

Madrid between *the global* and *the ordinary*

MSc Essay. MSc City Design & Social Science, LSE, December 2014

Isabel Gutiérrez Sánchez

PhD candidate, The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL

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In the early 2000s Madrid became a *global city*, as it is regarded by the specialized literature. In 2007, Madrid occupied the eighth position in the world with regards to the number of headquarters of large multinational corporations and the city's stock market also became one of the most prominent in Europe. Following this line of international projection, Barajas airport was placed in the list of the world's ten best (Observatorio Metropolitano, 2014). The new global position of the city required all sort of specialized services: corporate finances, consultancies, law offices, architecture and publicist firms. This cycle of economic growth occurred in conjunction with a highly neoliberal political agenda, which paradoxically came hand in hand with a wide range of developmental plans for the entire metropolitan area. As an outcome, Madrid's population grew by more than a million inhabitants in only one decade, almost a million jobs were created and the geographic borders of the region expanded beyond the boundaries of the Autonomous Community.

In contrast to this optimistic account, extensively promulgated by the political class, the city's development in the wake of this *regulating fiction* (Robbinson, 2002), has profoundly transformed and polarized Madrid's social and productive structures as well as depleted its physical territory. To make matters worse, the financial and economic crises, which have heavily impacted the city and the entire country

since 2008, have served to sharpen the adverse consequences of this program.

However, despite the serious risks of social fracture that the crisis involved, this hard conjuncture has opened up possibilities for a turnaround. The series of social mobilizations since the outbreak of the crisis, have efficiently contributed to put the model of the *global city* into question. Interestingly, the crisis has made room for a wide range of projects led by groups of citizens, who are strongly disputing the construction of the future of the city against the dominant market forces and the very top-down approaches of the local government. Examples such as temporary health-care centres, projects of co-housing, open schools, spaces of ecologic production and consumption related to urban orchards and gardens are among these citizenship initiatives that have been on the rise since then.

As such, Madrid stands today in the midst of important political and economic turbulences, in which its future seems to be stuck in tense suspension, due to the lack of clearly dominant models to guide the development of the city and the reactivation of its economy. Both approaches to the city's development, one representing the dream of the *global city* and the other, in line with a more *ordinary* vision in terms of Robbinson, appear in dispute in the actual urban setting, both claiming space to be implemented and tested.

In this essay, I will compare a series of projects that reflect this tension present in Madrid at the moment. The first array comprises a range of policies and projects under the name of the *smart city*, set in line with

the persistent attempts by the local authorities to promote the business community and the tourism sector. The second corresponds to *El Campo de la Cebada*, a public square in La Latina, which has been ruled by the neighbours since 2011 on a temporary basis, and is currently attempting to create an *ideario* around the notion of *the commons* to serve as a conceptual tool to face its unstable future. In doing so, I will explore the visions and ideals underlying the concepts of the *smart city* and the *city of the commons*, present specifically in the aforementioned projects, that rather than ideal models for the city's development, constitute concrete materializations of the two very distinct visions for the future of Madrid presented in this essay: the global and the ordinary.

The analytical categories will comprise the people involved and their role and position in the city, the narratives and representations that are being constructed in the imagination of the desired city that each of these projects represents, and the means and resources utilized. My ultimate aim will be to sidestep the fruitless exercise of labelling cities with totalizing categories and instead, following Robinson's claims to open up the imagination to new possible tomorrows, provide a reading of the different interests and desires overlapping in the present that might determine the near future of Madrid.

For this purpose, I will break this analysis into two main sections. The first will briefly expound the impacts that the globalization of Madrid has had in the city, and will relate them to the contesting social mobilizations and *spaces of insurgent citizenship* (Hosltun, 2009), which have emerged in the wake of this political program, and its adverse

effects over the still ongoing crisis. In the second section, I will critically examine the notions of the *smart city* and the *city of the commons* as underpinning concepts of the projects mentioned above. Finally, I will conclude with a reflection on the different ways in which these conceptualizations are being produced and the different functions with which are being used.

Context

As politicians in power assert, the successful insertion of Madrid within the world's economy was due to an urban model that engenders wealth, creates employment and provides a huge range of social opportunities by means of an economy open to the advantages of the global world and a faultless regional administration. But, is really the *global city* a dynamic economic model, which prompts social welfare through the abundance of opportunities that encourages social upward mobility? (Observatorio Metropolitano, 2014). In spite of these compelling predicaments, the achievement of this image of success has entailed significant costs for the citizens. In addition, Madrid's globalization has had huge impacts in the urban geography of the city and the metropolitan region. Madrid's territory has been profoundly transformed both socially and physically and these changes can be recognized in the city's landscape.

