



## **Planning Cultures and Urban Strategies. From 1908 French-Spanish Exhibition to International Expo Zaragoza 2008 (Spain)**

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The vision held of International Exhibitions (or World Fairs, or Expos) as a type of ephemeral event, and a reflection of the development of capitalism, nationalism and imperialism, has been widely expressed in historical studies of these large scale events. At the same time, the relevance of these Exhibitions in the architectural and town planning historiography has led to excessive generalisations. While some authors are interested in the cultural dimension associated with events view as “ephemeral” and exceptional, others consider them to be true urban development projects with long lasting effects in urban structure and landscape. However, Expos have almost always been looked upon as an expression or reflection of political, economic and cultural conditions, much more than as agents for change or as conscious strategies aimed at transforming the host cities.

When one studies the objectives of “historical Exhibitions”, those taking place from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1930’s, it is possible to find numerous parallels in the concepts and objectives governing them. They were the expression of a nation’s power, celebrations of its progress and the advances in industry, production and technology. With a different perspective, an analysis of the built legacy and impact on urban development from these Exhibitions show that both aspects are important and recurring: museums and public buildings are accompanied by improved public spaces, new and improved parks, new transport infrastructure and improved waterfronts.

Which are the similarities and differences with these historical episodes when we consider recent great events, such as the last Exhibitions of the “age of globalisation”? Considering the ones held from 1990’s up to Expo Shanghai 2010, we see some continuity and also important change in their relationship with Planning cultures and strategies. At a time when cities increasingly compete to attract investment, the phenomenon of the promotion of large-scale events seems to have adapted itself particularly well to the new economic, social and cultural conditions of the age of information and general urban restructuring. The spectacular and “emblematic” linked projects can be seen as part of an urban promotion and marketing strategy, but also as catalyst for urban transformation operations.

The paper deals with those issues and focus on two Exhibitions held in Zaragoza, Spain. The first one was the 1908 French-Spanish Exhibition. The second, the International Expo Zaragoza 2008. Obviously, there are many differences between two Expos held with 100 years of historical distance. However, both of them have been important landmarks in local Planning culture, changing official Planning strategies and being responsible for significant impacts in the urban morphology and landscape of Zaragoza.