

PLANNING IN BETWEEN

A case study of three Supra-local urban plans in Catalonia (Spain)

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Abstract

For over two decades, Catalonia has developed basically local planning and within the municipal boundaries. However, the recent boom of supra-local planning makes clear that the territory is subject of an imminent restructuring. In this context, Supra-local urban plans (PDUs) play a leading role to consolidate the link between the territorial and the local level, exceeding the linear hierarchy of planning to consolidate the territorial model proposed by the Autonomous Government of Catalonia (2003-2010). However, in practice, PDUs present different planning approaches that demonstrate its potential flexibility to adapt its scope and methodology to the uniqueness of each of the urban areas addressed. The aim of this paper is to define the exceptionality of the innovative contributions and the instrumental specificity of PDUs through a multiple case study.

Key words: supra-local planning, urban planning instruments, Central Counties of Catalonia

1. INTRODUCTION

On November 28, 2010, when the coalition led by the Socialist Party of Catalonia ends its legislature in the Autonomous Government of Catalonia [*Generalitat*], the planning community, and indeed all those connected to urbanism in Catalonia and Spain, have little doubt on the magnitude of the planning enterprise made at the level of the autonomous community with horizon in 2026. In fact, during the last decade, over fifty supra-local plans were approved, making it clear that this territory will be subject to future major reforms.

Somehow we all know the achievements of the Catalan urban planning, especially in Barcelona (Busquets, 2004). But territorial development is completely unknown; despite Catalonia has a regional planning policy since 1983. For over two decades, this law is practically not used and, therefore, Catalonia produced mainly local plans and within the municipal boundaries.

This lack of supra-local planning in Catalonia (and Spain) define two main problems: First, a territory broadly designed by fragmented local plans. This has to do with the division of the legal system in a law that regulates the regional planning and another law that regulates urbanism. If we analyse the structure of planning in Catalonia, the relationship between law and instruments, the division of the system is clear (chart 1): on the top, we have the instruments of the territorial law (The Territorial General Plan, the regional plans and territorial sectorial plans). Below, we have the instruments of the law of urbanism (the local general plans and the detail plans).

<i>Legal system</i>	<i>type</i>	<i>instrument</i>
Regional Planning (Regional planning policy -1983)	General	Territorial General Plan (PTG)
	Partial	Regional plans (PTPs)
	Sectorial	Sectorial regional plans (PTSs)
Urban Planning (Law of urbanism - 2002)	General	Supra-local urban plans (PDUs) Municipal general plans (POUMs)
	Detail	Partial plans (PPs) Special plans (PEs) Urban Renewal plans (PMUs)

CHART 1. Structure of planning in Catalonia. Source: the author

The second problem regarding the lack of supra-local planning is its opposition to the current processes of urbanization, which the main vector is the integration of the territory. The process of “metropolization” (Indovina, 2004; Nello, 2001) is not a new phenomenon. For instance, we can refer to the seminal studies of Geddes (1915), to the evolution of the concept of “metropolis” since the WWII (Blumenfeld, 1967; Davis, 1959), to the idea of “city-region” introduced by Giancarlo De Carlo in the sixties. However, despite the many theoretical contributions, the urban perspective of the territory and the plurimunicipal coordination is still very difficult to be implemented through operative planning.

Here lies the opportunity of the new Supra-local urban plans [*Planes directores urbanísticos* (PDU)]. PDUs are instruments intermediate between regional and local plans designed as framework for the municipalities included in its boundary. Also, this new instrument is among the few cases in which the challenges of regional policies could be implemented through urban planning tools – comprehensive tools. However, in practice, PDUs have different methodological approaches regarding the regional planning guidelines and objectives. These different approaches demonstrate the potential flexibility of the PDUs to adapt the scope and methodology of planning to each territory.