New institutional and legal frameworks were enacted at the local and the national level in order to accomplish the entry of Madrid into the circuits of cross-border economies. As in many other cities, deregulation was the principal mechanism of this process of internationalization (Sassen, 2002). However, the colonization of Madrid's territory was not only performed by a liberal legislation based on the increase of land offer and reclassification of land uses. As a paradox to that neoliberalist political agenda, large transport infrastructures, financed with public investments and delivered by the major Spanish construction firms, were also required to accomplish that mission. A mesh of new highways as well as the extension of the Metro and new high-speed train networks guided the urbanization of the metropolis during the years of the construction bubble.

As a result of this political project and the mode of development associated, the city experiences today a great polarization of its residents due to the imposed highly unbalanced economic structure, where the new growth sectors (finance and advanced services) have completely displaced the more traditional ones and trapped a great share of the population in niches of ill-paid and precarious employment. Moreover, management of major public services such as health and education, have been progressively privatized, reinforcing the levels of social inequality. With regards to the physical territory, the implemented mode of urban development has fragmented the regional geography and consumed the entire municipal land.

All these factors have determined the particular way in which Madrid has been facing the economic crisis started in 2008. At the outset and

up until 2010, the impacts of the crisis in Madrid were lower than in other regions of the country. It was in 2011 that the persistence of the crisis and the shift to *politics of austerity* imposed by the European Union started to threaten the model of the *global city*. The sharp drop in employment rates and the economic contraction generated a crisis of debt in the council. These facts in conjunction with a series of corruption scandals in the political elites, produced a strong deligitimization of the institutions that finally became a profound political and institutional crisis.

In May 2011, huge citizenship mobilizations, without precedence in the short to middle term in terms of magnitude, broke out in Madrid and spread across the entire country. Since this so-called *European Spring*, firstly represented in Puerta del Sol square, Madrid has witnessed the appearance and consolidation of strong social movements opening up processes of major citizenship politization. The series of social mobilizations including the *15M Movement*, the *Mareas Ciudadanas* for public services, health and education, and the *PAH (Platform for People Affected by Mortgage)* have efficiently threatened the continuation of Madrid's globalization. In their exertion of counter-power, these social movements, still in action today, are strongly disputing Madrid's future against the political and economic dominant powers. Many of these mobilizations have found in existing grass-root urban projects a space to crystalize in multiple forms of insurgent citizenship initiatives, which have been on the rise since then. Some of them have already proved a beneficial contribution for the revitalization of depreciated and neglected areas in the city, whilst others constitute strong contestations

to municipality or market-led policies and projects for urban regeneration, which still today keep pushing to have a dominant role in the construction of the city.

Today, Madrid navigates a time of extraordinary indeterminacy in which its future seems to be stuck in tense suspension. Local and national institutions have become less accountable to people due to their policies aimed exclusively at directing flows of global capital, which have left the social demands aside. But in this gap left by the failure of such politics, citizens have raised up to reclaim the right to participate in their city and imagine its possible futures. This conflicting tension might determine the unavoidable transformation of Madrid in the coming years.

The Smart City vs. the City of the Commons,
two emerging ideas in the wake of two dreams for Madrid: the global and the ordinary

As expounded in the previous section, on the downside, the crisis has severely threatened the continuation of the globalization of the city, but otherwise, it has opened up spaces where citizens have started to try out alternative modes of experiencing, practicing and producing the daily urban life. However, the model of specialized service businesses and tourism promotion, still fights with considerably strength to lead the resurgence of the city of prosperity that Madrid represented in the

years preceding the crisis. Today, both modes of understanding and imagine the city, one related to the city's globalization and the other to the improvement of ordinary urban life, in line with Robinson's arguments against the global cities approach, overlap in the agitated urban setting of Madrid.

A series of projects, with very different character and objectives beyond, evidence this conflict. On the one hand, the local government has recently implemented a range of policies and projects under the name of the *smart city*, set in line with the ongoing attempts to promote the business community by attracting national and international entrepreneurial business and encouraging competitiveness among them. On the other, multiple emerging projects led by citizens such as self-managed social centres, urban orchards, open schools, occupied collective housing, self-managed health-care centres and projects of collaborative economies are being aligned with the notion of *the commons* as an ideal of sharing resources, products and knowledge that informs the daily practices in these spaces. From the distance, the *smart city* and the *city of commons* can be both understood as ideal categorizations with ongoing specific material manifestations, embedded in two contesting political projects for the development of Madrid today; one pursued by the government in power to this day, and another one sought by an increasing sector of the citizenship, claiming a radical overturn in this political agenda.

