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MADRID THINK TANK

CRISIS

It is crucial to begin this article by making a reference to an undeniable reality: We are in a time of CRISIS. Having this word on mind, if we think about the nature of the term crisis itself, it is curious to see that while the Greek word (κρίσις) from which crisis is derived stands for a situation dominated by change, other cultures, older than the occidental ones, have come to deepen its meaning and implications. This is the case of China, where the ideogram for crisis is composed of two characters, one means danger and the other opportunity.

This philosophy, this way of approaching reality, is what has driven the creation of the MADRID THINK TANK. Depending on how we face dangers or take advantage of new opportunities will be our future.

However, we lack the tools to predict the future. Therefore, our only option is to propose bold solutions capable of addressing and providing answers to the different challenges and work for society to understand and endorse them.

“The best way to predict the future is to invent it”

Alan Kay, at a 1971 meeting of PARC.

CONTEXT

Before the central argument, it is essential to make a brief reference to the current context and the role that cities play in it, because the 21st century is raising enormous challenges for humanity and cities are the critical space where to address them.

This crisis is not only about the economy; neither is it a temporary phenomenon. What is happening is a structural change that affects the natural framework which supports human life, our organisation as a society and the way we live.

The most tangible evidence of this situation is that in 2011 mankind reached 7 billion

human beings, a figure which speaks very clearly of our success as a species, but it is important not to forget that only 900 million people, that is an eighth of the total population, have a decent standard of living.

Moreover, the effects of climate change are threatening the survival of our species and the ones living with us. The human impact on the environment has made entire areas of the planet extremely vulnerable.

Energy consumption, a key resource for the activity of all life forms, has doubled in the past 30 years and yet it is expected to continue rising at a faster rate in the following decades. The acceleration of this consumption is not only a concern in quantitative terms, but also in qualitative ones, since less than 10% of this consumption comes from renewable sources. In this sense, if we consider the addition by sectors, it can easily be seen that more than 60% of this energy consumption is directly related to our forms of settlement; therefore cities are largely the cause of this situation.

Cities have also become the major centres of goods and resources consumption, displaying ecological footprints that reach global dimensions. The very proof is that, although they only occupy 2% of the earth's surface, urban environments are directly responsible for 70% of the total emissions of greenhouse gases.

However, despite this unstable context, cities reach their maximum importance and validity. The planet is now totally urbanised. The present situation is radically different from all the previous ones. Up to the Modern Age, less than 3% of the world population lived in communities of more than 5,000 people, however today, half of the human population lives in urban areas and, according to some predictions, this figure will rise up to 60% in 15 years. Now, at least in terms of quantity, we, humanity, have become an urban species.

But cities have not only grown in population, what is even more important, they have also increased in numbers and have changed their shape, size and organisation. In 1950, only New York had more than 10 million people. By the year 2000, the number of these large cities had been enlarged substantially. By the year 2025 more than 60 cities with a population over 10 million are expected.

In parallel to these dynamics, globalisation and technological change are also making noticeable effects. Our time and space coordinates and the way in which we relate with others, have changed forever. The ability to connect people and distant places has been multiplied exponentially. In this way, our planet has become smaller.

Enormous and often contradictory social changes are also occurring. In some respects, the new global society, whose nature is essentially urban, has become more homogenous, selfish and ignorant, while in others, it is much more diverse, rational, informed, compassionate and aware of reality than ever before.

Therefore cities, that is, the places where most of the population concentrates, where the new cultures are found, where the main consumption of resources and products takes place, and finally where it is possible to most notably appreciate the effects of these consumptions, have become the critical areas in tackling the enormous challenges that the 21st century holds for humanity. For this reason, the role cities are to play, have an increasing importance.

CHANGE **New times require new procedures**

As a result of this context it is evident that humans are forced into change. We ought to change and we are to do it by thinking differently. We must be aware of the dangers but also of all opportunities.

In the near future, which can already be perceived in our time and also as a result of the dominant role of urban environments, competition will not occur among states, but between cities and territories. As first consequence two categories of cities will emerge:

On the one hand there will be cities that have a very clear and well defined project. These projects, conceived upon the very deep knowledge of global and local realities, will be capable of uniting all citizens around the common task of improving their quality of life. These cities will contribute to prosperity and well being on the planet. On the other hand, there will be cities that are lacking such a future project; these cities will inexorably see their positioning decline.

