



## **“A sociocultural way of thinking and doing: Spain’s irrational building policy”**

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### **Abstract:**

Spain’s new iconic architecture has rightly become an international attraction, yet it has appeared during the worst economic recession the country has witnessed since becoming a democracy. In this paper I discuss why this contradiction can actually be explained by many years in which Spanish society performed according to certain patterns that are embedded in its culture. I turn to the historical roots of these ways of thinking and doing, by examining the political changes in the government as well as the economic framework that, in parallel, underwent various transformations over time. The resulting legislation and building policy illustrate how little impact these changes had on the behavior and performance of the main actors. In fact, we find evidence for a clear repetition of certain behaviors. Recurring actions – changes in zoning laws, town-planning corruption, misuse of public spending, and the overuse of stunning, spectacular architecture – were taken based purely on the lure of possible financial and politically glorious success and on learning from past experiences, which well reflects Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*. In this paper, then, I consider the roots from the past of Spain’s building culture and the need to move toward a deep transformation of this *habitus* that has unknowingly, unconsciously, and imperceptibly pervaded Spanish society.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** iconic buildings, *habitus*, crisis, urban planning

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***"El planeamiento es un gran instrumento.  
No arroja resultados tan rápidos como los que pueden obtenerse  
fichando a un arquitecto estrella y plantando  
en cualquier sitio una obra espectacular"***

Xerardo Estévez, former mayor of Santiago (1983-1998)

It is almost impossible to overlook the majestic structures that have been built in Spain in the last two decades: Santiago Calatrava's work in Valencia, the Expo held in Zaragoza, several brand new airports and AVE (high-speed train) stations, and the City of Culture in Santiago de Compostela, to name just a few. But it is a more complex undertaking to provide an explanation for why these public construction projects were carried out, or even why they were approved in the first place. They are aesthetically impressive, but in many cases lack any kind of functionality. The fascinating contradiction here is that they were built at a time when the state could not bear the cost of such projects due to a serious public deficit. Explaining this phenomenon is the challenge presented in this paper.

We cannot understand the present without taking a closer look at past building practices in Spain. The politics of desarrollismo (the road to economic development) in Francisco Franco's time, during the 1950s and 1960s, targeted a model founded on basic steps: rezoning green land, building, and selling. Legislation just paved the way for this model that, as I argue above, has persisted over time, in spite of all the changes in context.

Within the particular economic and political circumstances of each decade, a new land law was passed that had immediate consequences in the construction industry. Based on these legal and political transformations, I discuss important shifts in ideological trends during the 1990s that had a deep influence on the ongoing building style in Spain. The persistence of patterns that we have encountered practically ever since the early days of the dictatorship enable us to define this way of thinking *and* doing as dispositions of *habitus*, according to Bourdieu's concept. "*Habitus* builds on the idea that actors act strategically and practically rather than as conformists to cultural norms or external constraints, such as income. Rather, they are strategic improvisers who respond in terms of deeply ingrained past experiences to the opportunities and the constraints offered by present situations."<sup>2</sup>

As will be discussed below, politicians make their choices motivated by a dynamic reenactment of past learning, while adapting to external structures in the present. Bourdieu precisely understands the human action described as *habitus* as "practice." "The dispositions of *habitus* are acquired through the experience of social interactions by processes of imitation, repetition, role-play and game participation."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the repetition of previous successful practices in Spain, in which building was a way of making easy money, led to a habit of performing similar actions for the same purposes. As I argue below, after witnessing the success of macro-projects like the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, politicians were certain that by repeating similar projects, success would be guaranteed again and again. Put

precisely, their performance was set according to what had occurred in the past and based on their expectations for a probable brilliant success in the future, or as Bourdieu clearly states "the dispositions of *habitus* predispose actors to select forms of conduct that are most likely to succeed in light of their resources and past experience."<sup>4</sup>

This paper proposes that the political behavior of the main actors can be identified with fundamentally cultural habits, since it is simply human action that is "adaptive and constitutive of cultural standards." This perspective will help us comprehend the decisions that led to irrational building practices. Therefore, I suggest that a brief journey into the past will enable us to achieve valuable insight into the present.

### **Back in time: Franco and the economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s**

In the late 1950s and the early 1960s, after a harsh postwar recovery, the Spanish regime saw a road to economic development. To boost the economy, the regime became more flexible. First, the government passed a Land Law (Ley del Suelo) in 1956 as a legal framework for rezoning land for building. Second, it articulated the 1959 Stabilization Plan (Plan de Estabilización) with the creation of the Housing Ministry (Ministerio de la Vivienda). This plan brought about a reduction in public spending and in inflation, the convertibility of the peseta, and the ability to obtain loans and funding, thanks to Spain's introduction to the International Monetary Fund, the European Organization for Economic Cooperation, and the International

Bank of Reconstruction. Finally, the 1960 Real Estate Act (Ley de la Propiedad Horizontal) clearly protected the owner over the tenant and regarded investment in property as a desirable goal. As a result of such legislation, a building euphoria exploded in the late 1960s and the 1970s. The idea was not to create a culture of renting, but rather to consider home ownership as a highly profitable venture and the safest option for investment. These habits have not changed much, despite the years that have passed and the latest strong economic crisis. Thus, home ownership percentages in Europe today reflect this stance on the part of Spain, in contrast to some of its neighbors: Sweden 38%, Germany 43%, Holland 53%, France 56%, Spain 81%.

