From Urban Management to Local Governance: 20 Years of Strategic Plans in Spanish Cities.

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Since 1988, when Barcelona started its first strategic plan, this planning method has had a large diffusion in Spain and other countries, especially in Latin America and some Mediterranean countries. In Catalonia, strategic planning has become a standardized practice widely accepted and currently in a growth process. This progression is not only an evolution process. It must be contextualized within a process of deep change in the government and planning of territories and cities, which is happening in Europe in the last years.

The paper analyses, in first place, how the diffusion of this methodology has spread among different Catalan cities. The first plans were conceived for industrial metropolitan cities, which suffered from a deep redevelopment process. Instead, during this decade, a new generation of plans has been started by many smaller cities located on the fringe of the metropolitan area. These areas have suffered a sprawl process and the arrival of many new citizens, and they have chosen to create strategic plans as a way of managing their future and maintain their welfare.

In second place this paper makes a critical analysis of the last twenty years. On one hand it states the good results this new way of managing the territory has had when dealing with a changing and instable society. On the other hand, it explains the problems that most strategic plans have had until now, both methodological and contextual, like the lack of coordination or the deficiently defined objectives.

Finally, a recent change in the current direction of events is analysed. During recent times strategic planning seems to be in crisis. As time goes by, fewer cities have working strategic plans. But a deeper analysis shows that what it is really happening is that the philosophy behind strategic planning has merged with local policies, so even if the use of the words “strategic planning” is declining, they are still present in the core of urban and land management.

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