The overall objective of this paper is to define the innovative contributions and the instrumental specificity of PDUs within the Catalan planning system. For this aim we analyse three pioneers PDUs: the PDU of Bages, the PDU of Òdena and PDU of Vic. The sampling of the plans is based on three conditions: a time-based condition (the three plans are drafted almost at the same time); a thematic condition (the three plans address the management of complex urban areas, related to medium sized cities and their conurbations); and finally, an administrative condition, as these PDUs are instruments of the same regional plan, for the region of the Central Counties of Catalunya (figure 1).

As for the specific objectives, on one hand, we intend to define the methodological innovation of each individual case and, on the other hand, we expect to generalize the instrumental scope of PDUs through a cross case analysis. The research questions are: why these three PDUs implement such diverse methodologies? and how the methodological decisions are related to the singularity of each territory? We also want to discover which are the independent variables that define the specificity of PDUs scope.

But, before getting into the empirical analysis of the plans, it's important to describe, as a context for the cases, the territorial dynamics of the Region of the Central Counties and the evolution of supra-local planning in Catalonia. Finally, after these three parts, we'll present some conclusions.

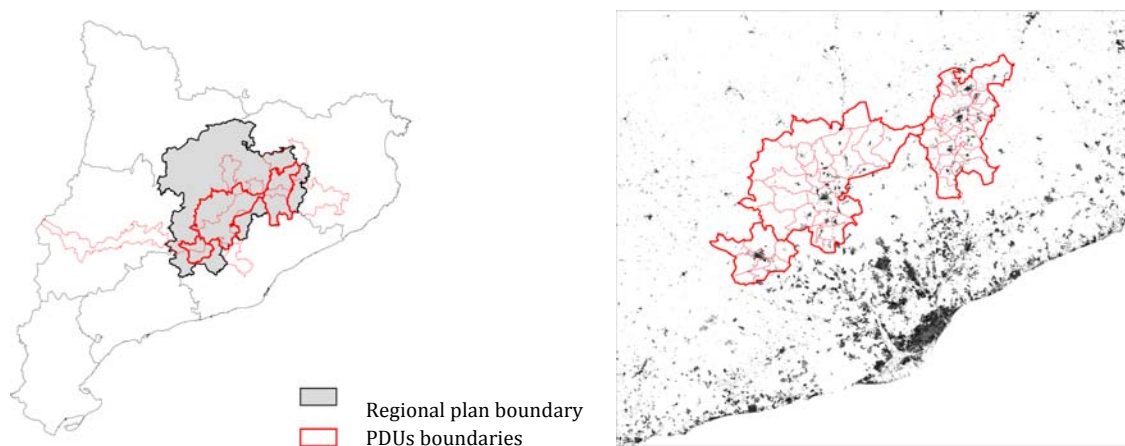


Figure 1. Geographical situation of the cases. Source: the author

2. The region of central counties of Catalonia: a territory in transformation

Cataluña has seven regions [*vegueries*], defined by law in 1995, which overlap the Spanish provinces. Thus, we can consider that regional planning is mainly a mean for administrative reform (Fernandez, 2008). In particular, the Region of the Central Counties is defined by five counties that share several characteristics. The most relevant are: a complex topography that makes mobility very difficult, especially between east and west, and at the same time reinforces centripetal character of Barcelona's urban area; a powerful urban structure due to the existence of three intermediate sized cities (Manresa, Vic, and Igualada) and the capacity of their respective urban areas; the high population growth due to the immigration; the on-going productive substitution (textile industry); the complexity of the urbanization process; and the lack of instruments for territorial governance.

At the same time, the county administration doesn't have enough institutional power, therefore, in this region, prevails the municipal management of the territory. Although the Region of the Central Counties is not strictly a functional urban region (Hall, 2006), we can clearly identify three urban areas (Gløersen, 2005): Bages, Vic and Òdena.

3. THE SUPRA-LOCAL PLANNING IN CATALONIA

3.1. Background

With the argument of the regional dynamics, the Autonomous Government of Catalonia promotes the drafting of three PDUs for guiding the development of the urban areas already mentioned. This political impulse is part of a deep renewal of the planning instruments and regional management that the Administration develops since the year 2004. However, we must point out that Catalonia has a remarkable historical background in supra-local urban planning such as the expansion for Barcelona [*ensanche*] designed by Cerdá in 1859, or Regional Plan of Rubio i Tudurí (1932), developed in the thirties of the last century.