The return of European tourists to sunny Spain and the movement of migrants within the state to find jobs in the building sector coincided with these boom years (the end of the 1960s through the 1970s). Hundreds of examples can illustrate this idea, but perhaps Benidorm is the clearest case. Once a cute fishing village, now it could be any urban city in the world and one without much tourism appeal.

Thus, Spain's economic development plan was clearly based on tourism, building, and the labor of migrants. The legal steps that were taken by the government simply promoted the culture of urbanism and the market. This approach prevailed for years in this country. In fact, it is intriguing to note the similarities between the actions taken then and what the current Spanish government promotes. On the one hand, La Marca España (the Brand "Spain"),

according to which tourism represents around 11% of the gross domestic product (GDP), is seen today as the greatest lever for recovery (*gran palanca para la recuperación*).<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, construction in 2008 represented 15% of economic activity.<sup>6</sup> Although construction was a higher percentage in the past than it is today after the recession (around 5%), this industry has been the determining factor in the Spanish economy. Migrants who were hired by the building sector have contributed to this boom, too. And last but not least, another overriding factor in forming the disposition of *habitus* in Spanish society has been corruption. This conduct exists today (every day there is a new case in the courts that attracts media attention), but it has also been inherited from the past. During the period 1961 to 1974, government ministers held 326 positions on boards of directors, which means that they were occupying positions that were profitable to those companies in which they had an economic interest. That was the beginning of the era of "clientelism." From that time up to now, there has been a high social tolerance for this behavior, especially in relation to town development. However, today, after the deep crisis that has hit Spain and the consequent discrediting of politicians, this social tolerance has reached a limit and there are now calls for a complete change in the ethical standards for politicians.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, the model of economic development that was conceived for Spain half century ago has persisted over the years and shaped the real foundation of what happened later. The recreation of these practices, or *habitus*, led to

everything else. We next delve briefly into the 1970s and 1980s, considering significant events in chronological order.

### **Transition to democracy and the European Union (1970s–1980s)**

Regarding politics, this may be one of the most crucial and delicate times in Spain. Franco died in 1975, and after tough negotiations, a new constitution, which shaped the country as a monarchical democracy, was approved in 1978. The centralist government headed by Adolfo Suárez and later, Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo took a decisive step toward the perpetuation of a new model. They provided the first democratic townships with absolute power in planning management and urban project implementation. The role of townships is the key to understanding the following succession of events.

The economy during that time was fragile. A world economic crisis, the so-called oil crisis, hit in 1973. Nationally, Spain faced another critical moment due to the construction that had taken place in the previous decades. Living premises had no equipment, basic infrastructure, or habitability. The government's reaction to the crisis was to implement measures to promote growth and curb public spending.

In 1982, for the first time in many years, a leftist party, the Socialists, led by Felipe González, won the elections. The Socialists remained in power until 1996 and implemented many changes they had envisioned (actually, their motto during the elections was "vote for change"). The final goal was to eliminate the bad habits

(those *habitus*) from the past. However, "change" in the building sector was rather unnoticeable.

The Socialist government passed the Decreto Boyer<sup>8</sup> in 1985 in order to promote private consumption and investments, and to foster labor and the building sector, as well as passed a new Land Law in 1990. This was the perfect legal framework for developing land, with the administration taking a more active role.

Once again, the government was relying on the building sector as the key factor for economic growth. With this new legal framework, the opportunity arose to reclassify/rezone green land in order to build. This was an idea that came from the Left (so that there would not be so many private landowners, and instead more administration), and ultimately resulted in a huge mistake, because the reclassification/rezoning of green land was carried out without any rationale, planning, or thinking related to urban development. Plenty of inexpensive green land lots were suddenly worth thousands of pesetas and were highly profitable: private landowners would sell them to a construction firm, which would build a tall apartment building and simply make money by selling the units. The profit was automatic, fast, and simple. Everybody was winning – with the exception of the land.

Against this political backdrop, intensive construction took place. This approach represented a continuation of the *habitus* started earlier. Unfortunately, the architecture did not always present an interesting style. Examples abound throughout the country, but simply as a matter of illustration, we can have a look at

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urban developments such as Salou, Bellvitge-Hospitalet de Llobregat, or El Pozo del Tío Raimundo-Madrid, where green land was turned into tall apartment buildings all clustered in such a way that little space was left without any structures.

Nonetheless, in this period (1984) a shift took place and shook up this nondescript building style. Oriol Bohigas organized an architect competition in Barcelona to construct buildings for the 1992 Olympic Games. The time had come to change the type of urbanism Spain had had until then, although not the country's building practices.

### **Spectacular economic development (1990s–2007)**

In the 1990s, several political, economic, and legal transformations occurred, but unfortunately the same building *habitus* continued, although perhaps it can be described as more successful and interesting. This was the so-called *Década del Ladrillazo*, or the decade when everybody could make profit by rezoning green land and building and selling properties.

First, there was a political change. After a couple of years in which a light economic crisis occurred (1993 to 1995), the Socialist Party lost the elections in 1996. The Conservative Party and President José María Aznar held power from 1996 to 2004. With the Conservative Party in control, and the economic sector having a prosperous moment, it could easily be predicted what practices the government would carry out to achieve economic development: promoting construction. To achieve this goal, the Parliament had to take some legal measures. And they did so

by passing an act that provided for liberalizing measures in 1997 and, consequently, a new Land Law in 1998. The excuse was that land to build on was too expensive and that the former administration had been too inefficient. Thus, the Conservative Party enlarged in an unprecedented way the amount of available land for building. This was the definitive step toward what was known as "everything can be built" (todo es urbanizable).

