevance and the different ways in which it has exerted an influence on national urban policy.

3.2 What Is the Role of the EU?

As mentioned, the urban dimension of EU policy has had an important influence in the Spanish context. The main instruments that have contributed to this have been 1) the policy documents developed by different EU actors over the years, particularly the Communications of the European Commission and the documents that have given place to the Urban Acquis of the EU in the framework of the informal meeting of Ministers responsible for urban matters and 2) the specific programmes for urban regeneration and urban development launched by the European Commission from 1994 onwards and funded by the Cohesion Policy, including:

- 1994–1999: URBAN Community Initiative
- 2000–2006: URBAN II Community Initiative
- 2007–2013: Iniciativa Urbana (IU)
- 2014–2020: *Estrategias de Desarrollo Urbano Sostenible Integrado* (EDUSI)/Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (ISUDS).

The development of these initiatives allowed the continued implementation of the method of urban regeneration proposed by URBAN during the period 1994–2013, and has made an important contribution to the definition of the EDUSI that is being implemented in the present programming period 2014–2020 of the Cohesion Policy. This continuity cannot be found in other Member States, singling out Spain as an interesting case study in this regard (De Gregorio Hurtado 2018a). This continuity explains to a certain extent the transformative capacity of EU urban policy in the country. The transformative capacity can also be explained because these are the only explicit instruments of urban regeneration that have been launched at the national level so far.

URBAN and URBAN II were defined and launched by the European Commission. They have made an important contribution to transforming

the practice of urban regeneration in the country. It can be argued that the management of both initiatives within a Ministry with economic but not urban expertise (Ministry of Finance) limited their transformative capacity at the beginning, but this Ministry has in fact been crucial in making the continuity mentioned above possible. While the contribution of URBAN has been to introduce knowledge on a different way to face urban decline (collaborative, participative, area based, etc.), resulting in the development of programmes of urban regeneration in 29 cities, URBAN II has implemented ten programmes that have demonstrated an evolvement in the way in which cities have faced the holistic improvement of their deprived areas (De Gregorio Hurtado 2012a).

Figure 11.1 Cities with URBAN and URBAN II programmes (clear squares) and cities with IU programmes (dark circles) (De Gregorio Hurtado 2017b).

The Iniciativa Urbana entailed taking a further step towards deeper embeddedness of the ‘URBAN method’ in the Spanish framework. It introduced an important change with respect to URBAN and URBAN II: it was designed by the Ministry of Finance with the support of some other Ministries and experts. This was possible because it took place within the framework of the so-called ‘urban mainstreaming’ of the Cohesion Policy (European Commission 2008, p. 9), a vision that aimed to mainstream the URBAN method in the regulatory

framework for the new Operational Programmes of the countries and the regions. To make it possible, Regulation EC 1080/2006 of the ERDF included, as a non-mandatory provision for the Member States, Article 8 that allows countries to develop strategies of intervention in distressed urban areas. The Spanish government decided to use this article, defining a new instrument largely inspired by URBAN (Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda 2007) called *Iniciativa Urbana* (IU). It is worth noting that the continuation of URBAN through the IU was a decision taken by the government in the context of the intense urban activity that it was undertaking from 2004 (see section 2.4). This interest in creating a new instrument explains an apparent contradiction: why one of the Member States that had paid the least attention to the urban issue in the past (see section 2.3) was the only one that continued explicitly to implement the URBAN method in the framework of the Cohesion Policy 2004–2013. The IU achieved a higher profile than URBAN and URBAN II, as in this period the Network of Urban Initiatives (*Red de Iniciativas Urbanas* (RIU)) was created. RIU is an instrument that aims at providing an arena of knowledge sharing that integrates all the cities participating in the IU and other relevant stakeholders (Autonomous Communities, some Ministries, companies, NGOs, universities, etc.). The IU also had from the beginning the possibility of creating a greater impact than the two rounds of URBAN, as it had sufficient funding for the development of 46 programmes of urban regeneration (see Figure 11.2). The most important contributions of the IU can be found in the adoption of a collaborative and inter-sectoral vision within the municipalities and in the introduction of various important topics, such as the gender perspective and the mitigation of climate change, in the IU strategies (De Gregorio Hurtado 2018b).