During Franco's dictatorship some regional planning efforts are made especially for the area of Barcelona such as the County Plan of 1953, the intent of the Plan for the urban areas of Barcelona of 1966 and the Metropolitan General Plan of 1976, the only one that was approved and still has a normative permanence.

Since the restitution of democracy, the transfer of urban planning decisions from the government of Spain to the government of Catalonia produces an outstanding promotion of the municipal urban planning (Ferrer and Sabaté, 1999). In addition, coherent with the administrative reform, the regional policy of 1983 gives the Autonomous Government the capacity to develop supra-local planning at different levels. However, during the period 1983-2003, twenty years of conservative government, the development of supra-local planning is virtually non-existent. In this way the lack of supra-local instruments emphasise the metropolitan dynamics that we mentioned before.

3.2. The Territorial Planning Programme

In 2003, with the Socialist party in the government, there is a new conviction for territorial planning. Consequently, the creation of the Territorial Planning Programme in 2004 represents a turn in the politics but also in the practice of planning. On the one hand, the approval of the law of urbanism in 2005 is a great advance in terms of the regulation applicable to the urban planning and its linkage to the regional planning. On the other hand, the government intends to move from the "current model" to a new "possible model" for the territorial (re)equilibrium.

3.3. The regional plans

As in many European Union countries, the Catalan government establishes the regional level and in the prototypical character of regional plans as a new framework –or model– for the territorial equilibrium. These regional plans have a physical and strategic approach. Furthermore, to increase their efficiency, these plans only address three themes or layers (open spaces, settlements and infrastructures for mobility), avoiding the omnicomprehensive tendency of general planning (Esteban, 2006).

One of the most relevant issues is that, by proposing a regional nodal structure (figure 2), the regional plan identifies the potentiality of the three urban areas (Bages, Vic and Òdena) as structuring polarities of the region of the Central Counties. However, due to the lack of normative accuracy of the regional plan for applying regulations and proposals within the urban scale, these urban areas (a kind of sophisticated spots of the region) are developed through three PDUs of general scope: PDU of the Bages, PDU of Vic and the PDU of Òdena. Thus, the government gives PDUs the role of "linkage" between the regional and urban space, supporting the multiple levels of the territorial model (Nel lo, 2006).