Together with this legislation, the so-called projects for regional interests were also introduced. This approach led to magnificent projects in Cantabria, Aragón, and Murcia around 2001. Eccentric examples are "El Reino de Don Quijote" in Ciudad Real with 9,000 homes, or the "Gran Scala" in "Los Monegros," a kind of Las Vegas in the desert near Zaragoza (at a public cost of about 17 thousand million euros). Both projects have, fortunately, been cancelled.

Let us analyze the three main reasons for the real-estate boom during this decade: the first one, which has already been mentioned, is the power given to townships. Since 1978, they have had the main responsibility for town planning and development. Townships receive about 15% of their funding from the Central Administration. Consequently, they had to look for other types of financial sources. Land rezoning was their best option. Urban development was a short-term solution for their persistent financial problems.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, people who worked for townships were not, in most cases, the best academically and professionally prepared. Sometimes their merits were based on their belonging to a certain political party. Thus, for many years, townships maintained an infinite power to take decisions on

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land management/town planning with only one goal in mind: raising revenue. The results were disastrous in many cases. The combination of towns' repeated inefficiency, total power over decision-making, and access to lots of money led to a general lack of ethical behavior – the misuse of public money for personal illicit gain. An interesting case is Valencia, the autonomous community that in 2010 was ranked as one of the least transparent urban areas, together with the Balearic Islands.<sup>10</sup>

Another factor that helped encourage the abuses that occurred in urbanism was the urban developer (*agente urbanizador*), who functioned as a private developer of public land. This position was introduced in 1994, and the eventual purpose was to urbanize even more, since all land, including that which had been given to the administration, could be developed by a private company. The private company was allowed to perform in place of the township, in other words, to take care of town planning as well as to manage urban development. The problem is that the administration is regulated, whereas these private companies based their decisions on arbitrary/self-profit criteria. The result was a concentration of real property holdings of building land in the hands of a few companies that negotiated directly with municipal authorities to rezone land and finance townships. In other words, this expanded role for private companies represented a definitive step toward urban growth without control. Worthy of note is that data from a 2005 Greenpeace European Cartographic Study reveals that between 1990 and 2000 the built-up surface of the Comunidad Valenciana grew by 48.98%, and in Alicante by 62.23%.<sup>11</sup> Sadly, the consequences can hardly be overlooked when one visits

Valencia, where concrete has destroyed what was a beautiful green landscape on the sea.

The second important reason for the growth in real estate is the availability of easy money or easy loans. In 1990, the mortgage interest rate was about 16%; in 1999 it went down to 5%; and in 2006 was around 3.5%. Those figures meant more credits, more spending, and consequently, more debt. As a result of this easy money, together with generous funding from the European Union (EU) (especially for infrastructure: high-speed trains, airports, highways), the volume of mortgages increased 793% between 1999 and 2006. A record rate of building took place in 2005: more than 800,000 housing units were produced, which exceeded the total number of homes built in Germany, the UK, and France combined, and a terrible housing bubble arose, during which prices never ceased going up and which created a surplus that fueled an artificial economic prosperity. Public housing was reduced to a minimum, but monumental projects were highly regarded and financially supported.

The last key factor in the real-estate explosion in this decade has to do with the change in the architectural paradigm. It was during this economic euphoria, in combination with the legal support that was available, that it became possible to believe in architectural miracles. Mayors and presidents of each and every autonomous community saw the chance to promote ostentatious (flashy, showy, theatrical, spectacular) projects. They called upon people in the architectural star system to be part of this moment of high spirit, which resulted in the construction of

great iconic buildings and then led to iconic cities. The moment corresponded to the contemporary change in the architectural paradigm that had been taking place internationally since the end of the 1970s: the balance between shape and function was over. The shape had to be free – everything was allowed to enhance the image, the experimental architecture. This period represented the tastes of a hyper-consumerist society (without the ideological tensions between East and West) and the death of the right angle (Philip Johnson).<sup>12</sup> Paris, Berlin, and London were considered the magnet cities . . . and Spain did not want to be left out and miss this opportunity. Two cities, Barcelona and Bilbao, which were in need of changing their image, began this process.

In a way, the use of a particular architectural style was vital in expressing a certain ideological attitude. The new tendencies in architecture (from postmodernism to neo-modernism and beyond<sup>13</sup>) were regarded as a style that could shape the architecture of the future, as one of pluralism, irony, paradox, and renovation. The application of art to political ideology is not new. For instance, the use of the baroque in Spain during Franco's times has been linked to the Golden Age, to Spain's greatness in its history construct. "Baroque imagery touched the whole of society and was to help shape cultural, intellectual, political and social life during Francoism."<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the new styles reflected the complexity and plurality of a society, as well as some superficiality. These new artistic movements were ideal for Spain since the country was eager to create for itself a fresh and dynamic image that went beyond modernity.

Barcelona carried out fascinating projects by Arata Isozaki (Palau Sant Jordi), Vittorio Gregotti (Olympic Stadium), Santiago Calatrava and Norman Foster, Frank Gehry, and Alvaro Siza in 1992. And the building continued for two more decades with Barcelona 22@ (a new neighborhood in the city): Forum Building for Herzog & De Meuron,<sup>15</sup> Water Tower by Jean Nouvel, and a park designed by Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue, among many other projects.

