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From the attempts to create a modern city to its globalization: a historiography of the Spanish international exhibitions (1888–2008)

Federico Camerin  and Miguel Fernández Maroto 

Instituto Universitario de Urbanística, Universidad de Valladolid, Valladolid, Spain

ABSTRACT

This work addresses the urban transformations planned within the development of World Expos in Spain (Barcelona 1888 and 1929, and Seville 1992), along with other international exhibitions (Zaragoza 1908 and 2008, Seville 1929, and Barcelona 2004) with the aim to explore the role of these mega-events as urban experiments reflecting the aspirations and challenges of different époques. The hypothesis is that the Spanish exhibitions can be approached as symptoms rather than the main cause of urban transformations. While the mainstream literature focused on single events in Spain, this research provides a study based on a reflection on the urban transformation tied to the event and the post-event use of the venues and their insertion in the wider urban fabric. Two are the main outcomes. First, this study demonstrates that the 1888-to-1929 expositions fostered the conversion of Barcelona, Seville and Zaragoza into ‘modern’ cities’ by providing monumental and representative spaces converted for everyday use under urban renewal and city expansion. Second, the 1992–2008 expositions attempted to turn these cities into ‘world cities’ centred on urban regeneration processes and mega-projects, with mixed results, ranging from useful insights on urban structuring to wasteful use of resources in large buildings.

KEYWORDS

Urban transformation; city planning; event venue; urbanization; event-led development; urban experiments; neoliberal urbanism

Introduction

The paper conducts an analysis of urban planning associated with seven major exhibitions held across three Spanish cities, dividing these events into two historical periods. The main goal is to understand, through the lens of urban planning, similarities and differences between various International and Universal Exhibitions, Expos and World’s Fairs, labelled hereafter as ‘Major International Exhibitions’ (MIE) held in the Spanish cities of Barcelona, Seville and Zaragoza from 1888 to 1929 and from 1992 to 2008. These events are, in chronological order, the 1888 and 1929 Barcelona Universal Exposition, the 1908 Zaragoza Hispanic-French Exposition, the 1929 Seville Ibero-American Exposition, the 1992 Seville Universal Exposition, the 2004 Barcelona Universal Forum of Cultures, and the 2008 Zaragoza Specialized Exposition.

The paper approaches MIE as systemic phenomena, embedded in competitive strategies, in long-term processes and projects, and related with large local territorial developments,¹ to engage

CONTACT Federico Camerin  federico.camerin@uva.es

¹Caramellino, De Magistris, and Deambrosis, “Reconceptualizing Mega Events,” 618.

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more fully with the historical influence of the early MIE events in the most recent ones. The case study analysis situated itself in the stream of research² focused on understanding the multiple ways in which contemporary ‘planning cultures’ (i.e. the ‘complex relations between the cultural context and spatial planning as an operative instrument of territorial policy in a more comprehensive way’³) have shaped the events (and vice versa) as they proved pivotal to shape unusual and accidental perspectives on the transformation of the host cities. By doing so, the inquiry can lead to highlight the potential of these new perspectives on the literature on mega-events to provide insight into planning histories in the attempt to overcome a focus placed upon specific periods that has neglected or just left aside themes and issues that are pivotal to the understanding of MIE and their complex interrelationship with urban development.⁴

The first section presents a literature review on the relationship between the evolution of urban planning in Spain and MIE to examine three main aspects. First, it highlights the changes in urban planning culture in Spain since the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Second, it scrutinizes how academics have examined Spanish MIE and, third, it reflects on the Expo periodizations provided by the academia. The second section presents the research materials and the methodology used for the case study analysis. The third section analyses the relationship between the local urban planning and the urban transformations tied to each event. The fourth section discusses the differences and similarities between the MIE under analysis and engages with the mainstream international literature. Eventually, the conclusion reflects on the evolving planning culture tied to the events, underlying that hosting MIE in the three cities has poorly enabled novelties in the local planning culture in the period 1888–1929, while the period 1992-to-2008 experiences had stronger impacts. It also underlines the lessons learned and possible future research.

Framing urban planning evolution in Spain from the mid-nineteenth century

The correlation between international expositions and local urban planning in Spain is contingent upon the developmental stage of the national urban planning system. Consequently, the relationship between the 1888–1929 and 1992–2008 events is not analogous. The instrumentation of this system occurred gradually from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.⁵ The 1956 Land Law emerged as the inaugural legislation that addressed all facets of municipal urban planning in a comprehensive manner. Prior to this landmark legislation, the existing planning regulatory framework was fragmented, with its efficacy highly dependent on the constrained financial and managerial capacities of local city councils.

The Spanish government enacted the initial urban development legislation in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with legislative texts approved in 1864, 1876, and 1892, which, in turn, were predicated on the 1859 seminal project of Barcelona Extension by Ildefonso Cerdá. Subsequently, the Spanish government enacted specific legislation on a city basis, culminating in the enactment of the 1895 Law on cities’ extension, sanitation, and interior improvement. This regulation facilitated the expropriation procedures, including the expansion or widening of streets, which often coincided with the provision of new urban infrastructure.⁶ This fragmentary body of legislation showed its limitations in the early twentieth century, but the attempts to generate

²Gold and Gold, “Festival Cities”; Todd and Quinn, “The Festival City,” 94–5.

³Knieling and Othengrafen, “Planning Culture,” 2134.

⁴Ibid., 617.

⁵Terán, “Historia del urbanismo.”

⁶García-Bellido, “A (R)Evolutionary Framework,” 6–8.

a unified and updated legislation failed. Only the 1924 Statute of Municipalities, which for the first time defined the framework of powers conferred on local councils, managed to provide a basic compilation of the existing instruments.

After the Civil War, the 1946 Madrid's General Plan anticipated a new urban planning system, which was consolidated a decade later in the aforementioned 1956 Land Law. It established a new hierarchical system of plans (general – *Plan General de Ordenación Urbana*, PGOU –, partial, and special plans) and a new management system, along with the new Ministry of Housing, created in 1957, although the Ministry of Interior kept the control of the local councils' activities. This hindered the implementation of the new system, and many councils continued to use nineteenth-century instruments until the 1970s.

The Land Law suffered major integrations in 1975 to better detail the municipal spatial plans' contents⁷ then applied by the new democratic City Councils after the 1979 elections. In spite of the 1990, 1998, and 2007 amendments to the Land Law and the transfer of legislative powers in planning matters to the regions, the foundations of the system remained largely unchanged until recently, when some regional authorities introduced significant changes.⁸

Urban planning and MIE in Spain

The impact of MIE on Spanish cities is a topic particularly well analysed in the scientific literature and has led to uncover the main urban transformation tied to them, from the critiques regarding the capitalist-oriented approach to MIE capacity to act as catalyst.⁹ The interest of academic literature in the urban dimension of these events, however, fell short in inquiring two main aspects.