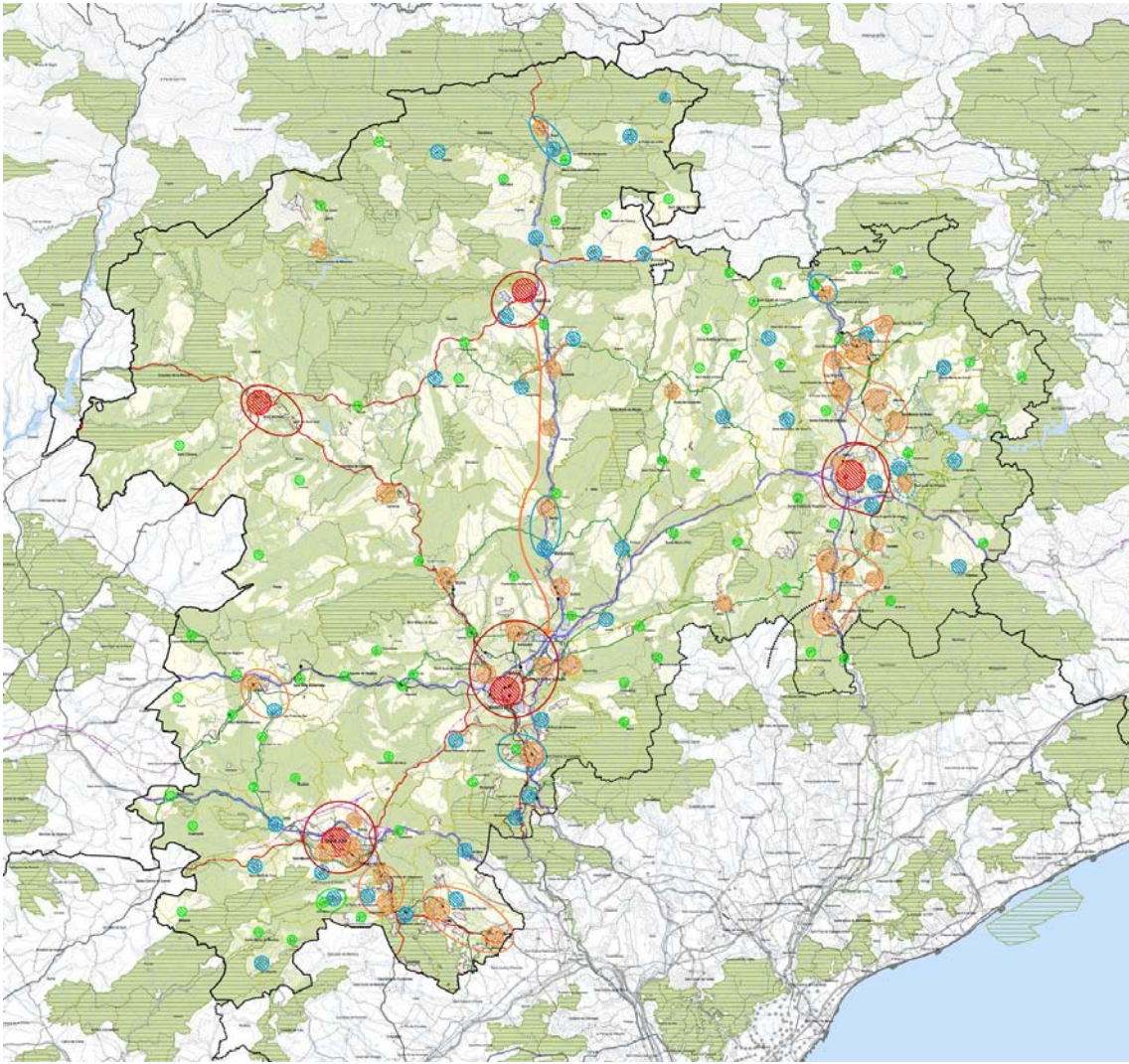


Figure 2. Regional nodal structure. Source: DPTOP, Generalitat de Catalunya. Plan territorial parcial de las Comarcas Centrales. Barcelona, aprobación definitiva setiembre 2008

3.4. Supra-local urban plans

Supra-local urban plans (PDU) are implemented as a framework of reference and coordination of the municipalities included in its planning boundary. In addition, due to the diversity of the territory, the Territorial Planning Programme proposes a typology according to six issues: heritage preservation, mountain counties, strategic residential areas, major infrastructures, coastal system and urban areas (which is the case of this research). As a result, comprehensive planning with supra-local scope regulates today over 30% of Catalonia. Therefore, despite the deferred nature of the PDU, it is clear that the territory is under imminent restructuring.

4. CASE ANALYSIS

4.1. Individual analysis of the cases: three instrumental approaches

Although the practical results of these instruments must be checked in the future, the relevance of the PDU, as an exercise of planning, justifies the analysis. The three PDU are based on the graphic and policy guidelines designed by the Territorial Planning Program for guiding the planners.¹ Though, in practice the three cases have different approaches over the same instrument. So by analysing individual cases, our purpose is to identify the level of innovation and the particular relationship between the specific planning methodology and the territory of reference.

PDU of the Bages: the territorial question

Of the three cases, the PDU of Bages is the first to be approved. The urban area of Bages is a pivot of urban, water and infrastructure radial systems. Due to the big extension of its boundary, almost a whole county, the first methodological challenge of this PDU is to deal with the territorial dimension to communicate specific urban targets. For this reason, this PDU is overlaid with some criteria of the Regional plan, especially those related to the structure of the open spaces. However, both plans enhance their relationship at the policy level.