Cities are both imaginary and physical spaces (Pinder, D. 2002), that is, everyday urban life plays out in these two intertwined spheres, one of ideas and desires, and the other of material representations,

developments and practices. In the following lines, I will explore the visions and ideals underlying the notions of the *smart city* and the *city of commons* present specifically in some of the aforementioned projects through the practices of the people involved, the means and resources they use and their actual materializations.

The Smart city

The *smart city* rhetoric, fuelled over the last decade by big technology, engineering, consulting firms and more recently by local governments as well, has been constructed through visions of an urban environment highly technicized, with embedded computerised sensors into the urban fabric, producing and managing huge data collected from the citizens. Underlying this picture, there is an inherent dream of a better living through data (Poole, S. 2014), an aspiration of efficiency and rationalization of the urban life. As many cities, Madrid has also been seduced by such a desire and has started to expand the city's budgets for technological innovations. Urban Labs, projects of implementation of sensorized networks in defined areas and intelligent platforms of city's resources management are some examples among a wide range of initiatives for the promotion of the *smart city*.

The aims and reasons underpinning these projects are clearly stated by their promoters. In the Madrid Smart Lab, a call in 2014 for technological ideas in the field of urban services, the organization (the Council and Ferrovial Servicios) asserted to seek the reactivation of the

city's economy, the promotion of an intelligent and sustainable development of Madrid as a "showcase to the international scene", and the advancement of "an ecosystem of entrepreneurial and innovative competitiveness in the smart city sector" (www.madridsmartlab.com). Will these projects help to better understand and manage the complexities of Madrid's life? Will the efficiency that they pledge serve to activate Madrid economy and urban life? Will they help to assure Madrid's position within the list of cities of international economic interest?

An already implemented example in the wake of the promotion of the smart city is the Smart City Platform at Madrid-Moncloa University Campus as a part of the City of the Future project of Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. The initial set of pilot services of the platform comprises a network of sensors distributed across the campus that monitor a range of environmental parameters, another type of sensors coupled to electrical boxes that allow monitoring energy consumption, and a set of devices for the analysis of people and vehicle flows. All the data collected by these sensors is processed in a control room that houses the platform dashboard and large screen for displaying experiment results. The monitoring of all these parameters and data can well serve to raise awareness on citizens and, specifically students at campus, regarding energy and environmental issues. Not in vain, the platform was advertised in appealing green boards depicting a future urban landscape that harmoniously integrates herbage with hyper-technological devices.

Notwithstanding, critiques and complaints have emerged as well, claiming the non-compliance of personal liberty rights. An association of students of the campus has already taken action and organized several campaigns against the implementation of this system, which they see as an apparatus denying the privacy that any citizen count on in the public space. The operating of this platform remains contentious in the present, showing the contradictions inherent to the technification of the urban space.

The project of furthest impact in terms of the magnitude of its scope, might be the recently approved MiNT Platform Project, which will be developed by IBM as a service for the Council to provide an integral management of the urban services. The technological platform includes a series of software systems that will perform distinct tasks. The first group of IT systems will be intended to the management of services such as lighting, vehicle monitoring, CCTVs, waste, urban cleaning, parks and green areas, urban furniture and irrigation networks. The second pack will be geared towards the management of human resources. Another one will be devoted to the rationalization of assessment procedures and control of agreements with supplier companies, and a final one will be oriented to the citizen, enhancing his/her participation through new channels of communication and warnings of potential incidences. The Platform has been promoted as the major project of smart cities in Spain that aspires to secure Madrid's position as one of the most important cities in the world.

However, regardless the seemingly pro-innovation position, this showcase-vocation raises important issues with regards to the city's

management. As it has been show, smart city projects require complex infrastructures and software that municipal governments are not able to produce themselves. Inevitably, they have to rely on private companies and therefore, leave important information and also civic functions in their hands. The excessive reliance on unmitigable data privately managed can serve to deflect responsibilities from local governments, jeopardizing civic rights. In its blind attempt to achieve an alluring international image, Madrid's Council is rendering the public services to private technological corporations.

