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Titulación de Arquitectura

ESCUELA POLITÉCNICA SUPERIOR Alicante University

Carretera San Vicente del Raspeig s/n 03690 San Vicente del Raspeig. Alicante (SPAIN)

eurau@ua.es

Urban Catalogues

Review and critical analysis of a tool for heritage protection

Pérez-Eguíluz, Víctor¹; Fernández-Maroto, Miguel²; Jiménez Jiménez, Marina³

1. Departamento de Urbanismo y Representación de la Arquitectura, University of Valladolid, Valladolid, Spain, victor@institutourbanistica.com

2. Departamento de Urbanismo y Representación de la Arquitectura, University of Valladolid, Valladolid, Spain, miguel@institutourbanistica.com

3. Departamento de Urbanismo y Representación de la Arquitectura, University of Valladolid, Valladolid, Spain, marina@arq.uva.es

Synopsis

This paper aims to analyse the use of urban catalogues as a tool for the protection of the built heritage, the results that have been achieved so far and the possibilities for its integration in the current paradigm of urban regeneration. We intend to evaluate to what extent this kind of instruments have been effective to ensure the conservation of singular buildings, because at first sight the results do not seem satisfactory, at least in the way that they have been used in Spain.

In this regard, it is necessary to explain the difficulties that they have to face and explore possible alternatives in a renovated context of multidisciplinary collaboration and integration of urban regeneration policies.

Key words: Urban catalogue, heritage, multidisciplinary approaches, integrated policies.

1. Urban catalogues as normative tools

Born as a measure to protect the most valuable buildings and prevent their demolition, the use of catalogues has extended since the second half of the 20th century, although it varies in every country or city. They emerged as a reaction against the intense urban renewal of some European historical centres that resulted from the combination of hygienist measures and real estate interests, within an urban planning system aimed at the urban expansion rather than reform. In this context, catalogues were included and consolidated within general and special planning tools as a specific protection measure for historical spaces, following the awareness of the loss of heritage that this previous urban renewal processes may involve.

In brief, a catalogue consists of a list of outstanding buildings that receive a certain degree of protection, which involves a regulation on which types of interventions are allowed in them. The strictest protection excludes any intervention beyond conservation and restoration works, while the lightest one just protects some elements, such as facades or fragments of them. In this sense, catalogues become a kind of ordinance for existing buildings.

In general terms, catalogues have been a useful tool to fight against quantitative transformations and to stop, at least partially, the substitution of buildings that for instance ruined many Spanish historical centres during the sixties and seventies. They represented a defensive and restrictive strategy that somehow froze urban landscape, and this has revealed as insufficient to effectively avoid the deterioration of this heritage. In addition, some authors have linked catalogues with urban speculation and explained the role that they play within some socioeconomic processes in historical centres.

2. Unsatisfactory results

Some research on the state of conservation of buildings in various Spanish historical centres has allowed us to evaluate the effectiveness of the catalogues and their integration with other urban policies.¹ The poor inclusion of other active protection and reuse measures and the inability to influence some of the main problems in these areas explain their poor results. This affirmation is not something new: in the text that accompanied the pre-catalogue of Madrid (1977) was stated:

*“The approved document is a first step in the municipal policy for the revitalization of the ancient city. Absolutely ineffective if it is not inserted within a coherent planning with the contribution of the necessary means for its management and execution”.*²

Among the specific objectives that are attributed to catalogues, the most usual are the conservation of buildings, the diffusion of the values of the heritage that they protect or even the revitalization of historical centres.

¹ Research projects such as *“Políticas urbanísticas aplicadas a los Conjuntos Históricos, logros y fracasos”* (2011-2013, CSO2010-15228) or *“Las Áreas de Rehabilitación Integrada y sus efectos en la recuperación de los espacios urbanos históricos”* (2014-2017, CSO2013-40688-P).

² Announcement of the agreement that was taken by the City Council and was published in *Boletín Oficial de la Provincia*, November 8th, 1977

However, these documents rarely articulate neither effective conservation measures nor revitalization ones, and they are hardly known by citizens.

For instance, it is surprising that catalogued buildings usually suffer worse evolution than not protected ones in their state of conservation: through our research we have realized that the number of catalogued buildings that are in a ruinous condition is clearly higher than the average of all buildings in the historical centre. In fact, this condition usually affects to 15-25% of catalogued buildings, which is excessive taking into account that they are valuable elements to be preserved.