Other cities did not want to remain invisible and they also participated in this building course of action in 1992, for instance Seville for the Expo,<sup>16</sup> and Madrid as a European Cultural City (among other projects, Madrid rebuilt the Arts Center Reina Sofia for 5 thousand million pesetas in 1992 terms). These cities focused on postmodernist architecture, as also did the most illustrative example: Bilbao, in the Basque Country.

Bilbao was a rather industrial town without any particular appeal. It had no beach, no major art museums, and with its rainy weather the city has never been an attraction in itself. Thus, it urgently needed a change of image. The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s was the perfect time for the city to start thinking about urban planning. Everything began with the Gehry proposal for a new Museum of Modern Art. When the authorities presented the project, it did not receive an immediate positive response from the public. Rather, people thought that all the politicians, architects, and technicians were dreamers, and that such a macro-project was impossible.

However, the Gehry building was inaugurated in 1997, and was later followed by two towers by Arata Isozaki; a Calatrava bridge (the Zubi Zuri Bridge) and airport; the Deusto University Library by Rafael Moneo; the Iberdrola Tower by César Pelli; the Euskalduna Conference and Music Centre by Federico Soriano and Dolores Palacio; and the Exhibition Center by César Azcárate and Esteban Rodríguez. The effects on the city after the Guggenheim inauguration were far greater than the local administration had expected: in 1994, there were 29 hotels, and in 2008, 53 hotels; in 1994, about 24,300 tourists visited the city, and in 2008, more than 600,000 visited (who spent 2.1 billion euros); in 1994, 88 conferences were held in Bilbao, and in 2008, 981, which generated 2 billion euros in GDP for the Basque Country and 317 million in tax revenue.<sup>17</sup> In economic terms, these undertakings were no doubt worth the effort.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, the formula worked: it was simple to requalify green land as building land; it was easy to obtain financial loans; architects were enjoying success; construction companies were making money, and so were politicians. The key to success was clear for everybody. The main actors in power only had to follow the strategies for building based on an unconscious calculation of the possible, or likely successful results. The dispositions of *habitus* of politicians, economists, and architects were orienting their actions according to real, self-fulfilling prophecies.

An example of a politician who took this approach is Manuel Fraga, the president of the Galician autonomous community, who decided to build an icon for Santiago de Compostela. A project by Peter Eisenman to construct the City of

Culture was approved during the term of an architect-mayor of the city, Xerardo Estévez (1983–1998). However, the Galicians were dealing with a totally different case here: Santiago is a very attractive city with a beautiful old town and glorious architecture. Moreover, it has been a religious center of pilgrimage since the Middle Ages. Yet, Fraga felt the need to change his image as a conservative politician (he was active in the Franco cabinet) and was inclined to do this with a spectacular building.

Caixa Galicia – now Nova Galicia Bank – transferred its ownership of a green site outside Santiago (on which nothing was to be built, but Fraga somehow gained approval from the township). The transfer to the township was free of charge, although the preserved open space was worth about 4.5 million euros.<sup>19</sup> In 1999, the Parliament of Galicia held an international design competition, which Eisenman won. He started to build the project in 1999. Due to the lack of public funding, however, construction was stopped in 2012, and then restarted after some months, but finally abandoned in March 2013 without the project's being inaugurated. Two problems existed here: on the one hand, there was a shortage of public money to inaugurate a project and make it work and be functional, and on the other hand, there was never any need for such a project. The budget for the macro-project has doubled since it began, and consequently it is considered a white elephant for governments and taxpayers (huge, useless, and very expensive).

Therefore, it can be seen that the economic and architectural repercussions that started during the euphoria of the 1990s went on into the 21st century,

extending beyond the deep financial crisis, and today the project has an uncertain future. Practices were repeated, and not just a routine, as we discuss next. People who were involved in these projects were expecting a successful return based on positive past experiences.

Other cases of urban development are worth mentioning, to illustrate the point about repeated *habitus*. One is Expo 2008, in Zaragoza (International Exhibition, or the World's Fair), which held the eminent Zaha Hadid Bridge – another iconic structure for a city that had no appeal for tourists. City officials also felt it was in need of a "Guggenheim effect." The Expo in Zaragoza provided politicians with a unique chance to revamp the old-fashioned image of this rather unattractive town. All the pavilions were magnificent. The bridge mentioned here is spectacular in shape: a fluid and dynamic design with intriguing curves that work as a hybrid of a pedestrian footbridge and an exhibition pavilion. However, this project encountered many technical problems that also doubled its budget cost.<sup>20</sup> The original budget of 20 million euros became 80 million. The icing on the cake is that today, the bridge is only for pedestrian use – and nobody goes to that side of town – but it costs about 1 million euros per year to maintain. Fortunately, not all the pavilions were that costly. The beautiful Spain pavilion by Patxi Mangado managed to keep the costs within budget (18 million euros). All of these buildings created for Expo 2008 are now empty, since they have no practical use. The image of these pavilions, together with the bridge, the squares, and the green, reminds one of a ghost town – a ghost town at the public treasury's expense.

Therefore, the "Guggenheim effect" did not end up providing colossal revenues in all cases. However, with what politicians imagined would likely be a positive result, in addition to the permissibility inherent in the legislative framework and the most favorable financial conditions, they kept on building iconic structures. An additional example that cannot be omitted in this paper is Calatrava's macro-project in Valencia: the Ciutat de les Arts i les Ciències.