Firstly, most of literature falls into the analysis of specific categories of expositions (such as the World Expos, i.e. Universal Exhibitions, staged every five years, and International Exhibitions, smaller editions staged in between Universal Exhibitions) or other global sporting mega-events (i.e. the Summer Olympics along with Football World Cup),¹⁰ without taking into account other MIE for a comparison. In fact, the mainstream literature on the Spanish case mainly involves a single-city and single-case-study analysis, with still scarce inquiries on the planning aspects of the MIE held in the same city¹¹ with even less attention paid to two or more of these events hosted in different cities and their relationship.¹²

Secondly, previous studies demonstrated that MIE exerted to a large extent the capacity to contribute to local urban development by not only filling, but also creating space,¹³ along with place promotion and strategies to rebrand and regenerate decayed urban sectors.¹⁴ This usually happened on the ground of the public authorities and business community attempts to selling the city.¹⁵ Spanish cities represent a specific case as they did not organize these kinds of events in a large period of time (from 1929 to 1992, although Spain hosted the 1982 FIFA World Cup).¹⁶ Over the decades, the Spanish urban planning system had evolved and acquired more relevance

⁷Parejo Alfonso, *La ordenación urbanística*.

⁸De Gregorio Hurtado and Tomás, "Country Profile of Spain."

⁹Romero Renau, "Dos décadas de urbanismo-espectáculo."

¹⁰Müller and Gaffney, "Comparing the Urban Impacts"; Doustaly and Zembris-Mary, "Is Urban Planning Returning to the Past?"

¹¹Sánchez Suárez, 1994, *Barcelona 1888–1929*; Morales Martínez, "Sevilla, la Exposición Ibero-americana de 1929"; Otero Alvarado, "Los grandes eventos como acciones"; Baringo Ezquerro, "1908–2008," 191–7.

¹²Ballester, "World Expo and World's Fair in Spain"; Pérez Escolano, "Sevilla y Barcelona."

¹³Roche, *Mega-events and Social Change*, 200.

¹⁴Gold and Gold, *Cities of Culture*, 10.

¹⁵Ibid., 11.

¹⁶Camarin and Longato, "Urban Impacts of Spain 1982."

in the society, so the 1992-to-2008 MIE had a different relationship with planning tools with respect to the 1888-to-1929 events.

The periodization of MIE in relation to urban planning

From a methodological point of view, academics provided various Expo periodization. Monclús¹⁷ suggested that World's Fairs can be usefully categorized into historical expositions conceived as ends in themselves (1851–1929), modern expositions, intended to promote sustainable urban development in the places where they were held (1930–1989), and postmodern expositions, whose emphasis was on city promotion and place marketing (1989–present). Clark¹⁸ has instead distinguished World Expos according to the periods of industrialization (1851–1945), cultural exchange (1945–1991), and national branding (post-1992). Smith¹⁹ classified Expos and Olympics according to the evolution of public policy and event regeneration: urban development (before 1945), reconstruction (1945–1972), regeneration (1972–2000) and globalization (post-2000). Monclús²⁰ further developed his chronicle into six categories according to urban design visions as a possible way to analyse the showgrounds and urban transformation (i.e. how outdoor events venues have been used and integrated into the wider urban fabric in the post-event) and the wider transformations implemented out of event venues: City Beautiful (1890s–1920s), Modern Urbanism (1930s), Townscape (1950s), Structuralism (1950s–1960s), Urban Projects and City Branding (1980s–1990s), and Strategic Projects and Landscape Urbanism (2000s).

These categorizations appear useful to explore MIE-related urban transformation as an observatory to understand it as part of a wider urban planning culture. However, they involve the risk to produce excessive generalizations and inconsistencies²¹ due to the fact that it is possible to find examples of events that do not completely match the proposed categories (e.g. early twentieth-century events where hosts used them help to address urban problems and encourage urban development). This is why these periodizations should be accompanied by another layer, i.e. the Spanish urban planning, whose evolution can be divided into geometrical urbanism and extension plans (1850–1900); modern urban planning (1900–1940); planning and accelerated urban growth (1945–1975), and from comprehensive planning to urban projects (1975–2008).²² Consequently, the focus on various MIE hosted in Spain through the perspective of urban planning offers the opportunity to match the contents of the MIE-oriented periodizations to uncover the specificities tied to the case studies in two different periods (1888–1929 and 1992–2008).

Materials and methods

The paper seeks to uncover an as yet little-explored evolution of the relationship between urban planning and seven MIE hosted in the Spanish cities of Barcelona, Seville and Zaragoza by focusing on two distinctive periods (1888–1929 and 1992–2008) (Figure 1; Table 1). Also, it pinpoints similarities and differences between the urban transformations tied to the different époques in which they occurred in relation to urban planning. To overcome this limitation, the methodology of

¹⁷Monclús, "International Exhibitions and Urban Design," 219–21.

¹⁸Clark, *Local Development Benefits*, 51–3.

¹⁹Smith, "Event regeneration," 42–63.

²⁰Monclús, "International Exhibitions and Urban Design," 226.

²¹*Ibid.*, 238–9.

²²Monclús and Díez Medina, "Urbanisme, Urbanismo."



Figure 1. From top to down, the localization of the Barcelona, Seville and Zaragoza. Source: own elaboration (2025).

Table 1. Data on the case studies.

Case studies and features	Barcelona 1888	Zaragoza 1908	Barcelona 1929	Seville 1929	Seville 1992	Barcelona 2004	Zaragoza 2008
Kind of Exposition	World Exhibition	French-Spanish Exhibition	World Exhibition	Ibero-American Exhibition	World Exhibition	Universal Forum of Cultures	Specialized Expo
Themes	Fine and Industrial Art	Industry, Culture	Industry, Art, Sport	Art, Culture	The Age of Discovery	Sustainable Development, Peace, Cultural Diversity	Water and Sustainable Development
Date	08/04-10/12/1888	01/05-05/12/1908	20/05/1929-15/01/1930	09/05/1929-21/06/1930	20/04-12/10/1992	09/05-26/09/2004	14/06-14/09/2008
Year of approval	1885	1907	1914	1911	1982	1997	2004
Surface (hectares)	25	6,3	118	69	215	30	25
City planning tool	1860 Cerdà's Extension	1906 Extension	1905–1917 Plan of Connections	None	1987 General plan	1976 Metropolitan general plan	2002 General plan

Source: own elaboration (2025).

this research is qualitative as we relied on a variety of sources available from the grey literature in addition to the scientific literature.