However, if action is only based on traditional urban procedures it will be impossible to respond to this new context. We need to rethink entirely the way we make and live in cities to achieve these goals. Moreover, we need to change them.

The immensity of this task should not overwhelm us. In addition to 8,000 years of experience in the construction of cities, we can already count on many of the tools and ideas that will illuminate this change.

New Information and Communication Technologies are at the basis of all transformation processes that are taking place in our time. We must use them as a vector of change. But technologies are not enough. The importance of current and future challenges will also require innovative thinking in social terms.

Due to all these fact the main concept of this paper – participation - emerges.

Participation

The citizens of the 21st century are aware of their power. They have access to unlimited information, know the technological tools and use them to their benefit. They participate in

public opinion and self-organise to demand their rights and freedoms. This allows us to state that in recent years a new culture of participation has been forged, a culture of participation that until now, did not exist. However, this new culture of participation has few echoes in the urban processes.

Although 21st century citizen have moved from “being part” to “taking part”, they are nevertheless systematically relegated to a secondary and testimonial role in what is possibly the most important collective process of their lives: the configuration of the space in which they spend their existence, the construction of their city.

The traditional urban procedures, characterised by their functional segmentation and monopolised by a few stakeholders, offer little or no channel for the citizens to participate. This way of acting belongs to the past. If we want to ensure a fair system of coexistence, it is critical to reverse this situation. The new society is already demanding for new ways of doing and managing in every area and every aspect: the city is one of them. The responsibility of the authorities and the professionals must be to ensure that major decisions affecting collectivities, such as urban ones should be underpinned by broad citizen consensus.

Furthermore, in recent years citizens have been able to organise themselves autonomously through distributed, selfless and open collaboration, to perform tasks of enormous complexity and thereby expanding the horizon of human knowledge. Citizens have talent.

We must use this shared creativity as the basis for providing solutions to the challenges we are facing. With it, and with the contribution of new technologies, which offer a great channel of communication to achieve real and effective participation, cities could become the attractive and efficient place desired by their citizens.

Technologies and participation are therefore the keys to guide us in the right direction and toward the achievement of the desired goals.

In short, the city is the focus of the problems, but it is also a wonderful creation that thanks to promoting interaction among people, manages to produce the knowledge needed to meet and confront the new challenges. Cities think, create and innovate, and maintain technologies once invented. Cities are the natural space of the Knowledge Society.

“The city is not only part of the problem, it is also the solution.”

Jaime Lerner

MADRID THINK TANK

Architects can and should take an active role on this process of reflection and change, which will make cities the best possible places while they remain spaces shared and desired by their citizens. For this reason, the COAM (Official Association of Architects of Madrid) has decided to promote and lead the creation of MADRID THINK TANK, so that with the participation of all, we will help to build our collective urban project. Participation therefore is the key to the MADRID THINK TANK.

The fundamental mission of THINK TANK MADRID is “to contribute to the construction of the collective urban project of Madrid, improving the position of the city and its territory and making them better integrated places in a globalised world while offering the highest quality of life for its inhabitants”.

In opposition to the traditional structure of the “Think Tanks” models of the 19th and 20th century, where the thinking elites gathered to produce knowledge that was subsequently transferred to the rest of society, MADRID THINK TANK revolutionises this structure by making the citizens the true protagonists. For that purpose, MADRID THINK TANK provides a unique concept of working at the metropolitan scale of Madrid, whose essential functions are fourfold.

1. *To Participate*

MADRID THINK TANK is a platform from which it is possible to participate, a place that concentrates Madrid society’s view on what and how they want MADRID to be. But participation in the MADRID THINK TANK is not only about opinion; citizens can also contribute by proposing and acting.

2. *To Act*

Secondly, for that reason, MADRID THINK TANK is defined by the verb to act. MADRID THINK TANK will promote the adoption of coherent policies, the making of proposals and the implementation of specific urban actions. Therefore, the MADRID THINK TANK is also a tool for the city and its territory to continuously reinvent itself.

3. *To Train*

Thirdly, MADRID THINK TANK intends to train. Citizens are the ones which with their reflections and interactions generate the applicable knowledge needed to build the city, but for this knowledge to be truly useful it is necessary to be based upon solid foundations. For this reason another MADRID THINK TANK mission is to inform and educate those involved in the participation process.