In particular, the singularity of the PDU of Bages is based on the implementation of layers of project and on the areas for homogeneous regulation as a sensible time-based policy (figure 3). Despite the large size of its boundary, these resources allow the plan to fix the specific scale of urbanism at supra-local scale, improve the natural nodality of Bages by integrating the transport system, identify thematic units through different categories of cultural landscapes, and avoid the blueprint images of the territorial strategic projects.

¹ See DPTOP - Programa de Planejament Territorial, Barcelona. *Determinacions gràfiques i normatives dels Plans Directors urbanístic d'abast general*, 2005

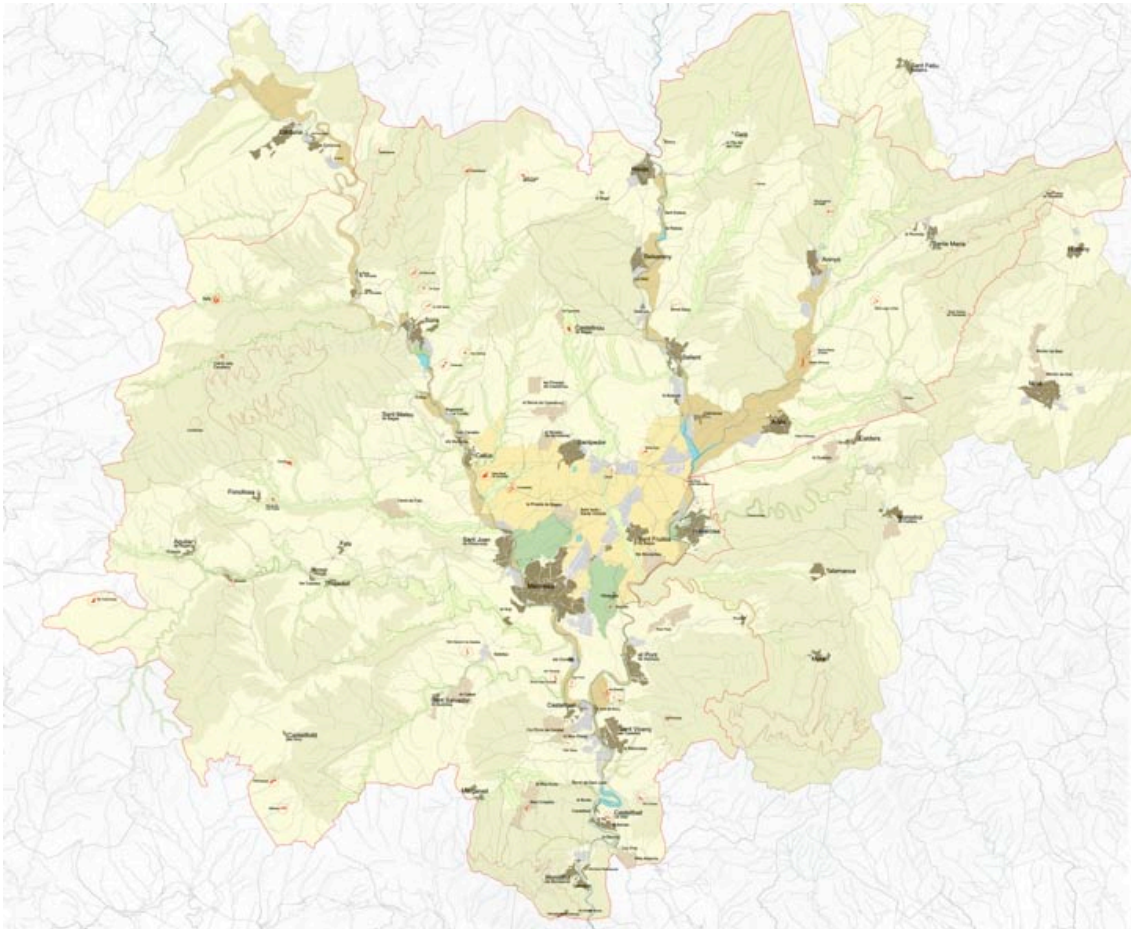


Figure 3. Areas for homogeneous regulation Source: DPTOP, Generalitat de Catalunya. *Plan director urbanístico del Pla del Bages*, Barcelona, Octubre, 2008