At the moment (2019), in the framework of the urban dimension of the EU and with the support of the Cohesion Policy, Spain is implementing 181 Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (ISUDS). They can be considered an evolution of the *Iniciativa Urbana* and URBAN, as the knowledge and experience of those instruments have been crucial for defining the ISUDS (interview with public servant – 1). Nevertheless, the ISUDS also have important differences in relation to the URBAN approach. The most important is the results-oriented approach adopted in the new guidelines provided by the European Commission for the implementation of the urban dimension of the Cohesion Policy in the period 2014–2020. It required acting in cities that had solid strategies for sustainable urban development (European Commission 2016). As a consequence, in this period the focus on the most vulnerable areas through the area-based approach at EU level disappeared. These guidelines were transposed to Spain through the Partnership Agreement signed between Spain and the European Commission (Ministerio de Hacienda y Administraciones Públicas, without year). They were further elaborated by

a Working Group created in the context of the RIU that gave place to the document that set the guidelines for cities to access EU funding for implementing sustainable development strategies (ISUDS) (RIU 2015). The ISUDS programmes are operating in cities or functional areas of more than 20 000 inhabitants.

Source: De Gregorio Hurtado (2018c).

Figure 11.2 Cities and functional areas with EDUSI programmes

A first analysis of the instrument allows one to say that the thematic concentration required by EU rules and the lack of an area-based approach focused on the most vulnerable areas of cities are resulting in piecemeal interventions that compromise the integrated approach and the transformative potential of the funding. The Ministry of Finance has confirmed that for the following period of the Cohesion Policy the EDUSI will not be an option, recognizing that it is necessary to carry out a review of the instrument (interview with public servant – 2).

The implementation of the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy in the country through the instruments mentioned, along with the exceptional action made possible through the *Política de Ciudades* of the PDI in the past (see section 2.2), has been the only framework in which a specific urban regenera-

tion policy has been developed at a national scale. Its positive and transformative capacity shows the benefits of addressing this policy field through national funds in the future, and on the basis of a long-term vision. It can also set the basis for a review of the ISUDS approach at the EU level for the upcoming period of the Cohesion Policy.

In the framework of the above-mentioned Partnership Agreement between Spain and the European Commission, Spain committed to developing its Urban Agenda (Ministerio de Hacienda y Administraciones Públicas, without year), as has been explained in sections 2.5 and 2.6.

3.3 Do Parties Matter?

The review undertaken in section 2 allows one to say that political parties matter in the Spanish context. The changing presence of the urban issue in the policy agenda in the different periods analysed shows that the two main parties in Spain (which have been in government since 1982, governing in alternate periods) have different priorities towards this topic. While the Socialist Party has been more active in this regard, developing instruments that made the topic visible and at various times made relevant contributions to an attempt to develop collaborative arenas, the Popular Party has excluded it in general from its policy agenda. It has continued the implementation of instruments introduced by the Socialist Party at various moments in time, such as the Housing Plan or the Infrastructures Plan, but with a more sectoral approach. It is also worth noting that within the Socialist Party co-exist different sensibilities to the urban issue.

In the second half of the 2000s the political scenario changed in an important way in Spain. New political parties emerged; two of them are represented at the time of writing in the Spanish Parliament as a result of the elections of June 2016 (Ciudadanos and Podemos). A review of the electoral programmes of the four main parties competing in that election shows the following: the Popular Party and the Socialist Party have integrated into their programmes more proposals for specific urban actions to be implemented in cities. Nevertheless, the approaches embedded in their programmes are quite different. The Popular Party, on the one hand, focused on the smart cities vision, transport and the rehabilitation of residential buildings in the framework of the Housing Plan 2017–2020. The Socialist Party, on the other hand, while also addressing the smart city approach, had a more integrated idea of the action necessary to advance to more healthy and sustainable urban areas, introducing topics such as the circular economy and integrated urban regeneration in its electoral programme. It was the only programme that proposed an urban model – the compact city based on sustainability and universal accessibility principles, including the environmental and climate change dimensions and the rational