Calatrava's projects are beautiful, spectacular, anthropomorphic, white, and brilliant, but they have a chronic problem: they are extremely expensive. In Barcelona, he built the Bac de Roda bridge and planned another one, which was never approved due to budgetary restrictions. In New York, he was awarded the project to build the World Trade Center Transportation Hub Station, which has received much criticism because of the cost (3.74 billion US dollars), the ten-year delay in construction, and the controversy about its shape. Originally designed to remind viewers of a bird, it has been said that it looks like a giant stegosaurus. In Malmö, Sweden, Calatrava built a structure for public housing, but the cost was so massive that the city had to sell the homes based on free market prices. Ultimately, Calatrava's impulsive and capricious projects start with an idea, but have no definitive strategies for the ending. Thus, posterior and reiterative modifications of the original plan keep rising, leading to continuous budget increases.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps one of the most significant examples is the increase for the Ciutat de les Arts i les Ciències, which went 1.132 billion euros over budget. Nor should we forget that 90% of the cost for these white elephants is covered by public spending. Naturally,

the bond between the Conservative Party (in power in Valencia since 1995) and



Calatrava has been very strong.

He designed Valencia as a modern stage of global civilization, and politicians were enchanted by his ideals for

artistic grandeur. The Ciutat de les Arts i les Ciències is now an empty, useless, white theatrical space.

### **Economic crisis (2007–2015) and pharaonic buildings: Is there a contradiction?**

Considering that many Spanish citizens took a stance against this policy of building magnificent structures in expectation of higher returns, it is understandable that a change in government occurred in the following decade. The Socialist Party, with a new face, Rodríguez Zapatero, won the elections in 2004 and governed until the end of 2011.

Zapatero's party had to deal with one of the worse economic crises that Spain had ever faced as a democracy. There were shortages in public spending, but not enough to revive the macro-economic numbers. In the middle of the recession, the Socialist Party lost the general elections in December 2011 and the Conservative Party came to power. The EU's strict policies of cutting public spending that have since been practiced, have had some undeniable effects: social unrest and public discontent due to a higher unemployment rate that has led to countless evictions,

increases in taxes, and drastic spending cuts for health care, education, and social services. However, after four years of this approach, the macro-economic numbers are now showing the first green sprouts, even though the population has not really noticed a difference in the health of the economy.

The well-known economic crisis that began around 2007 was intrinsically related to the *habitus* of building in Spain. The main reasons that have been given to explain such a financial crash have always been summarized as "the collapse of the real-estate bubble." I would argue, instead, that the reasons are more complex.

First, and following the pattern we mentioned previously as reflecting the reasons behind the buildup of the aforementioned *habitus*, easy money abruptly ended for the first time. Together with this, finances collapsed: banks had no cash in their accounts and were unable to supply credit. Without loans for construction companies, homebuyers could not obtain mortgages. In 2011, the Spanish banks accumulated 325 thousand million euros for loans given to real-estate developers. Together with mortgages, this represented more than 50% of the GDP. Second, and consequently, housing prices fell from the 2007 peak to 70% of their value.<sup>22</sup> At the beginning of the 21st century, salaries increased about 30%, but housing prices rose 246%. People were paying more than 50% of their salaries for their mortgage. This situation was unsustainable. As long as people were employed, and could pay for these outrageous prices, everything was all right. However, as soon as the financial failure started, unemployment rates rocketed and countless evictions took place. With no possibility of homebuyers' getting a loan, prices automatically fell to a

record low and the entire system collapsed. It is important to note here that when the real-estate bubble was expanding, experts explained this by affirming that urban land was "limited" and thus "priceless," and that this factor was determining real-estate prices. Indeed, since the economic collapse, one can conclude just the opposite: land price is not as vital as supply and demand.<sup>23</sup>

Another aspect to consider is the new 2007 Land Law. Politicians were already aware at this point that the real-estate depression had a direct relationship to land policy. Therefore, the Socialist Party passed a new law with an economic character that regulated the value/rezoning of land. Under this law, it is mandatory to provide land for public building, which is usual in a "crisis era." This represented a desperate effort to control what was already uncontrollable. The townships, however, continued having the power to take all decisions regarding building policy. If they had to approve a spectacular project to boost the image of a town, they did so. In any event, at the beginning of the crisis there were many macro-projects that had already been approved, and some were even built. Other plans ran up against the cuts in public spending and have yet to be finished (for instance, the City of Culture in Santiago de Compostela). The fortunate projects that could be finished during this period of 2007–2015 are unused, or underused, because of a lack of public funding to organize concerts, exhibitions, or sports events. They were planned without officials' reflecting too much upon what was needed, and having only in mind a change of image and a possible eventual Guggenheim effect.

Curiously, after this dramatic change in the financial context, the behavior of politicians who had to take decisions about financing public buildings remained intact. This might be explained by the momentum at the time, which is always hard to stop, although I tend to see it as a vivid example of the dispositions of *habitus* that had been clearly acquired through the experience of social interactions based on the processes of repetition, role-play, and game participation.

The Guggenheim effect did not spread successfully as expected to every town, but the main actors in the public discourse did not want to recognize this failure and continued implementing the same policy all over again. Examples of this practice abound: the airport in Castellón (not even inaugurated); in Burgos; in Albacete (with only one flight, it lost 3 million euros a year); in Huesca (the restaurant being its main attraction); in Ciudad Real (it cost 1,000 million euros and is not yet functioning); and in Lleida (with only two flights a week and with 1 million euros lost per year, at a total cost of 100 million euros). Actually, Spain can boast of having 50 airports (useless, expensive, but very attractive).