PDU of Vic: The rururban question

The second urban area addressed, Vic, has an exceptional agricultural landscape and a special territorial dimension: a mix of rurality and urbanity. These are the arguments to set the scope of the PDU as comprehensive geographical unit. The methodology of this PDU is based on the combination of urban and architectural analyses to emphasize the unique “rurban” morphology of the plain of Vic. For example, by identifying some collective regional places [*llocs*] and the typological analysis of the evolution of farms [*masias*].

In addition, this PDU is based on the descriptive tradition of ruralistic to express the structural and territorial identity of the plain (figure 4). Therefore, it is more a tool for the territorial reflection than for the concrete action. For this reason the methodological innovation of the plan is not compatible with the code set by the Territorial Planning Program for the supra-local plans. The “narrative approach”, the abstract documentation and the difficulties for communicating the regional objectives are three arguments that left the approval of the plan unfinished.

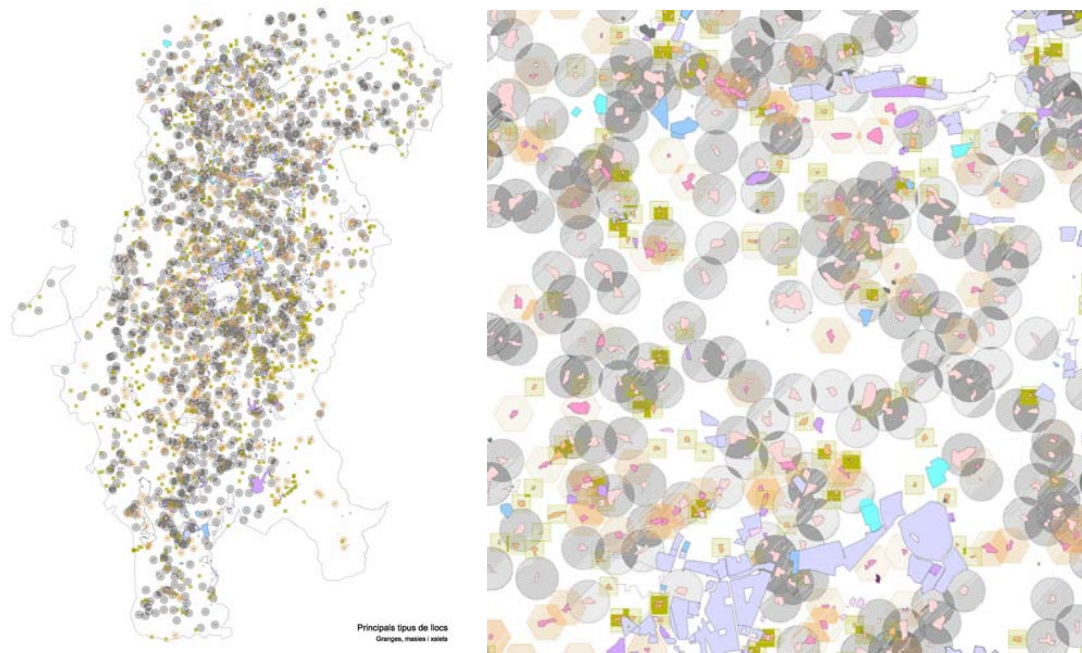


Figure 4. Parameterization of dispersed activities and buildings. Source: DPTOP, Generalitat de Catalunya. *Plan director urbanístic de la Plana de Vic*. Presentación para la aprobación inicial, Barcelona, junio 2006

PDU of Òdena: The urban question

The morphology of Òdena, the third urban area in question, could be explained through its three main territorial components: the conurbation around Igualada, a small plain, and a stretch valley (the only connection of this urban area with Barcelona). The boundary of this PDU is the one that best fit to the conurbation. This allows the plan to implement a morphological approach similar to the comprehensive municipal plans of the 80's in Catalonia.