use of land – which aimed to regenerate the existing city, avoiding the new occupation of green fields (Partido Socialista 2016, p. 324). The new parties, Podemos and Ciudadanos, also included the urban issue in their programmes, but developed their vision less than the two other parties. Podemos mentioned the intention to develop a Climate Change Law with important implications for cities. It also included a part entitled ‘sustainable cities’ in which the aim was to launch an urbanistic model orientated to the rehabilitation of existing buildings dominated by an economic and physical approach (Podemos 2016, p. 15). Ciudadanos mentioned the urban issue in its programme, but only in regard to the smart city vision.

This review of the programmes of the parties allows one to say that the proposals for cities were quite general, lacking in most cases a description of the mechanisms needed to implement them. This is consistent with the historical lack of presence of this topic in electoral campaigns at the national level. This is also consistent with the low profile of this topic in the media, something that is related to its relatively low relevance for most citizens.

3.4 Why Should National Government Intervene?

The review and analysis of the actions taken by the Spanish government over the last four decades shows that its legislative capacity, along with relevant judicial decisions of the Constitutional Court, have shaped the framework in which it can develop a policy aimed at having an effective impact on urban areas. It shows also the relevance of the political role of the state and identifies policy mechanisms (existing or pending) through which it can contribute in important ways to setting a national policy context aligned with the main principles of urban sustainable development. Parkinson et al. (2013, p. 176) point out some facts that mean the state could play a significant role regarding the development of urban areas:

- ‘The State is still responsible for many policy domains, notably those which require National intervention’ (for example, public works, land, transport, housing, climate change).
- ‘The State has enormous resources that it can devote to urban areas if it chooses to’.

With regard to these facts, we argue that the Spanish government has not developed the necessary action to support the regions, and particularly the cities, in facing some of the most pressing challenges of the country. As has been explained, the EU has exerted a very important influence in the Spanish context even if it does not have competences to legislate on urban issues. Instead, this has been done through instruments such as URBAN that provide

funding to the Member States if they implement regeneration programmes complying with strategic rules. The Spanish government could have done the same, providing sustainable funding frameworks aimed at incentivizing regions and cities to take action in many policy areas in the direction of urban sustainable development, and particularly in the field of urban regeneration, with a focus on the most vulnerable neighbourhoods.

Along with that, it is worth noting that the government also has the capacity to create and institutionalize arenas for reflection, negotiation and reaching consensus with the Autonomous Communities and the cities, something that is crucial to give place to instruments that address in an effective manner the necessities of the municipalities. The lack of these kinds of arenas explains why subnational governments, and particularly cities, have bypassed the government in their relationship with the EU. It also lies at the very core of some of the poor synergies achieved among policies implemented by the three government tiers.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The reflection in this chapter allows one to confirm that Spain has not so far developed a comprehensive and integrated policy aimed at supporting cities in addressing their problems and challenges. However, an observation of the evolution of the social, economic and environmental conditions of Spanish cities over the last four decades leads to the recognition of a crucial public effort that has contributed to improving cities in important ways. This public action has been taken by all three levels of government (Spanish government, Autonomous Communities and cities) with a low level of coordination, mainly addressing urban problems through sectoral visions. In addressing challenges they have not developed a long-term vision, acting reactively as problems arise and become of social concern. In any case, the action of the Spanish government (developed mainly through the competences of the Ministry of Public Works) in relation to land, housing and, in some periods, transport infrastructures policies emerges as relevant. The first two policies have especially had an important impact. They have adopted different approaches over time, the approach taken being highly related to the economic context and the policy priorities of the parties in government (see section 2). The Popular Party has traditionally shown less interest in introducing the city as a policy priority on its government agenda. This has had effects domestically, as it has fostered the sectoral approach of policies. In the international domain it has resulted in a low level of influence on the framework of the urban policy of the EU. The Socialist Party, on the other hand, has traditionally shown a greater interest in the urban issue, which has resulted in the proposal of regulatory frameworks that at various points in time have been blocked by the Constitutional

Court. This and its proactivity in this regard shows an ambition to retain at the national level the capacity to develop a sort of policy for ‘the City’ (even if mild), implemented in coordination with regions and municipalities. The frameworks proposed so far have not been successful in finding a way of involving the lower government levels. As mentioned, this is one of the most important challenges for the country at the moment. It is also worth noting that the analysis undertaken here shows the different levels of commitment in regard to the urban issue within the Socialist Party.