Firstly, the utilization of digitized newspaper and magazine articles facilitates the acquisition of firsthand commentaries from individuals involved in the respective subjects, including architects and politicians. These materials were collected using the online search engines for archived articles made available from various national newspapers (e.g. Barcelona's *Il·lustració Catalana*, Seville's *El Liberal* and Zaragoza's *Heraldo de Aragón*). Secondly, legislative documents adopted for the events were collected from the archive website of the national government. Thirdly, official event-related literature (e.g. official technical reports) and catalogs were collected from the Bureau International des Expositions website or requested to the archives based in Barcelona, Seville and Zaragoza, while other reports from third parties were found online using the Google search engine. The content of this documentation is highly comparable, with the following elements being of particular interest: books, projects, maps, plans, designs, photographs, printed catalogues, films, and so forth. Of particular interest are the iconography and cartography, in consideration of the fact that, in many cases, the facilities created for the events were ephemeral. Eventually, as for the scientific literature, we used the bibliographic databases Scopus and JSTOR and the bibliographic databases of the Spanish networks of university libraries. Overall, there were minimum differences in the availability of sources for older versus more recent events (so we recognized little potential limitation), although the production of scientific literature on 1888-to-1929 events has been less in comparison with the 1992-to-2008 events.

The case studies

Barcelona 1888

The 1888 Exhibition, initially a 1885 private-led initiative then handed over by the City Council in 1887,²³ was disconnected from the implementation of the Cerdà's Extension, which envisioned for

²³Prados Tizón and Rodon Lluís, *Eugenio R. Serrano de Casanova*.

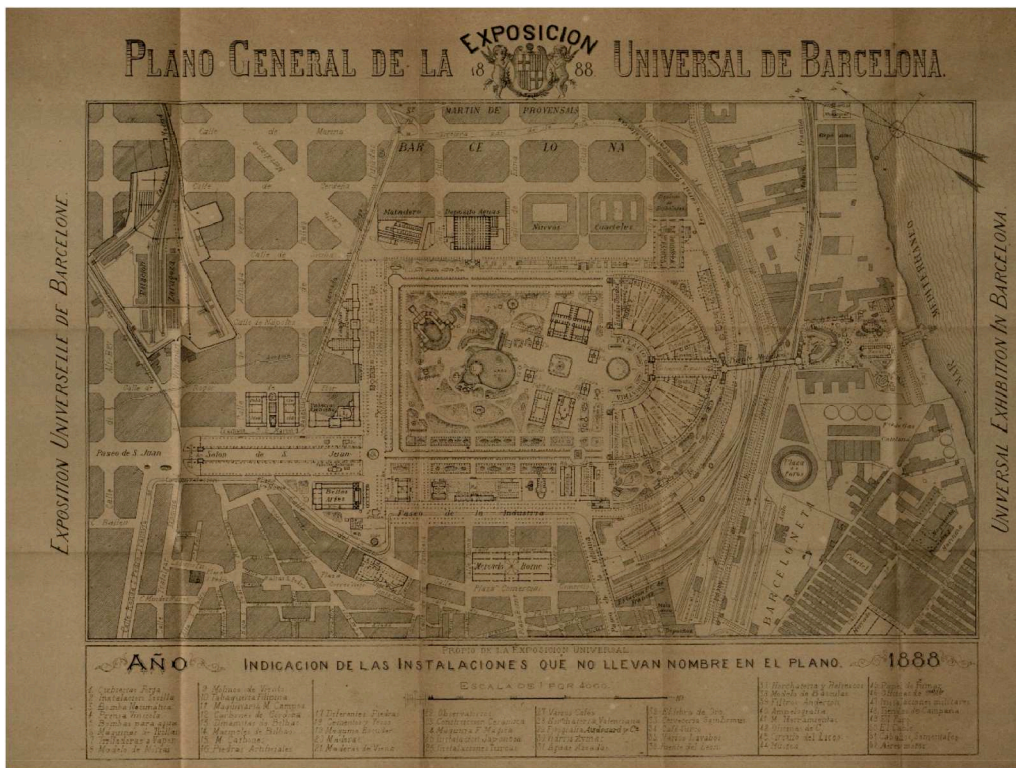


Figure 2. General plan of the 1888 Exposition Universal de Barcelona. Source: Historic Archives of the City of Barcelona (AHCB).

the former military Citadel new uses related to the port and commerce.²⁴ After the property transfer from the military to the local administration in 1865, the area was targeted to become the major public park in Barcelona, whose realization was speed up by the large expenditure made available by the event (4 million pesetas).²⁵ As most of the effort was placed on the park, the Expo acted on the symbolic and cultural dimensions of the city with poor influence on subsequent urban planning schemes and the long-term trends in physical transformations, because they were constrained by the economic and functional logic of the urban structure.²⁶

The Expo attempted to offer a new image of Barcelona as modern and cosmopolitan city, especially in the main access roads to the showground, which would be the most frequented by the visitors, by carrying out three main developments.²⁷ Firstly, the completion of works started prior to the event but still unfinished. The most relevant was the completion of the Citadel park started in 1875, with the construction or completion of permanent buildings (e.g. Castle of the Three Dragons, Museum of Geology, Orangery, Umbraculum, Overnaculum, Gallery of the Machines), along with the creation of its triumphal entrance with the *Arc de Triomf* opening to the *Salón de Sant Joan Avenue* (Figure 2). Other interventions were the construction of the avenue *Passeig de Colón* and the new quay *Moll de la Fusta*, which contributed to complete the city's

²⁴Fontserè Mestre, "Plànols del recinte."

²⁵Espuche et al., "Modernization and Urban Beautification"; Molet i Petit, *Un triomf inesperat*, 46–50.

²⁶Oyón and Monclús, "La ciudad como Exposición," 3–4.

²⁷Boladeras, Farràs, and Mestre, *La Modernització de Barcelona*.

seafront between the *Parc de la Ciutadella* and *Las Ramblas*. Secondly, the event provided of new infrastructures and services that enhanced the quality of life for citizens and imbued the city with a modern image in the eyes of visitors, including the electric lighting of the most representative city's public spaces (*Las Ramblas*, *Passeig de Colón*, *Plaça de Sant Jaume* and inside the Exhibition site) and new urban furnishings (automatic platforms, billboards, pneumatic clocks, public toilets and stands for refreshments and newspapers). Thirdly, the erection of monumental piece of architecture and interventions, such as public sculpture (e.g. the Columbus Monument at the intersection between *Passeig de Colón* and *Las Ramblas*), urban landscaping and decoration, and new pavements. The event total expenditure reached 8,933,005.53 pesetas, with 2,211,420.64 pesetas of revenues, for a total deficit of 6,720,584.92 pesetas.²⁸

In the aftermath of the exposition, the idea to convert all the facilities into museums revealed its economic and practical unsustainability and the majority of them were demolished,²⁹ with the exception of the aforementioned permanent buildings, which later housed various museum activities, along with the Zoological Garden and the Aquarium. This fact contributed to expand the very minimal existing network of museums, creating a new central focus for the city's cultural offering.