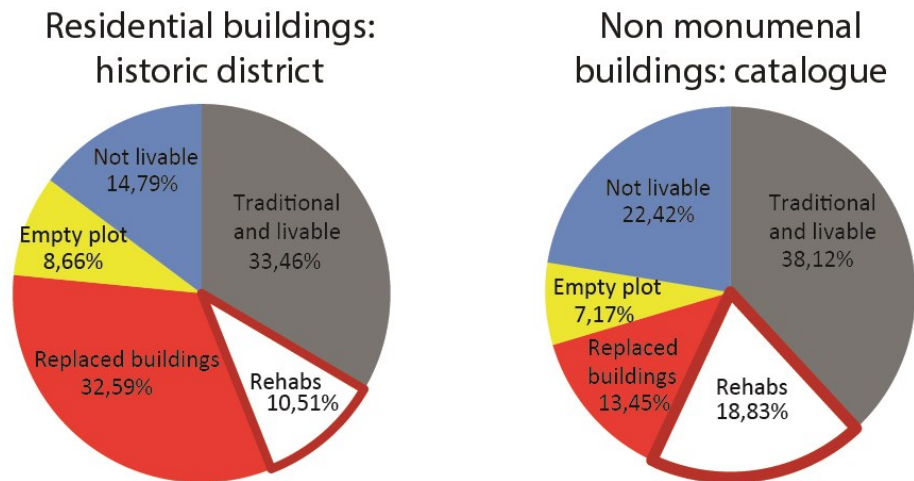


Figure 1. Poor statistics on catalogue results: Cuellar's case.

The general and special urban planning tools have contributed to catalogues with most complementary strategies. These plans usually try to promote the management and fulfilment of the objectives of catalogues, such as the recovery of catalogued buildings in danger.

The allocation of public uses is the most widespread measure for the rehabilitation of the most significant buildings, and specific planning and management tools to promote the intervention in groups of buildings have also been proposed. Unfortunately, private developers are not interested in these kinds of projects in the current context of Spanish real estate market, which recovers from its worst crisis in decades, and public resources are not enough to satisfy all needs.

