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AN ADDICTED VIEW ON THE EUROPEAN URBAN SUMMER SCHOOLS

EVALUATION
AND OUTLOOK

Taking an addicted view from a former participant in 1994 at a Young Planning Professional Workshop (YPP), to an organiser of a YPP in 2009, from a lecturer at European Urban Summer Schools (EUSS) in Wrocław and Lisbon to a tutor at EUSS in Madrid, I can recall some memorable moments in all of these. Nevertheless, this last EUSS experience makes for one of the best.

Reasons for this may lie, at the start, in the previous knowledge all tutors of Madrid had and the long-time connections they partially shared. For most tutors it was through being lecturers at CEU, for others through ISOCARP, where they shared joint meetings or creative happenings at least since the late nineties. Therefore, the tutors were at ease under the coordination of Teresa Franchini who made things even easier by allowing choices of the site where the tutors thought they could perform best.

The same applied to the participants who chose the site they would work on, provided the right mix of specialities was guaranteed.

Further reasons derive of course from the participants who shared an enthusiastic motivation that matched the vibes of central Madrid and the excitingly modern topic of post-speculative cities. Going through their specific personal motivations, for several of them EUSS came as a break-through in their studies and a turning point to decide on further avenues of expertise in their professional careers. For that reason they may have lacked some knowledge in urban planning, but they had an extra-abundant thirst for learning and understanding when this topic was the right choice to follow in their future careers.

Madrid was the right city as it consisted in itself a real living lab of a post-speculative city for several reasons. So much so, that I - myself a tutor - went into interviewing the inhabitants and doing a bit of field research. The presenters were mostly old acquaintances from my PhD time and CEU lecturers who were really involved in presenting their views and research. The vast selection of presenters among nationals and foreigners who are easy to attract to a big metropolis, is one of the best advantages of a big city. One visible disadvantage as compared to smaller towns may lie in not having the stakeholders present at the final session. Politicians in charge and senior staff members of public administration are obvious examples.

The practical assignment proved once again that multi-cultural participants can really work well together despite their different backgrounds as consolidated knowledge on urban planning was homogenising standpoints and proposed actions. I especially enjoyed seeing the Vallecas team participants that I tutored along with Teresa Raventós, do informal interviews, compute the data and map it afterwards. This substantiates the subjective and objective gathering of relevant information that allows us, urban planners, to make meaningful proposals that will be validated by the citizens. Hopefully they will gather their trust and respect.

The EUSS in Madrid proved even more interesting for me as it gave me insights onto the future of our own cities. Therefore, it made me meditate on my teachings. When I came back home, to Minho University in Portugal, I changed the teaching strategies of the Urban Planning subject for the 4th year Civil Engineering course. In the following week, what would have been a normal less than one hour preparatory meeting with my long-time assistant (since 1998) turned into a vivid and very pleasant three hours discussion with two teaching assistants. Together, we shared my EUSS in Madrid experience and what we could improve not in the contents but on the way we delivered our experiences to students and what we asked from them in return.

I am sure that - more than enjoying the topic which they did - EUSS participants as well as my Minho students will find it especially relevant later on, in the hard but exciting future that lies ahead of us. Let more EUSS come!