Zaragoza 1908

The 1908 exhibition dedicated to the first centenary of the Sieges of Zaragoza in the War of Independence against the French was situated within a historical context in which, during the early twentieth century, the city experienced unplanned and disorderly expansion, driven by speculative developments and lacking municipal oversight.³⁰ This period marked a turning point in the city's growth, leading to the planning of urban extensions following the Cerdà-designed Extension and Catalan modernism.³¹ The 1906 Expansion Project for Zaragoza,³² which was approved but not implemented,³³ laid the foundation for the 1908 Hispano-French International Exposition. This project involved the urbanization of the mostly unbuilt land *Huerta de Santa Engracia* (Figure 3), a key element in the subsequent growth of the southern part of the city. It also represented a definitive break with the traditional urban grid of Roman origin. The goal of the extension was to establish the foundations for the construction of residential and opulent neighbourhoods for the city's affluent bourgeoisie. While the implementation of such project occurred during the late 1920s, it is evident that the fundamental principles of the city's primary lines of growth were established during this period, persisting well into the next couple of decades.³⁴

The post-event transformations within the showcase regarded the creation of three permanent buildings, already predetermined by an agreement between the State and the City Council (i.e. the Charity, the Museum of Fine Arts, and the School of Arts and Crafts), along with various monuments and leisure facilities (e.g. the Music Kiosk). However, most of the showcase comprised temporary structures consisting of pavilions constructed from lightweight materials (e.g. wood, plaster, and adobe) fulfilling diverse functions (e.g. café-restaurant, theatre, and exhibition spaces) that were dismantled following the event.³⁵ The Spanish state allocated a total budget of 2,500,000

²⁸Girona, *Memoria reglamentaria*, 21.

²⁹Oyón and Monclús, "La ciudad como Exposición," 10.

³⁰Betrán Abadía and Serrano Pardo, "La Zaragoza de 1908," 128–31.

³¹Poblador Muga, *La arquitectura modernista en Zaragoza*.

³²Casanal, *Anteproyecto de ensanche*.

³³Betrán Abadía and Serrano Pardo, "La Zaragoza de 1908," 132–3.

³⁴Monclús, "De Las Reformas a Los Ensanches," 100–5.

³⁵García Guatas, "Obras Que Se Vieron Y Han Quedado."

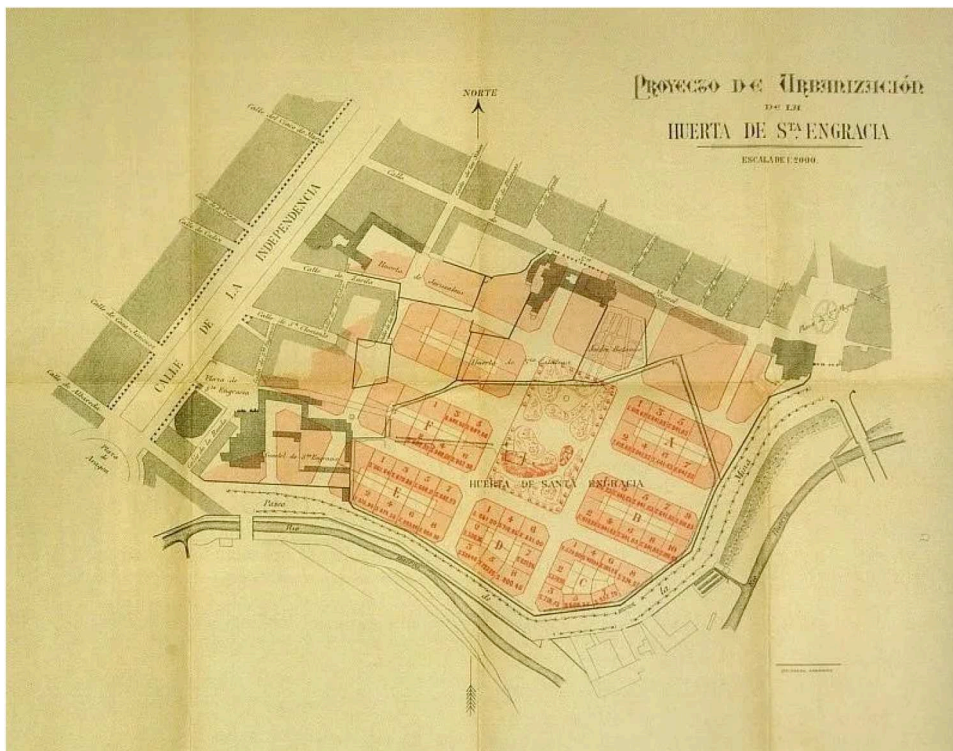


Figure 3. Urbanization of *Huerta de Santa Engracia*. Source: Historic Archive of Zaragoza.

pesetas for the execution of the Expo (with almost 2 million pesetas devoted to the three permanent buildings)³⁶ while the City Council spent 1,145,001.46 pesetas (mainly for levelling the land, installation of water, sewage, and gas lighting systems, paving, and landscaping within the venue and its surroundings), resulting in a surplus balance of 468,606.01 pesetas.³⁷

The post-Expo planning regarded the reuse of the aforementioned buildings and the construction of the long-awaited railroad to France, which was inaugurated immediately after the end of the Exposition.³⁸ However, most of the event venue was left abandoned for 20 years³⁹ until its complete conversion in a wealthy residential neighbourhood in the late 1920s.⁴⁰

Barcelona 1929

The annexation of various municipalities in 1897 obliged Barcelona to address the road connections between these urban centres and the Cerdà's Extension through an international competition awarded in 1905 to the French architect Leon Jaussely. His 'Plan of Connections', eventually approved in 1917, attempted to reshape the Extension through the incorporation of monumental forms and scenic views into the grid pattern. This plan introduced zoning techniques for the first

³⁶Betrán Abadía and Serrano Pardo, *La Zaragoza de 1908*, 155, 159.

³⁷Pamplona Escudero, *Libro de Oro*, 337–9.

³⁸García Guatas, "Dos claves," 5–7.

³⁹Pérez, "A las ruinas de la Exposición."