Underlying the smart city projects implemented in Madrid, there is a clear political stand in favour of a specific industry and business sector, deemed as the major forces capable of re-placing the city in a privilege international position. Rather than a model for structured urban development, the smart city represents a collection of disconnected private initiatives in search of economic benefits. The interest of the municipal government in their promotion can be understood as an insistence on the continuation of that desired project of becoming global. Nevertheless, it is still not clear how the principles of efficiency, predictability, security and sustainability by means of sophisticated high-tech networks of data processing will improve the urban life. It needs to be recalled that the most important problems facing contemporary cities like the increase of social inequalities, the persistence of poverty and the environmental pollution, are not technological problems, but rather political issues.

The City of the Commons

On the other side of the spectrum and amidst widespread precariousness and crisis, a wide geography of spaces led and managed by groups of citizens is taking shape in Madrid today. Ever since the uprisings and occupation of Puerta del Sol Square on May 15, the city has witnessed the appearance and consolidation of strong social movements, which have found in existing grass-root urban projects a space to crystalize in multiple forms of insurgent citizenship initiatives. Some of them have already proved a beneficial contribution for the revitalization of depreciated and neglected areas in the city, whilst others constitute strong contestations to municipality or market-led policies and projects for urban regeneration.

Amongst these citizenship initiatives, *El Campo de la Cebada* in La Latina neighbourhood, has attracted international interest. *El Campo*, as it is called by the locals, was a large vacant plot of municipal property that since mid-2011 has been legally managed by neighbours. Several groups have been organized on a self-management basis to play different roles in the space. The following is a list of the existing working groups in the form of an inventory that can be read as a political manifesto:

- *Agenda and Program*
- *Administration*
- *Treasury*

- *Management 2.0*
- *Orchard and Compost*
- *Management of Walls*
- *Self-Construction*
- *Theatre*
- *Cleaning*

El Campo displays an enormous array of physical collaborative-constructed infrastructures. These artefacts are created on an open-source-design that can be updated indefinitely and transferred to other places by means of social networks, which are created in the process of production itself through the internet and the social media. *El Campo* is prompting creative and sustainable solutions to cope with daily problems, looking at the general crisis as a positive challenge. Particularly, one of the main concerns in the production of the space and its infrastructures is this idea of *sustainability*. Interestingly, this notion is articulated in different ways to serve different purposes. It relates to the construction of the infrastructures when deciding which materials and modes of construction are ecological or not, prioritising natural materials and techniques that valorise the existing, recycling and the economy of means. In that sense, the idea of *sustainability* legitimizes experimentation and introduces an added value in the constructive practice. Besides, *sustainability* is established as an unstable

framework in permanent re-configuration, used by the group as a means in the processes of decision-making, such as the management of resources, the approval of construction proposals or the definition of the modes of consumption inside the space. The different sustainable criteria activate debates, reflections, positions and decisions within the group. Moreover, the idea and its different representations are used also as a strategy in search of external legitimization and political vindication tool. It provides a new kind image to offer to the neighbourhood in contrast to the current deprived situation, which the group rejects and wants to transform.

In its day-to-day practice, *El Campo* is also challenging the notion of public space and its mode of governance, insisting that the city must be devoted to its citizens as ordinary people (Bollier, D. 2011). The common-management under a horizontal basis is producing new roles and synergies between neighbours, collectives and the Council, introducing new voices in the processed of decision-making with regards to urban matters. But not everything runs smoothly at the site. In fact, *El Campo* confronts significant difficulties and problems of organization, regulation and supply of resources. It is a common argument that the assembly, the major form of management and governance in *El Campo*, is an inefficient procedure because decisions in search of consensus tend to prolong infinitely. Moreover, the legal and administrative limitations force a great inventive in order not to be stacked in often ridiculous legal constraints. These are some of the challenges to make *El Campo* a project that can be sustained over time. There is a claim that this spontaneous organization leads nowhere in

terms of agenda, however, in its exertion of counterpower, *El Campo* is challenging the conventional idea of efficiency that characterizes capitalism as a notion of continuous economic profitability.

On the other hand, not everything in *El Campo* is construction or management. Politics are present, in a more or less implicit manner, in all the practices and discourses. There is also space for thinking, not only in terms of structural organization, but also to imagine the future of *El Campo* and frame a sort of *ideario* to inform its becoming. This set of ideas are being constructed around the notion of *the commons*, which are defined as essential goods, including both environment elements and other resources produced by the society, necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of life. This capacity of social reproduction is what is considered to be threatened by the current policies of austerity and privatization carried out by the local government as well as the state, as measures to overcome the economic crisis.