4. *To Communicate*

Finally, fourthly, MADRID THINK TANK searches to communicate. Therefore, communication also emerges as a key factor. Communication is carried out in two ways. Its purpose is to expose the latent knowledge that resides in society, and also to promote communication and interaction between those involved in participation. Consequently, the MADRID THINK TANK has among its objectives to be a space for dialogue and debate.

Encounter

The MADRID THINK TANK seeks to achieve its objectives by the sharing, the cross-pollination, the open dissemination of ideas and the participation of all, turning the city into a common task. For these reasons, MADRID THINK TANK is also a meeting place for institutions, professionals, companies and citizens, enabling them to interact, and share ideas and initiatives. Thus, thanks to the ultimate participation of all, MADRID THINK TANK will help to build a collective urban project of which they have ownership.

MADRID THINK TANK has been initiated by the Official Association of Architects of Madrid (COAM), and the Fundación Arquitectura-COAM, as well as with the support of other institutions such as the Regional Government of Madrid, the City Council and the Federation of Madrid's Municipalities, as well a vast number of civic, professional and educational organisations.

Besides the impetus of the civil society, private initiatives, providing human and financial resources, also help consolidate MADRID THINK TANK as an innovative model to build the city all citizens want.

Participatory process

At this point the question is how are all these processes of citizen participation carried out? Regarding citizen participation and action, MADRID THINK TANK has proposed two different platforms.

The first, IDEAS X MADRID, calls for extensive citizen participation. This forum encompasses many ages and formats, which can vary from individual initiatives to specifically targeted ones.

The second, MADRID THINK TANK CHAIR, acts in parallel to IDEAS X MADRID. It promotes that the process of generating ideas

and deepening knowledge about various topics takes place within university settings.

These platforms work according to a specific operative mode that makes an intensive use of new technologies since the participation process of MADRID THINK TANK is primarily managed via the Internet. The tool that manages all operational aspects is called iPARTICIPA.

The iPARTICIPA is an open innovation platform that covers the whole chain of ideas generation and the dynamics of user participation. The iPARTICIPA is a social network focused on the future of Madrid, in which people that will contribute with their ideas to building a collective urban project may interact with each other, express their thoughts and make evaluations and comments on others.

How can anyone participate?

MADRID THINK TANK dynamics is structured around the launching of challenges and the proposal of solutions to them, but it is also possible to participate by voting and reviewing both challenges and solutions.

There are a variety of problems and opportunities in the city which are still latent, due to the fact that they have not been properly identified yet or because they are still unresolved. In this context, the challenges emerge. They are the starting point of the various participation processes that lead to ideas competitions, to providing of innovative solutions, to forum discussions, round tables, etc. The challenges are, therefore, questions. The citizen who proposes a challenge poses question for other citizens to answer.

The solutions, however, are concrete ideas aimed at responding to what is been proposed for the different challenges. Therefore, whoever proposes a solution answers a challenge.

In addition to proposing both challenges and solutions, participants can also vote and

review other's comments. The vote adds value to both the challenges and the solutions. When voting on a challenge, participants highlight its importance and contribute to triggering the process of debate and participation around it. Voting on a solution contributes to choosing the most appropriate response to any specific challenge. Opinion generates debates and discussion that help know better the specifics of the different challenges and solutions by adding nuances that improve their perception.

Temporal development of the participation process

The participatory process starts with a selection. Initially, citizens present their challenges to the organisation of MADRID THINK TANK, whereupon a jury of experts analyses and reviews all submissions, giving priority to those that hold great interest. Once the challenge is accepted it is then publicly launched through all the physical and virtual channels of MADRID THINK TANK. The challenge is exposed but not yet active.

With their votes, citizens decide which are the most relevant challenges, and by doing that, they assist fund raising that allows the activation of the challenges. Once sponsorship is been raised the challenge is automatically activated. This sponsorship contributes to funding the challenge as well as means to finding solutions, such as conferences, exhibitions or competitions. Thereafter, begins the proposal of different solutions to a challenge on the citizen participation platforms.

How are the best solutions chosen? The process of choosing the best solution occurs in two stages. Firstly, citizens with their votes prioritise the solutions considered most relevant to Madrid. After that a jury specialised in the different matters meets to select and reward the

best initiatives among those to which the citizen had attributed the highest ratings.