⁴⁰Monclús, "De Las Reformas a Los Ensanches," 104.

time in Barcelona, and tried to introduce elements of the City Beautiful movement into the city. However, nor Jaussely-designed Plan or the urban transformation related to the 1929 Expo provided any innovative idea or solution that meant any break with the traditional conception of urban planning for Barcelona.⁴¹ In fact, the successive planning tool, the 1935 Pla Macià, did change the local approach to urban planning towards rationalism.⁴² The 1929 Exhibition was, to a considerable extent, a pretext that precipitated the implementation of a specific policy of urban expansion towards the western outskirts of Barcelona,⁴³ the integration of Catalonia into the global marketplace and the dissemination of contemporary global ideologies in term of urbanization⁴⁴ that would lead the city to become the 'Great Barcelona' and 'Midday Paris'.⁴⁵ These objective were pursued through the deliberate intervention of the public sector in a series of designated city sectors. The proper example was the urbanization of Montjuïc mountain⁴⁶ as an opportunity to also transform *Plaça d'Espanya* into a new economic and commercial reference point, thereby supplanting the role that *Plaça de les Glòries Catalanes* had played in Cerdà and Jaussely's projects.⁴⁷

The event-related transformations involved the urbanization of the area between *Plaça d'Espanya* and Montjuïc mountain with the provision of 14 palaces successively converted into the local trade fair, the stadium, the magic fountain *Font màgica* for the Exposition and modern infrastructures for leisure and transportation (e.g. such as funicular railways, gardens, Greek theatre, *Poble Espanyol*, and theme park) (Figure 4).⁴⁸ Moreover, the 1929 exhibition provided a significant investment in public works and services, with a particular emphasis on transportation infrastructure⁴⁹ and buildings refurbishment (e.g. City Hall and Regional Government), completion (e.g. Post Office and the railway station *Estació de França*) and built from scratch (the Royal Palace of Pedralbes and the first skyscraper in Barcelona, the Telefónica building). The Expo also accelerated the establishment of a novel system of urban furniture across the city, including pavements, lighting, sewer systems, and the redesign of public spaces.⁵⁰ The total expenditure was 229,043,524 pesetas, while profits amounted to 210,150,310 pesetas, for a total deficit of 18,893,223 pesetas.⁵¹

1929 Seville

The proposal for hosting the Ibero-American Exposition was since its beginning related to the main goal of solving Seville's numerous urban challenges,⁵² along with the idea of bringing back a glorious past and reestablish the city as a commercial gateway to Europe and America so as to address pressing labour issues by generating employment opportunities, stimulating trade, and augmenting tourism. As well as Zaragoza, the city lacked a comprehensive urban planning scheme and a wider planning proposal for the renewal of its urban area. During the long period of organization (1905–

⁴¹de Solà-Morales, "L'Exposició internacional de Barcelona," 144–5.

⁴²Tarragó Cid, "El Pla Macià o la nova Barcelona."

⁴³Duran i Ventosa, "Per què l'Exposició s'ha fet a Montjuïc," 48–9.

⁴⁴Martorell, "La urbanisació moderna," 10.

⁴⁵Puig i Cadafalch, "A votar per la Exposició Universal."

⁴⁶Castro-Varela, "Infrastructuring Pleasure."

⁴⁷No author, "El projecte de reforma de l'actual Plaça d'Espanya"; Grandas Sagarra, "Los proyectos urbanísticos para la plaza de España."

⁴⁸Grandas Sagarra, "Arquitectura para una exposición," 109–10.

⁴⁹Bono, "La transformación de nuestra ciudad."

⁵⁰Bassegoda, "Crónica barcelonesa"; A.R.D., "La Exposición de Barcelona."

⁵¹Bono, "La transformación de nuestra ciudad," 21.

⁵²Trillo de Leyva, *La Exposición Iberoamericana*, 101–58.

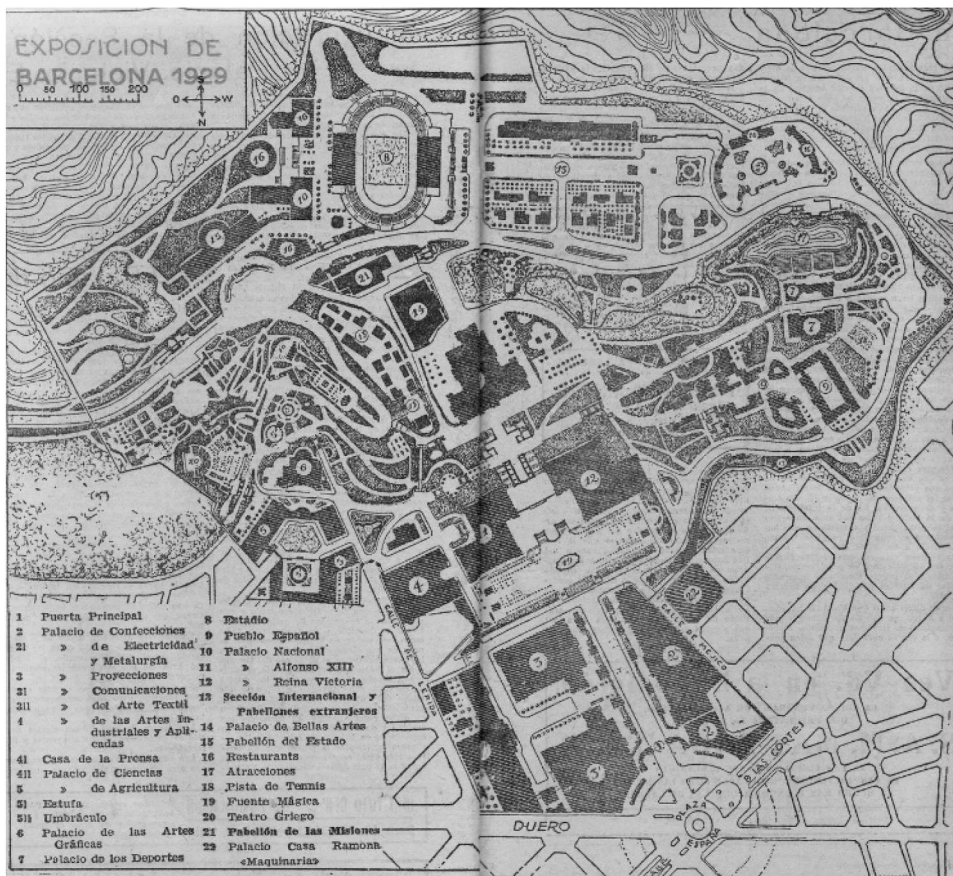


Figure 4. Planimetry of the pavilions of the 1929 International Exhibition in Barcelona. Source: Historic Archives of the City of Barcelona (AHCB).

1929) various planning proposals emerged with the objective of expanding and modernizing the city.⁵³ The planning of the Expo brought also engineering projects that expanded primary public infrastructures, including the *Corta de Tablada* docks and *Canal de Alfonso XIII* channel, which proved to be pivotal for the navigation of the Guadalquivir and the commercial port. This project commenced in 1909 and concluded in 1926 with the opening of the Alfonso XIII Bridge.⁵⁴

In terms of urban transformation, the Exposition was situated in the southern sector of the city (Figure 5) due to its historical significance as a traditional venue for fairs and events, including the April Fair, as well as its strategic proximity to the city centre. This location offered numerous advantages for both the Exposition and the city, including enhanced accessibility and proximity to key transportation hubs, which would facilitate the attendance of visitors from various parts of the city. At the city level, this would not only create urban infrastructures that could later be used for urban expansion, but would also condition its quality. In the post-event, the permanent building would house the headquarters of different public entities located in the city centre (e.g. University, Provincial Council, and School of Arts and Crafts) and would enhance the subsequent

⁵³Villar Movellán, "Arquitectura del Regionalismo en Sevilla."