As the majority of cities, Madrid has been concerned about the productive uses over the reproductive functions. Family cares, conciliation measures and activities after retirement have always been neglected. The emerging citizenship initiatives like *El Campo* are claiming and fostering a *feminization* of the urban space, that is, a shift from an urban model exclusively focus on the promotion of specialized economic activities towards a model that puts the functions of reproduction and care at the core of urban life. In doing so, they are displacing the focus from production and speculation as the only ways

to generate wealth and pushing towards new forms of economies detached from the exclusivity of the market. Furthermore, they are already generating wealth, which is creating frictions and contradictions with the market economy. As David Bollier contends, *the commons* introduce a new narrative about value that contests the neoliberal visions. The wealth that they produce is socially embedded and usually shared instead of monetized. In this current context of social cutbacks, dismantlement of the traditional structures of mutual support and privatization of social goods and services, the political hypothesis of the commons well serves as an instrument to reinvent urban life at a critical moment of institutional collapse and commodification of life (Bollier, D. 2011).

Conclusion

As it has been expounded, the economic and political model for the *global* Madrid drove a fast economic, demographic and geographic growth in the region as well as an image of success that has legitimized the government in power up until today. Nevertheless, this model of urban development, exclusively focused on economic activities and geared to foreign capitals and visitors rather than local residents, left many other functions and needs of the city aside. The analysis that Robinson does regarding the limitations of the *global city* approach in urban theory has proved to be true also empirically. In pursuing this

apparently attractive model of economic dynamism and globalization, Madrid has neglected many other aspects of the city's life. The crisis in the city has served to bring forth the weaknesses of this model and reinforce its devastating effects as the polarization of the society and the depletion of the municipal territory. However, some remarkable citizenship initiatives have opened a space for experimentation of alternative of living and producing the city. Their increasing presence in the metropolis has created an arena of dispute with new forces and stakeholders. Today, the future of Madrid seems to be contended between these two very different desires, one looking outwards attempting to re-attract the international attention, and the other, more locally-oriented, aspiring to reinforce the community life within the neighbourhoods.

The ideas of the *smart city* and the *city of the commons* appear as pennants of the very different political projects that these competing visions of the city represent. The rhetoric of both two share elements in common, like the concepts of sustainability, innovation or civic awareness, but, as it has been shown, they are used with different means and purposes. Undeniably, the *smart city* and the *city of the commons* significantly differ in their understanding of the urban space and the means used to intervene in it. Their very conceptualizations are even produced differently. Whereas the notion of the *smart city* stems from the economic and political elites and rest on an ideal and static image of a technified future, the renewed idea of *the commons* seems to be constantly under construction and re-signification from below, from the ordinary citizenship. On the one hand, the first is putting efficiency,

optimization and security as the most desirable features for the city of the future. On the other, the second calls for civic engagement, the feminization of the city and the de-commodification of urban life.

The means and technologies involved in these projects also shown their distinct character. *The Smart City Platform* at Madrid-Moncloa University Campus and the *MiNT Platform Project* for Madrid's Council rely on high sophisticated technological devices and networks, whose production is far out the scope of the municipal government. In contrast, in *El Campo de la Cebada* the urban infrastructures are being self-produced by the groups of neighbours through processes of mutual knowledge exchange and learning. The activities at the site are also managed and coordinated through extended digital social networks on the internet, linking the physical and the virtual of the project. The self-involvement in the construction and management of the resources and urban elements grants citizens more control over the urban space. These projects show how different ways of using technology can produce different environments and therefore, being capable of shaping the city for the next generation. The question here is that if all of them would be desirable for the society we would like to become.

In this essay, the *smart city* and the *city of the commons* have been presented through specific materializations carried out by different agents in the context of Madrid. What makes the second more interesting, is its process of construction and representation through the daily practice of a group of citizens, who have occupied the street to experiment by themselves the city they want to live in. In *El Campo de la Cebada*, the production of *the commons* is a practice itself. That is, it

is not a predetermined image or *ideario* to inform the activities at the site. It functions otherwise, it is informed by practice. This fact distinguished the *city of the commons* from the *smart city*. Whereas, the *smart city* represents an imposed ideal vision out of context, to perpetuate a model of urban development and unbridled growth, the *city of the commons* is serving as a basis to interpret the present itself and maintain the continuous production of desire of the ordinary people.

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