A particular case is that of a solution that can trigger new competitions in which the degree of detail or technical requirement is larger. In these cases, the Office of Competitions of the Association of Architects of Madrid, OCAM is responsible for managing the process.

Besides participation and action, training and communicating are among the other essential functions of the MADRID THINK TANK. For this purpose the MADRID THINK TANK has developed four platforms that work in parallel with the participation platforms.

They are all linked to the MADRID THINK TANK WEB and all its associated networks, in which different contents are redistributed.

MTT EDITIONS is another collaborative platform for publishing interactive contents on architecture, the city or any related topic.

TRANSFORMING MADRID is a third platform dedicated to research, dissemination and discussion of the spatial transformations of contemporary Madrid. With TRANSFORMING MADRID, MADRID THINK TANK aims to build a narrative about Madrid, a story about a city that needs to be better known and understood by all.

The final communication platform is MADRID TALKS. It consists of lectures, talks and debates organised by THINK TANK MADRID to reflect on the city of Madrid, to extend the knowledge to the public participation process and to publicise the activity of MADRID THINK TANK. MADRID TALKS are held at the headquarters of the COAM. They are carried out in different formats.

They include CROSS DEBATES, which are based on the idea that the city is not built only by shaping new spaces but also by configuring and creating identities, images, stories, sounds, etc. Consequently and with the aim to reflect

about this reality, MADRID THINK TANK organises monthly CROSS DEBATES about the PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF MADRID from various perspectives. Discussions are themed and public meetings are held to which personalities are invited who have contributed with their specialities to the complex and diverse city construction. Its vocation is to become a platform of connection and dialogue, from which to analyse past experiences as the basis to suggest and propose future directions.

In parallel other events are taking place, such as MEETINGS 5X10, the PECHA KUCHA or the DESIGN JAM. All of them are designed with the intention to show the talent that resides in the population, as well as to valorise the ideas that emerge from the participation process inherent in MADRID THINK TANK.

The MEETINGS 5X10 are a free presentation format through which any citizen, team, group, organisation or company can present their work in a simple and informal way, in a maximum of 5 minutes. The event consists of 10 presentations that are recorded and displayed on various MADRID THINK TANK web platforms.

The PECHA KUCHA respond to scheme 20x20 (20 slides, 20 seconds each) and is conducted in collaboration with the owners of this international brand. Once the presentation of the various works is finished, a public discussion is carried out, where audience can ask questions, exchange points of view with the authors and make suggestions.

Finally, DESIGN JAMS are design sessions lasting one or two days, during which the people gathered collaborate to produce an answer to a specific topic. In addition to providing solutions to a specific challenge, the objective of the DESIGN JAM is to get designers to learn and work together.

The work of these platforms is complemented by a range of activities proposed and organised by MADRID THINK TANK. They include a number of general events, such as the public presentations of MADRID THINK TANK to different discussion forums. One of the most outstanding of these events is the MADRID WEEK. The MADRID WEEK is an annual event, which coincides with the current Architecture Week, in which the results achieved during the previous year are presented.

Presentations continue with the exposure of the different structural lines of MADRID THINK TANK, which are held once a quarter (TRANSFORMING MADRID, IXM, MTT CHAIR). In addition to the above, some other activities that are tied to a particular challenge coexist, the form of conferences, lectures, films or debates specifically designed for a challenge or for a solution.

Implementation

All these activities are carried out following a specific path that orients them in a certain direction.

Periodically, THINK TANK MADRID selects a theme able to reach across the multiple aspects that affect the city. In 2012 THINK TANK MADRID chose as the core theme MADRID 2020. This global theme has very different implications, as it integrates issues related to urban planning, with the Olympic Project or Environmental Sustainability.

This global theme is divided into ten specific areas of action, which are:

- Madrid Global City. Madrid, Ciudad de América.
- Economic Activity. Más Madrid/Turismo en Madrid/ Emprendedores.
- Quality of Life and Participation. Madrid Vive.
- Historical and Natural Heritage. Legado Madrid.
- Space and Urban Landscape. Experiencia Madrid.
- Sustainability and Energy Rehabilitation. ECO Madrid.
- Mobility and Accessibility. Madrid se mueve.
- Intelligent and Knowledge Management Society. Smart Madrid.
- Cultural Identity. Todos nos/otros somos Madrid.
- City and Sport. Madrid Olímpico.