⁵⁴Del Moral Ituarte, "La obra hidráulica," 267–76.

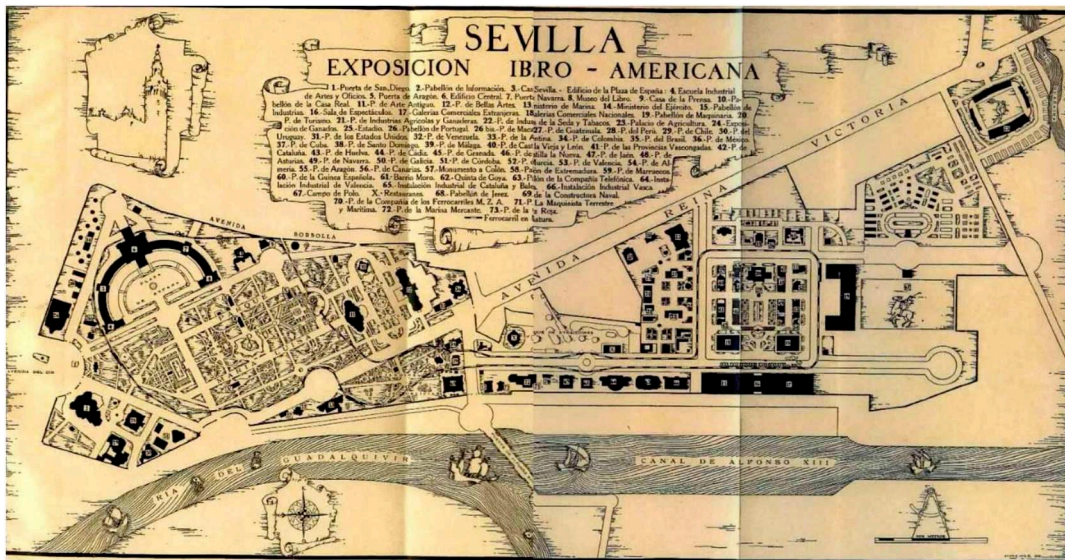


Figure 5. Plan of the 1929 Ibero-American American Exposition in Seville, Spain. Source: Historic Archive of Seville.

luxury residential use of the adjoining rural land. The 1929 event substantially modified Seville physiognomy. It opened the way to urbanize the southern sectors by means of Extension-shaped morphology (such as Palmera and Porvenir neighbourhoods) and to urban renewal operations in the city centre. The transformation of Seville into a modern city through Regionalism resulted in the establishment of a new urban model, i.e. from an Islamic city centre characterized by white-colored and intimate spaces to a more vibrant, open, and profiled city. The total expenditure tied to the event was 139,094,205 pesetas (of which 40,547,598 pesetas were paid by the State),⁵⁵ and the income was 85,147,360 pesetas, for a total loss of 53,946.845 pesetas.⁵⁶

After the event, the political change due to the end of Primo de Rivera dictatorship in 1930 meant the abandonment of any post-expo reuse plans,⁵⁷ which led to the dismantling of 39 out of 57 pavilions.⁵⁸ Among the permanent buildings, although they were meant to host consulates and other institutions (such as an Ibero-American University and Hall of Residence) to reinforce the links between both sides of the Atlantic, they were abandoned and neglected until the University of Seville, from the 1970s onwards, gradually converted them for its purpose.⁵⁹

Seville 1992

The 1992 Universal Exposition ‘The Age of Discovery’ planning process started in the early 1980s and was closely intertwined with the drafting of the new PGOU to substitute the 1963 PGOU, eventually approved in 1987.⁶⁰ These two planning processes were logically of a different nature and

⁵⁵Rodríguez Bernal, “Historia de la exposición,” 459.

⁵⁶Ibid., 260–2.

⁵⁷Gamero Martín, *Los problemas que la post-Exposición plantea*, 15–17.

⁵⁸Rodríguez Bernal, “Historia de la exposición,” 205–12.

⁵⁹Tejido Jiménez, *Las sedes universitarias*, 19–33.

⁶⁰Sainz-Gutiérrez, “El urbanismo de la Transición.”

corresponded to different actors. The central government was primarily responsible for the former and the City Council for the latter, while the Andalusian regional government (*Junta de Andalucía*) was involved in both. The urban visions for the Expo held by these entities differed significantly. Contrary to the City Council's position, the central government selected as showcase the La Cartuja island, a 215-hectare publicly-owned isle in the middle of the Guadalquivir River opposite the historic centre, where in early 1970s a major residential growth plan had been formulated through an Urgent Urban Development Plan (ACTUR), which had then generated significant opposition within the city. Eventually, the 1987 PGOU made only a cursory reference to the 1992 Expo, although it assumed La Cartuja to be the event venue (Figure 6).⁶¹ It searched its integration within the city through a new urban infrastructure within the newly formulated basic transportation network (i.e. an airport, a high-speed train line, bridges, and 75 km of new roads), which, in turn, improved the city's regional, national, and international accessibility. Moreover, the new PGOU incorporated the proposals of a special plan formulated by the *Junta de Andalucía* for the urban development of La Cartuja, which was approved concurrently with this planning tool in 1987.⁶²

However, while the 1985 masterplan for the Expo established the ex-post reuse of the site into educational, cultural, and administrative functions, the 1991 agreement between state, regional, and municipal authorities changed the terms midway. This agreement launched the 'Cartuja '93' public society to draft a novel special plan for La Cartuja and its surroundings.⁶³ Endorsed in 1993 and modified in 1999, the plan entrusted Seville City Council with complete accountability for the land and its urban development divided into three main functions: Science-Technology Park, Isla Mágica Thematic-Water Park, and an area dedicated to administrative, leisure, and university services. Nevertheless, the poor connectivity to the surrounding area and the post-event reuse and management of the venue (e.g. whether to demolish, maintain or sell off the main pavilions)⁶⁴ affected the post-expo planning, along with the financial loss (37,046 million pesetas corresponding to €222 million).⁶⁵ Despite the construction of bridges, the site was inadequately served local by transportation infrastructure, characterized by a paucity of bus routes and an underutilized railway station, as well as improper urban maintenance. The venue began a gradual redevelopment only in the early 2000s. Presently, it comprises three luxury hotels, two riverside parks and gardens, a shopping centre, the Isla Mágica, and several world-class cultural facilities, including an open-air auditorium, museums, theatres, and a stadium. A dozen of buildings and the surrounding public spaces are still suffering from abandonment and decay, and the Isla Mágica activities are unprofitable due to its oversized dimension.⁶⁶

Barcelona 2004

The 2004 Forum represented the final stage of the so-called 'Barcelona Model', a city-making model based on a project-oriented approach to urban transformation adopted by the City Council since the early 1980s and later reinforced via major events (i.e. the 1992 Olympics and 2004 Forum). It attempted to search for an emerging alternative planning model in which the 1976 General Metropolitan Plan became a flexible playing field on which to act in a differential way, focusing on areas

⁶¹ Arias García, "Sevilla y la Exposición," 25–6.