Compared to the other two cases, this plan is perhaps more orthodox than innovative, but also more risky in terms of the execution of the regional planning objectives. This PDU is scheduled strictly according to a detailed structural prefiguration of the “supra-local city” (figure 5). Thus, its scope is more binding for the future municipal plans. Indeed, the accuracy of the schedule for the urban interventions and the “conditioned development” cause a great resistance from municipalities and other local political platforms. However, the detailed and the structural nature of the design criteria make this PDU a device that facilitates the implementation of the regional planning objectives within the short, the medium and the long term.

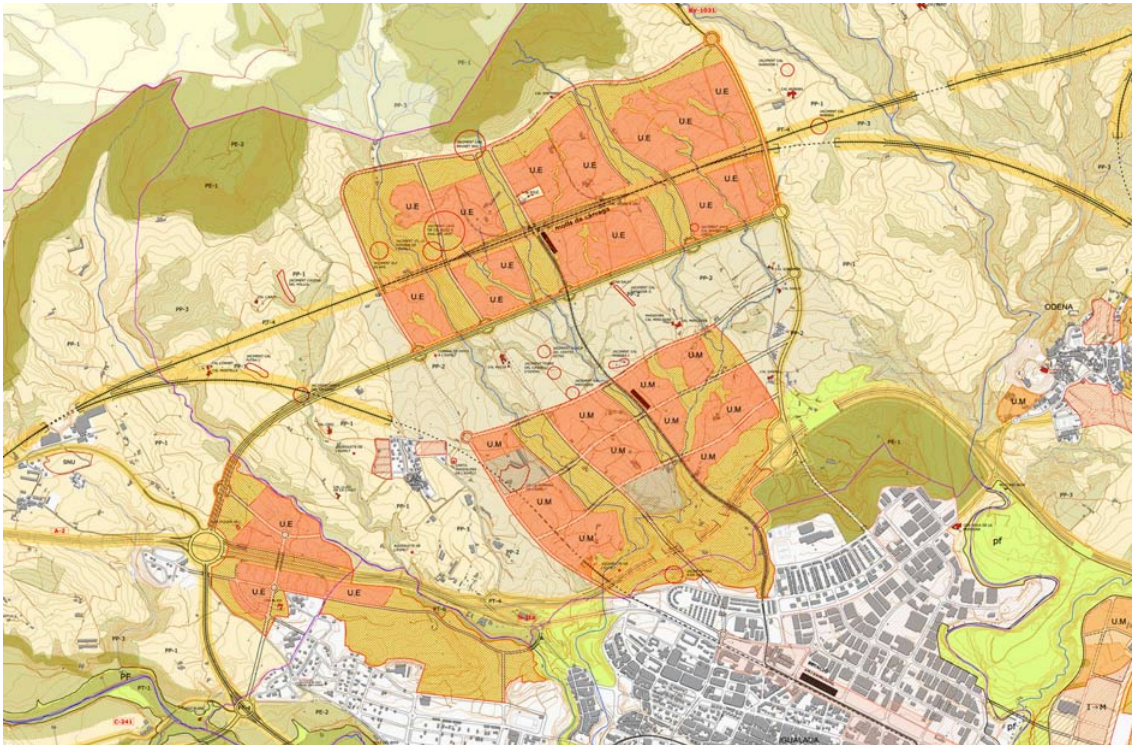


Figure 5. Prefiguration of the “supra-local city” (detail). Source: DPTOP, Generalitat de Catalunya. *Plan director urbanístico de la Conca d’Òdena*. Barcelona, aprobación definitiva diciembre 2008

4.2 Cross case analysis: defining "the supra-local urbanism"

According to experience of the individual case analysis, PDUs for urban areas resist to become a specific type of plan. But is it possible to define their specific scope? The cross case analysis confirms the importance of the flexibility of PDUs, but it also allows to generalize their inputs to define the specificity of this unique urban planning instrument with supra-local scope.