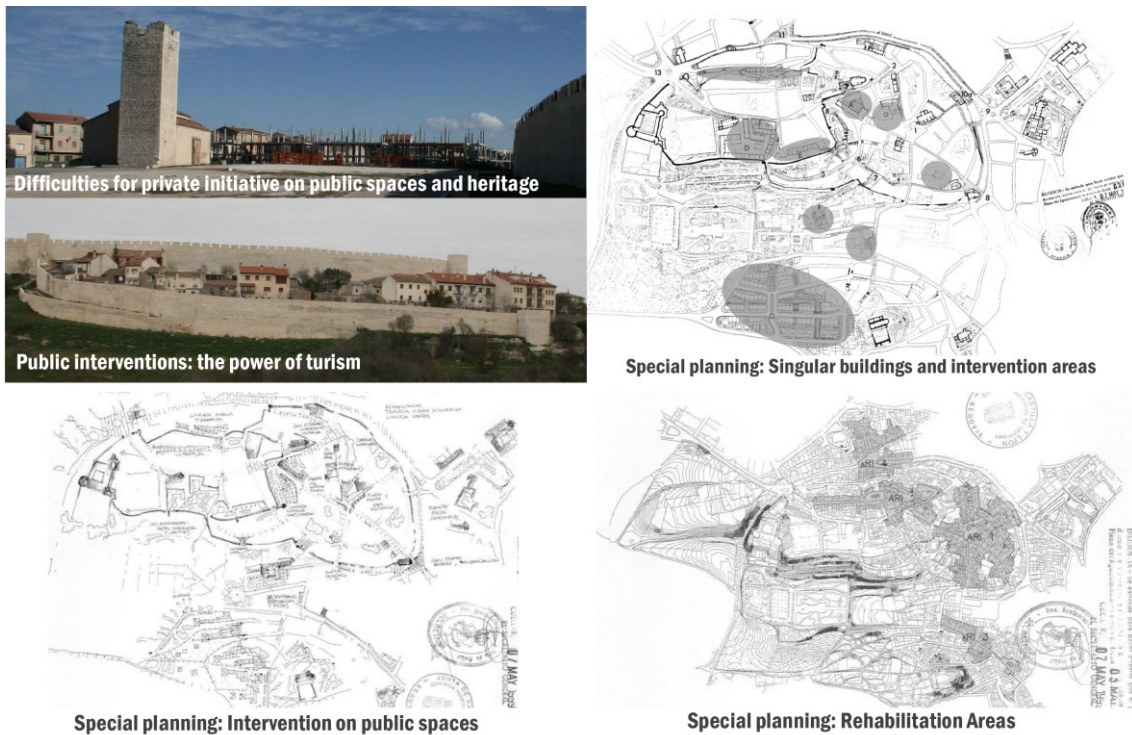


Figure 2. Some interventions proposed in the village of Cuéllar (Segovia).

3. Conclusions. Towards a proposal for a new model

Integrated urban regeneration is a concept that has been more and more used in recent years. It points out that the global needs of the existing city (social, functional, material) should be understood as a whole, and catalogues could enrich this approach, if we think of a different role for them.

If we understand that urban heritage is not only a value to be protected but also a social resource at our disposal, catalogued buildings could contribute to satisfy some collective needs in historical centres and also in other parts of cities: lack of affordable housing, poor quality of public space, lack of collective services for education, health or leisure, among many others. However, this would require a turn from the current protective, restrictive character of these tools towards a more active one.

In this regard, it is necessary to overcome their rigidities and reformulate catalogues with a programmatic rationale. On the one hand, the current fragmentary vision that emanates from these tools would be overcome to insert the buildings that they incorporate as part of an urban landscape and a social fabric. On the other hand, it would put the building together with the use that ultimately gives it sense.

That requires an interdisciplinary approach to combine the vision of urban planners and architects with that of other professionals (sociologists, economists, managers, etc.) and also with that of citizens and neighbours. In the same way, through the catalogues, urban planners and architects can for instance guide the initiatives of cultural or neighbourhood associations. An effective policy for heritage conservation in historical centres cannot be only

built upon planning tools, but requires creativity and collaboration that are prone to mobilise both public and private resources. Numerous recent cases of intervention proposals show the opportunity that a better articulation between catalogues and social agents would represent for the physical and social rehabilitation of our cities.



Figure 3. The former slaughterhouse of Valladolid (a modernist building from the thirties, protected P3) has been partially recovered as a cultural centre for “non institutional” initiatives combined with facilities for neighbours, while some parts of the complex remain abandoned.

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Biography

Víctor Pérez-Eguíluz. Architect (2009), Master of Research in Architecture (2014) and PhD on Urbanism (2015) is now Associate Lecturer of Urban Planning and Urban Theory in the School of Architecture of the University of Valladolid, and Researcher of its *Instituto Universitario de Urbanística*.

His main research topics are linked to urban heritage, its urban planning relationships and urban regeneration policies, taking part in several projects as “*Las Áreas de Rehabilitación Integrada y sus efectos en la recuperación de los espacios urbanos históricos*” (2017) or “*Políticas urbanísticas aplicadas a los Conjuntos Históricos, logros y fracasos*” (2013).

Miguel Fernández Maroto. Architect (2012) and Master of Research in Architecture (2014), is PhD Student and Assistant Lecturer of Urban Planning in the School of Architecture of the University of Valladolid, and Researcher of its *Instituto Universitario de Urbanística*.

His PhD research focuses on the evolution of Spanish planning system and techniques in recent decades, through the analysis of the case of Valladolid and other medium-sized Spanish cities.

He has taken part in research projects such as INTENSSS-PA (European Commission-Horizon 2020) and official commissions such as the Strategy for Urban Regeneration in Castilla y León (Regional Government).

Marina Jiménez Jiménez. Architect (1999), PhD on Urbanism (2009) and Master in Landscape Architecture (2016) is now Associate Lecturer of Urban Planning in the School of Architecture of the University of Valladolid, and Researcher of its *Instituto Universitario de Urbanística*.

Her main research topics are linked to urban design and the relation between natural green areas and public space, public participation procedures and qualitative analysis tools as well as urban history, where she is Local Coordinator of the European project “urbanHist”.