⁶² Balbontín de Arce, *Sevilla 1992*, 73–91.

⁶³ Blanco Muriel and Valle Tauste, "Cartuja '93."

⁶⁴ Maddox, *The Best of all Possible Islands*, 297–304.

⁶⁵ Contreras, "El año que España."

⁶⁶ Álvarez Corral, "Legado Expo Sevilla."

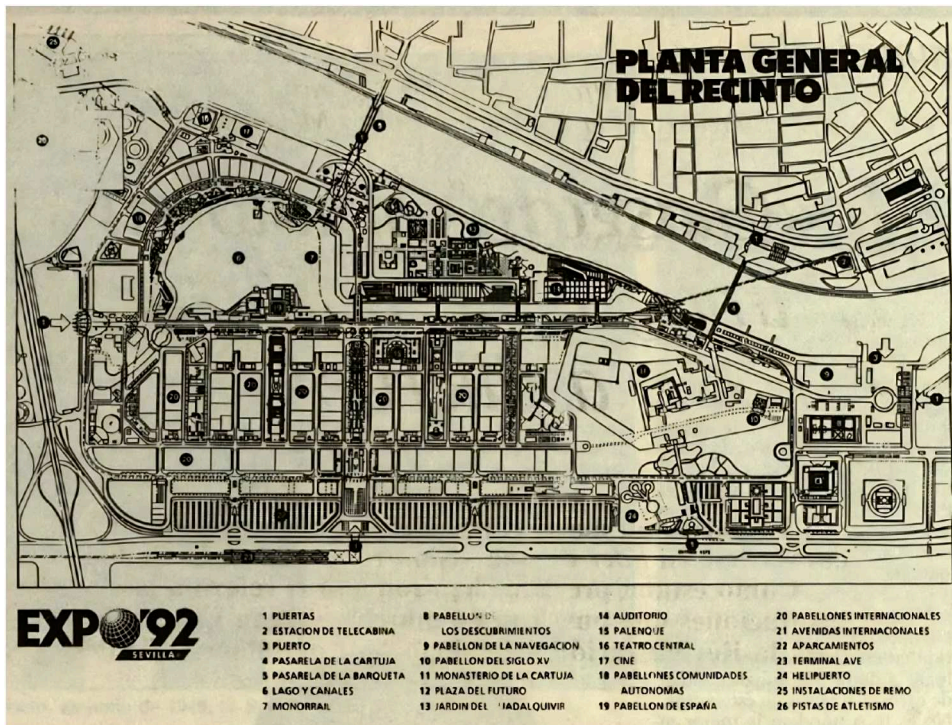


Figure 6. Plan of the 1992 Ibero-American American Exposition in Seville, Spain. Source: Historic Archive of Seville.

suitable for planning their transformation.⁶⁷ The most obvious expression of this approach was the 1987 strategic planning document 'Areas of New Centrality', which identified a series of key areas for transformation.⁶⁸ Among them stood up the old industrial Poblenou sector, in which two areas of centrality were Nova Icària, later becoming the Olympic Village, and the 220-hectare neglected industrial site at the crossroads of Diagonal and Prim avenues, envisaged to become a central area albeit in the long term.

Following the 1992 Olympic Games, which marked the first major transformation of the city's seafront, the organization of the 2004 Forum provided the impetus for the simultaneous continuation of this operation on Barcelona's north-eastern outskirts and in the surrounding low-income La Mina neighbourhood (Sant Adrià del Besòs municipality) through new transport infrastructures and the La Mina's 2002 Special Urban Redevelopment Plan (SURP).

It is therefore possible to speak of a convergence of operations in and around the Forum site, with different objectives and different entities in charge, which were able to give continuity to the great transformation of Barcelona's seafront that began with the 1992 Olympics. However, the fragmentary logics implicit in this way of acting meant that the success was not the same in all cases. For instance, the La Mina SURP became a pioneering reference point in the new phase of neighbourhood regeneration that would spread in subsequent years in Spain, particularly

⁶⁷ Monclús, "The Barcelona model."

⁶⁸ Ajuntament de Barcelona, *Àrees de nova centralitat*.



Figure 7. Map of the urban transformation related to the 2004 Forum. Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona.

after the bursting of the real estate bubble and the reorientation of urban planning towards the improvement of existing fabrics. In contrast, the urban role of the Forum site and its effective integration into the fabric of the city has generated controversy (Figure 7).⁶⁹

The total transformation, including infrastructure, costed €1.749.90 million, of which €1.117,4 and €594.20 million funded by respectively public and private sectors, with €25 million of cost overruns,⁷⁰ with no proper community participation or integrating infrastructure with the La Mina neighbourhood, creating a barrier. For instance, only 70 out of 800 housing units were dedicated to affordable homes; new hotels were built on public land; thematization of the event venue devoted to leisure, consumption, and tertiary activities; excessively costly facilities (€240,229,000 for both Barcelona International Convention Centre and Fòrum auditorium); and a lack of pre-event planning for the post-event reuse of the main buildings improperly designed for hosting civic and cultural facilities for local citizens.⁷¹ The symptoms of an oversized event were evident in the unfinished state of the Forum project, which lacked the necessary financial resources (€200 million) to complete the construction of a 75,000-m² marine zoo.

⁶⁹Delgado, *La otra cara del Fòrum*.

⁷⁰Majoer, "Framing Large-Scale Projects," 150.

⁷¹Borja, *Luces y sombras*, 229.



Figure 8. Map of the 2008 Expo. Source: Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza.