The parts of the territory

As for the boundary of the plan, PDUs do not start from the local discussion or the will of intermunicipal cooperation. PDUs define functional areas, significant for regional planning, that consider geographic, morphological and administrative variables (eg. the willingness of municipalities to participate –or not– within the regional politics).

Also, PDUs decode urban areas as an organic object, revealing the territory as a “city divided in parts” (Rossi, 1964), though with different intensities of urbanity.

Multiple scales and levels of description of the territory

Another point is that, far from the coherence of the territorial levels (national, regional, local, ect.) the ordering of urban areas does not correspond to a specific scale or level. PDUs address the phenomenon of the urban-region according to an architectural, urban, territorial and landscape character, and also study a wide range of scales (from 1/5.000 to 1/100.000).

Unlike the regional plans, PDUs do not represent their proposals according to the same graphical code. These plans develop an intentional language consequent with the territorial singularity and the background of the planners.

These plans differ in the nature of their content that can be “comprehensive”, similar to a general plan, or “special”, by selecting only some specific variables. Finally, according to different levels of “fuzziness” (Schön, 1983), PDUs’ proposals tend to blueprints, schemes, or abstractions.

Strategic?

Unlike the strategic plans, PDUs are not means for negotiation, in which feedback is processed and conflicts are resolved. However, these plans are strategic because they rely on the “form of the territory” (Greggotti, 1981), revealing “spaces of supply” for local and regional development.

Through the strategic projects, PDUs refer to concrete interventions for being executed in the short and medium term, through regulations, guidelines or recommendations. In this way the plans addressed the activities demand to prevent others from multiplying emergently.

Ad-hoc and guided developments

PDUs cannot define a schedule for planning: their proposals must be implemented by other (municipal and sectorial) plans. Thus, it is difficult that this plans fix “programs for the action” adjusted to the legislative schedule of municipalities (4 years). However, their structural nature allows supra-local objectives to have a longer effect.

Also, PDUs decrease the gap between the project and the program with specific suggestions for management (incremental or optional) and for the administration (public, private or mixed) of the strategic projects. More than a “final image”, PDUs provide a rational guide based on arguments that take the opportunity of particular situations in each territory.

5. CONCLUSIONS

During this presentation, we putted in evidence the opportunity of the new supra-local urban plans in Cataluña (PDUs) by analysing three pioneer cases for ordering urban areas within the same region (Central Counties).

Despite the guidelines of the Territorial Planning Program, the first conclusion is that PDUs do not respond to one specific type of plan. Their instrumental flexibility is due to the ambiguity of the law of urbanism, since it doesn’t specify if the content of PDUs is minimum or maximum. Therefore, these plans can adapt their planning approach to each situation (not *vice-versa*).

Secondly, the flexibility of PDUs can incorporate the mature experience of local plans, but also of regional plans. In this way these plans rely on the “form of the territory” as the physical context for the appropriate scale of the new city. This flexibility allows PDUs overcoming the conventional and modulated plans according to an administrative level that often overlooks the real urban phenomenon.

Although PDUs for the management of urban areas (in the context of the Region of the Central Counties) resist becoming an explicit type of plan, the cross-case analysis allows generalizing the specificity of their broad scope, therefore:

- PDUs are significant areas for regional planning, which decode the urban areas as an integrated urban space;
- PDUs must necessarily address multiple scales;
- these plans develop an intentional planning language consequent with the singularity of the territory and the background of the planners;
- PDUs are strategic because they rely on the form of the territory, revealing unique “supplying spaces” for local and regional development; and finally
- the structural nature of PDUs allows the regional planning objectives to have a longer effect.

In short, the flexibility of the scope of the PDU allows modulating, in a complementary way, binding approaches and guidelines, “ad-hoc” and “guided” developments, within a broad range of scales. Thus, PDUs exceed the rigid division of the levels of planning as a result of the fragmented legal system that dissociate urbanism from the territory.

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