Spain has invested 64 billion euros in high-speed trains (AVE), which has made it number one in Europe in high-speed train kilometers (2,000). Consequently, the government built AVE stations, like the one in Tardienta (the smallest town in Aragon, with one or two passengers per day at the most), in Requena, in Cuenca, and in Guadalajara (with no more than 20 passengers). Other construction projects have followed, such as 23 new tram networks (about 160 kilometers, at a cost of 2,000 million euros); new bridges, like the one in Talavera de la Reina (for 90 million

euros) or the one in Paymogo, Huelva, that connects Spain and Portugal at a cost of 2.18 million euros; or new public libraries, such as the one in Leganés, which was approved in 2007 but never totally finished, and which covers 8,000 empty and useless square meters.<sup>24</sup>

One might believe that building infrastructures is a safe bet because of their functionality. However, this is not always the case. The spectacular San Miguel Market in Madrid is another white elephant that has not yet been inaugurated.<sup>25</sup> It was decided in 2009 to remodel the market according to the plans of Madrid architects Enrique Sobejano and Fuensanta Nieto, both winners of the Ideas Competition organized by the city. The total cost for this public edifice is 60 million euros (4.2 million euros alone for glass for the roof), but it will not open due to a lack of public funding to organize anything and a lack of understanding of what it was built for. Actually, it has been named the Multipurpose Center since its function is not yet clear. This project was, again, mainly financed with public money. Another such project is the PLAZA, or "Plataforma Logística de Zaragoza," started by the Aragón government and the Zaragoza Township in order to create a great logistic platform around Zaragoza (its airport and AVE station). The initial cost was 46 million euros, but the government paid 158 million more euros with suspicious labor contracts. The case is currently under criminal investigation.

Fortunately, this model proved to be a failure in 2010 (the so-called crisis of overspending). The paradigm of unlimited building has come to an end, but the tendency to hire architectural stars continues, and as soon as the economy shows

signs of recovery, it is likely that more projects will be on the way. Luckily, not all projects have been carried out, such as the "Manhattan of Cullera," in Valencia. This venture was authorized, but there was no budget to continue with the building site. Other projects with excellent architects, however, have been approved. Jean Nouvel had, at the end of 2007, about ten projects in Spain; Foster had about six (skyscrapers in Madrid, a rebuilding of Camp Nou, wineries, among others); David Chipperfield had the City of Justice in Barcelona, two towers in 22@, "Veles e Vents" in Valencia; and Cesar Pelli, Toyo Ito, Arata Isozaki, Gehry, Thom Mayne, Rem Koolhaas, and Oscar Niemeyer also had projects. No wonder Spain is still considered a heaven on earth for star architects.

## **Conclusion**

From all these examples, we can draw the conclusion that what has happened in Spain in the last three decades was not an attempt to carry out a new model, but that is actually the same model taken to the limit<sup>26</sup> – politicians still believed tourism and building were the key factors for economic growth. Therefore, the transformation in legislation never changed the basic approach they took to planning. Many politicians were, rather, dreamers, who were starry eyed and convinced that betting on architectural miracles was the solution to all misfortunes. During several decades, they were carried away by a building euphoria that was in full swing. They never thought about the implications of overusing public funding nor of the freedom that townships were given that allowed them to do what they

wanted. The results were inefficiency, corruption, clear overspending, and in many cases a very deficient town planning that left many unnecessary white elephants in the 21st century.

This performance can be explained through the lens of *habitus*. Politicians knew that requalifying land was simple; corruption was widely engaged in; development companies were ready to start building and make money; there were no restrictions on environmental impact or town planning; and financing was widely facilitated. The choice was easy. The main actors were certain that by repeating showy projects, success would be almost assured time and time again. The dispositions of *habitus* predispose actors to choose actions that are most likely to thrive in view of their resources and past experience. According to Bourdieu, *habitus*-regulated behavior has some key implications. All of them can be found in Spain's building culture. The first characteristic is the regularity and predictability of behavior. This does not mean that behavior is a simple routine or just a repetition of practices; instead, "it is constituted by past experiences but it is constitutive of ongoing practices."<sup>27</sup> It is definitely true that, even though new land laws have been passed under almost every government and the economic framework has changed from time to time, the regularity of building policies has remained amazingly consistent over time. Practices might have varied according to timely fashion trends, to society, and to economic constraints – and thus, "according to the current resources," in Bourdieu's words – but in essence they have been continuously consistent. Second, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* does not have an individualistic

dimension; rather, it has a collective one. This is clearly the case with Spain, since the ideas related to building did not exist only in one town, but rather, sadly spread to the whole society. Therefore, they constitute collective practices or habits, and not individual actions as a result of a routine. The third characteristic brings us to set limits with rational choice theory. The way in which politicians have behaved in Spain during the years discussed in this paper cannot be designated as rational choice. According to rational choice theories, individuals must anticipate the outcomes of alternative courses of action and calculate which one will be best for them – the one that is more likely to give them the greatest satisfaction.<sup>28</sup> At first glance, one might assume that building decisions were taken to achieve the greatest satisfaction. However, we can definitely say that the choices taken in public building policy in Spain during the last two decades definitely fall within the category of Bourdieu's *habitus*. It is obvious that the type of practices we have examined here generate "strategies on the basis of an unconscious calculation of what is possible, likely, or unlikely for people of a certain standing."<sup>29</sup> According to Bourdieu, people can have habits of rationality, but once they are formed as mental dispositions, they will act as tacit ways of conduct. That is to say, "for the most part, *habitus* does not produce behavior guided by self-conscious reflection."<sup>30</sup> The approval by officials of some grand projects when public funding was so limited, cannot be explained as a rational choice, but rather as a mental disposition of *habitus* that oriented their actions according to some self-fulfilling prophecies. "The *habitus* adjusts itself to a probable future which it anticipates and helps to bring about because it reads it

directly in the present of the presumed world, the only one it can ever know"<sup>31</sup>. The practices attend to the present and reproduce a previous successful experience by anticipating the future.