Regarding the level of Europeanization of government policy action from 1986 onwards, it can be said that this has mainly taken place through the obligatory transposition of EU directives to the Spanish framework. The only period analysed in which the country has clearly adopted EU guidelines on a voluntary basis has been 2004–2011. At that time it even contributed actively to shaping the EU’s discourse and position on sustainable development, through the Toledo Declaration (2010), demonstrating that it can take on a leading role in this policy area. González Medina et al. (2017), having observed urban policies in Spain from a general multi-level perspective, conclude that with regard to the Europeanization aspect, Spain takes the role of a policy-taker. This observation is fully confirmed by the work in this chapter. Indeed, this chapter even appears to reinforce this conclusion when attention is focused just on the action taken at the national level.

Within this context, the Spanish Urban Agenda looks like it may be an instrument with the capacity to kick-start a transformation. Nevertheless, it seems that it will not address traditional inertias, particularly those around the necessity for interadministrative cooperation. It is making an effort to overcome sectoral and physically centred approaches to urban development, and its intention to link the implementation of the vision with the allocation of national and EU funds could play a significant role. This and the level of commitment of the subnational levels will be crucial factors in level of advancement in the medium term. In the current framework the commitment of the agenda to the creation of capacity in medium and small cities is another factor that will determine the real contribution of the instrument.

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NOTES

1. Some of the EU-12 countries started to develop their urban policy in the 1980s (France), or even earlier (the UK since 1960), while other countries started to pay more attention to urban issues within their national agenda under the influence of the ‘urban policy’ that started to be developed by the European Commission at the end of the 1980s. This is the case of Portugal and Italy for example.
2. These are the policy documents that have been developed over time by different actors within the EU. The most important ones have been developed by the European Commission, the Parliament, and the Committee of the Regions.
3. As mentioned, they have considerable competences in the development of legislative and funding frameworks regarding urban matters. This has allowed some of them to develop specific instruments over time. This is the case for Catalonia for example, which in 2006 passed the so-called Neighbourhoods Law (*Ley de Barrios*), directly inspired by URBAN (Nel.lo 2011). A similar law was developed by the Balearic Islands (passed in 2009), and the Izartu programme was implemented through three rounds launched by the Basque Country in 2001, 2004 and 2009 (De Gregorio Hurtado 2012a). Also, the specific action on sustainable urban development that is being implemented by regions at present has to be understood in the context of the influence that the EU instruments have exerted on them.
4. José Posada Herrera was Minister of the Interior (Ministro de Gobernación) and promoted the Act.
5. BOE nº 293 de 1983.
6. Judgement 61/1997.
7. Josep Borrell, Minister from 1991 to 1996, said to the main Basque newspaper that ‘what we did in Bilbao was more important than the Olympics [Barcelona] or the Expo [Seville]’ (*El Correo*, 20 November 2017).
8. SEPES is a body attached to the Ministry of Public Works (the name of this Ministry has been changed recently to the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda). It operates in the sector of land promotion, being the main operator of public land in the national scene.
9. URBAN Community Initiative (1994–1999); URBAN II (2000–2006); Iniciativa Urbana (2007–2013), Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (ISUDS) (2014–2020).
10. The acronym in Spanish is EDUSI (*Estrategias de Desarrollo Urbano Sostenible Integrado*).
11. Sectoral Conferences are institutionalized arenas for the negotiation and achievement of agreements between the government and the Autonomous Communities in Spain.
12. http://www.seat.mpr.gob.es/portal/areas/politica_autonomica/coop_autonomica/Conf_Sectoriales/Documentacion/Conf_Sect_exist.html (last accessed 19-11-2018).

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