However, the current socioeconomic framework (paraphrasing Bourdieu, the present that forms our mental dispositions) has been undergoing a transformation in the aftermath of the deep economic crisis that hit Spain in 2008. The consequences of Spain's building practices have created in recent years so much social and political discontent that a reshaping of the way of doing things seems now to be heading in the right direction. It is true that all this wastefulness to no avail has created outrage in Spanish society. The effects have been rather the opposite of what the main actors expected, since they intensified the financial crisis that hit Spain beginning in 2008. Citizens have seen how their taxes have been misused by the administration for unproductive, stunning macro-projects, while companies collapsed, banks failed, unemployment escalated to unprecedented rates, evictions took place daily, and so on. All that disruption has created a new generation of discontented people who are full of outrage and willing to show their growing dissatisfaction with this type of conduct. The consequences are criticism in the mass media, social movements (such as the famous 15-M, on May 15, 2011), and political change (from the two main traditional political parties – the Socialist and the Conservative – to a more varied scene with a third party, Podemos, which promises to alter these conventional practices).

In 2007, the European Parliament already noted that there was a need to end this system.<sup>32</sup> Overdevelopment has had "disastrous environmental, historical and cultural effects," it stated. The impact has been huge on the economy and the society and the effect on the environment is irreversible (The territorial capacity has been exceeded, and more than anywhere along the coast line, with a consequent deterioration of the tourist industry). There is a vital need to modify building laws and practices and stop unscrupulous developers and politicians in order to end corruption that, according to Transparency International, mainly lies in public building and local administration. Spain's citizens have realized that there is an urgent need to change the model that has been perpetuated in their society toward sustainable and more price-reasonable building.

Nevertheless, it appears that this change will be only partial, which leads us to the question whether a transformation of the environment can actually modify the *habitus*. In November 2014 the Arcano Group, a leading independent financial advisory services firm, issued a report that highly recommends real-estate investment.<sup>33</sup> It explains in detail the importance of the construction sector in the past and why an upward real-estate cycle is coming. In February 2015, in a television interview, Josef Ajram, a media celebrity broker and successful triathlete, suggested that viewers should invest in real estate, because it brings top value in a rising sector. Since funding is improving, efforts to accelerate the growth of the economy are once more relying on the real-estate sector.<sup>34</sup> On May 8, 2015, the newspaper El

Mundo published an article about Sima 2015 (Madrid International Real-Estate Exhibition) confirming the recovery of the building sector.<sup>35</sup>

According to Bourdieu "the persistence of the effects of primary conditioning, in the form of the *habitus*, accounts equally well for cases in which dispositions function out of place and practices are objectively ill-adapted to the present conditions."<sup>36</sup> Taking into account the "present conditions" and the persistence of the real-estate sector's relevance for the economic sector, the only conclusion to be drawn, in line with Bourdieu's *habitus*, is that the mental dispositions of the described model of behavior are just perpetuating the system. "The tendency of groups to persist in their ways, due inter alia to the fact that they are composed of individuals with durable dispositions that can outlive the economic and social conditions in which they were produced, can be the source of misadaptation as well as adaptation, revolt as well as resignation."<sup>37</sup> Therefore, there might arise voices of discontent, misadaptation, and revolt. But there are decision-makers who will opt for adaptation and resignation. Changes might take place in society and politics, but definitely not in certain cultural patterns of behavior.

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<<http://www.soc.iastate.edu/sapp/soc401rationalchoice.pdf>>

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> This paper is an expanded version of a talk given at Princeton University in the Fall of 2014. I would like to thank Maria Garlock, Ignacio Payá-Zaforteza, John Wriedt, Leigh Westerfield and Marc Domingo Gygax for their insightful comments.

<sup>2</sup> Swartz, David L., *The Occupational Theory Journal of Research*, Winter 2002, v. 22, supplement, p. 62 <http://www.bu.edu/av/core/swartz/sociology-of-habit.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Swartz, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> Swartz, p. 64.

<sup>5</sup> [http://economia.elpais.com/economia/2014/01/17/actualidad/1389961522\\_913502.html](http://economia.elpais.com/economia/2014/01/17/actualidad/1389961522_913502.html).

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.cenavarra.es/documentos/ficheros\\_comunicacion/sectorinmobiliario.pdf](http://www.cenavarra.es/documentos/ficheros_comunicacion/sectorinmobiliario.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> [http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corrupci%C3%B3n\\_urban%C3%ADstica\\_en\\_Espa%C3%B1a](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corrupci%C3%B3n_urban%C3%ADstica_en_Espa%C3%B1a).

<sup>8</sup> Miguel Boyer served as Minister of Economy, Treasury and Commerce in Spain from 1982 to 1985. He was behind the elaboration of this Decree.

<sup>9</sup> Also in this sense, Fernando Jiménez and Manuel Villoria, "Political Finance, Urban Development and Political Corruption in Spain," in *Money, Corruption, and Political Competition in Established and Emerging Democracies*, ed. By Mendilow, Lexington Books, 2012, p. 133.

<sup>10</sup> Valencia had 56.3 points out of 100 globally, but only 38.5 with respect to urbanism and public building. <http://transparencia.org.es/pymes365.com/en/incau-2010/>. In 2014, the points went up to an outstanding 92.5. It seems that a change is taking place. [http://www.transparencia.org.es/INCAU\\_2014/Puntuaciones\\_CC.AA/Valencia.pdf](http://www.transparencia.org.es/INCAU_2014/Puntuaciones_CC.AA/Valencia.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Greenpeace, *Destrucción a toda costa (Valencia). Julio 2005. Informe sobre la situación del litoral español*. <http://www.greenpeace.org/espana/Global/espana/report/other/destrucci-n-a-toda-costa-2005-5.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Moix, *La arquitectura milagrosa*, Anagrama, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> While the movement has pervaded other disciplines and is still present in many, such as literary criticism or philosophy, postmodernism in architecture has been a rather controversial categorization. Many theorists consider it as the movement of the late 1970s and onwards that used historical references and eclectic ornamental elements. Very illustrative is the interview that Charles Jenks held with Peter Eisenman, who was not convinced that his work could fit in the Post-Modern movement (<http://www.metamodernism.com/2011/12/09/metamodern-architecture/>), or Viñoly's interview (<http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/culture/2011/04/1788191/what-comes-after-postmodern-architecture-actual-architecture-says-ra?page=all>).

<sup>14</sup> Locker, The Baroque in the Construction of a National Culture in Francoist Spain: An Introduction, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies: Hispanic Studies and Researches on Spain, Portugal and Latin America*, 91:5, p. 671.

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that the cost for this building was 2 thousand million euros, but it is not used for any specific purpose and has hardly had more than a couple of visitors.

<sup>16</sup> Interestingly enough, at the conclusion of the Expo, many of the pavilions were dismantled, and today the site is divided between a research and development park called [Cartuja 93](#) and a theme park called [Isla Mágica](#), the "Magic Island," which also hosts the popular Pavilion of Spain.

<sup>17</sup> Data from Llàtzer Moix.

<sup>18</sup> Now they have a second Guggenheim in mind in Sukarrieta. This is a way to use architecture with an economic purpose, not for a specific function.

<sup>19</sup> Data from Llàtzer Moix.

<sup>20</sup> Many of the building difficulties that were found are detailed in Llàtzer Moix.

<sup>21</sup> For a list of budget deviation of Calatrava's projects, see <http://thefullcalatrava.wordpress.com/>.

For instance:

[CAC – Museu de las Ciencias Principe Felipe](#) Valencia (ESP) 2008 87.8 million € over budget

[CAC – Puente de l'Assut d'Or](#) Valencia (ESP) 2008 36.9 million € over budget

[Ciudad de las Artes y de las Ciencias \(CAC\)](#) Valencia (ESP) 2008 1132 million € over budget

CAC – l' Umbracle Valencia (ESP) 2008 17.9 million € over budget

CAC – l'Hemisfèric Valencia (ESP) 2008 14 million € over budget

[CAC – Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía](#) Valencia (ESP) 2008 223 million € over budget

<sup>22</sup> [http://economia.elpais.com/economia/2013/03/08/actualidad/1362758497\\_868709.html](http://economia.elpais.com/economia/2013/03/08/actualidad/1362758497_868709.html)

<sup>23</sup> Alsina Anna and Alsina Casimir, *El Desgavell Immobiliari a Catalunya*, PAM, 2012

<sup>24</sup> The so-called "Ghost Library of Madrid" with a budget of 12 million Euros.

<https://coabdm.wordpress.com/2015/02/03/definitivamente-la-mayor-biblioteca-fantasma-de-madrid-esta-en-leganes>.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.abc.es/madrid/20140920/abci-upyd-mercado-barcelo-201409191829.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Buriel de Orzueta, La década prodigiosa del urbanismo español (1997–2006), *X Coloquio Internacional de Geocrítica, Diez años de cambios en el mundo, en la Geografía y en las Ciencias Sociales*, 1999-2008.

<sup>27</sup> Swartz, p. 66.

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<sup>28</sup> Scott, John, *Rational Choice Theory, from Understanding Contemporary Society: Theories of the Present*, ed. By G. Browning A. Halcli and F. Webster, Sage Publications, 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Bourdieu, 1990 *The Logics of Practice*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

<sup>30</sup> Swartz, p. 64

<sup>31</sup> Bourdieu, 1990 *The Logics of Practice*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 64.

<sup>32</sup> DT\660551EN.doc March 28, 2007. Two years later, and following three visits to Spain in five years, the Committee on Petitions approved a very critical report against Spanish authorities (at the national, regional, and local levels). On March 29, 2009, the "Auken" report was approved by the Plenary of the European Parliament.

<sup>33</sup> file:///Users/aalsina/Downloads/en-the-case-for-spain-iii-arcano-nov-2014%20(1).pdf

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.8tv.cat/8aldia/videos/la-borsa-amb-josef-ajram-49/>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.elmundo.es/economia/2015/05/08/554bd017268e3ea6628b4578.html>

<sup>36</sup> Bourdieu, 1990 *The Logics of Practice*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 62.

<sup>37</sup> Bourdieu, p. 62