Zaragoza 2008

The 2008 World Expo on Water and Sustainable Development provided Zaragoza with a valuable opportunity to catalyze previous planning concerns about concepts and methodologies to implement for its urban riverbanks (Figure 8). The 1986 PGOU pioneered a novel metropolitan-scale approach to green spaces, which was predominantly focused on generating urban quality. Although the subsequent PGOU, initiated in the early 1990s and approved in 2002, signaled a shift towards a quantitative urban expansion, effectively superseding the previous qualitative approach,⁷² a debate persisted regarding the recovery and enhancement of the local watercourses, including the three rivers (Ebro, Gállego, and Huerva) and the imperial Aragón Canal.⁷³ Significant were the 1996 local symposium on rivers and cities and the 1999 competition for the redesign of public spaces on the Ebro's banks, which resulted in the 2001 riverside plan.⁷⁴ Once the 2008 Expo was assigned to Zaragoza, this plan served as the basis for drafting the Expo's Accompanying Plan⁷⁵ to strategically encompass a diverse array of projects, with a core focus on waterways, thus expanding the event impact beyond its immediate surroundings. Inspired by the Guggenheim in Bilbao, the city relied on star architects to design towers, bridges, and pavilions, and planned their reuse in advance.⁷⁶ The convergence of the 2008 Expo with the 2001 plan thereby modified the 2002 PGOU: this new strategic vision for the urban structure was distinct yet compatible with the existing spatial plan.⁷⁷

⁷²de las Rivas Sanz and Fernández-Maroto, "Planning strategies," 730–1.

⁷³Ramos Martos, "Los ríos en la revisión."

⁷⁴Monclús, *Proyecto de Riberas del Ebro*.

⁷⁵Monclús Fraga and Pérez Escolano, *El urbanismo de la Expo*.

⁷⁶Monclús, *International Exhibitions and Urbanism*, 115–30.

⁷⁷Ibid., 131–50.

Notwithstanding an anticipated reuse plan for the post-Expo, the huge economic loss (€507 million)⁷⁸ and the 2007–08 global financial crisis led to hampering the plan. The total expenditure of €1,200 million was affected by significant cost overruns, such as those occurred for the ephemeral and permanent architectures (from a minimum of 33% to a maximum of 53% each). Their initial building budget of €257.180 million rose up to €356.510 million.⁷⁹ The ephemeral architectures were dismantled after the event, except for the Spanish Pavilion (now abandoned), the Metropolitan Urban Park (now a public space), and the Zaragoza Convention Centre (it hosts cultural events). Three permanent facilities (i.e. Water Tower, Bridge Pavilion, and Aragón Convention Centre) have been neglected since 2008.⁸⁰ The grassroots association ‘Expo Zaragoza Legacy’ highlighted the excessive expenditure tied to facilities dismantled after 2008 and currently at risk of demolition, due to their state of decay:⁸¹ the annual maintenance costs of the Spanish Pavilion and the Bridge Pavilion reach €550,000 and €1 million respectively and the restoration of the ‘Ecogeographic Bank’ urban sculpture in the Metropolitan Urban Park cost €1.75 million. The most prominent reuse intervention concerned the Bridge Pavilion, which has been turned into ‘Mobility City’, Spain’s technology museum dedicated to sustainable mobility, at a total cost of €4 million, paid by the regional government.

Discussion

Although MIE events can be approached as a reflection of the political, economic and cultural contexts and periods, using the lens of urban planning to analyse 1888–1929 and 1992–2008 events show differences but also commonalities according to aspects related to the event-led development, post-event reuse, and the relationship MIE-planning culture.

Event-led development: trigger or symptom?

The case study analysis shows whether urban transformation processes were triggered off by MIE or rather these events were just the symptoms of already planned transformations. None of the 1888–1929 events relied on any spatial plans, but on the 1895 Law on extension, sanitation and interior improvements. The planning tools related to Barcelona 1888, Zaragoza 1908, and Seville 1929 followed thus expansion patterns, while Barcelona 1929 tried to create a new central area in a metropolitan context by combining leisure and pleasure along with tertiary uses (i.e. local fair trade). The 1888–1929 events had little impact on subsequent urban planning and long-term physical trends. Rather than being the demonstration of innovative urban planning, the 1888–1929 events had a weak impact in modernizing transformation in the urban structure, being instead accelerators of previously planned and ongoing works. The case of Barcelona is of particular interest because the planning of 1888 and 1929 events did not follow respectively Cerdà- and Jaussely-designed plans for the regeneration of former military land and showcases transformation. The 1992–2008 events showed a more complex situation, as they catalyzed already planned transformations aimed at urban development, but they pushed for wider metropolitan-scale transformations in the attempt to create new symbolic perspectives in a context characterized

⁷⁸Cortes Generales, 47760.

⁷⁹Tribunal de Cuentas, 72–81.

⁸⁰Asociación Legado Expo Zaragoza, *Informe*.

⁸¹Asociación Legado Expo Zaragoza, *El Legado que va a Desaparecer*; Asociación Legado Expo Zaragoza, *El Legado que ya ha Desaparecido*.

by post-Fordism and globalization patterns.⁸² Seville 1992 aimed at urban expansion and development due to the decision to host the event in the almost unbuilt La Cartuja island although it changed the previous 1960s planning decision to dedicate the area to a residential use in the new 1987 PGOU. Instead, Barcelona 2004 implemented a mono-functional project for the event venue based on the 1987 strategic vision tied to the areas of new centrality acting on the seafront in the attempt to recover a large neglected industrial site as it did for the 1992 Olympics. In contrast, the 2008 Expo leveraged previous planning on riverfronts integrated to the 2002 PGOU. In particular, Zaragoza's Accompanying Plan included various infrastructure projects and initiatives, public spaces and facilities along the riverbanks, which have become the backbone of the city of Zaragoza, being no longer an obstacle to urban expansion but the nexus between the old city and new housing developments.

The difficult post-event reuse

Not only the events propelled various kinds of constructions built for the event itself, but host cities underwent unplanned spatial impact, such as oversized infrastructures,⁸³ triggered by MIE. The events under analysis were not planned as ephemeral, as they searched for leveraging long-term urban modernization (1888–1929)⁸⁴ and globalization (1992–2008).⁸⁵ Urban spectacularization associated with emblematic projects has been a common element between 1888–1929 and 1992–2008 events. The two periods under consideration were distinguished by the establishment of oversized facilities in relation to ordinary local needs, cost overruns, substantial maintenance expenditures, and post-event obsolescence. However, almost all of MIE (apart Zaragoza 1908) embarked on strategies that had significant cost overruns and often takes decades to materialize (especially Seville 1929 and 1992). Also, apart Barcelona 1929, all the case studies shows a struggle to find coherent uses for showgrounds after the event. The two periods demonstrate that MIE have concealed a repositioning of a city's image and reputation through the showgrounds transformations. In this sense, the main differences between 1888–1929 and 1992–2008 events can be the following. Firstly, the latter were more oriented on a global scale exploitation, on the basis of processes not necessary aligned to the local context's needs. Barcelona 2004 constitutes an excellent example of showcase and its main buildings not designed for hosting large civic and cultural facilities for local citizens, characterized by a consumption-oriented redevelopment lacking proper connections with its surroundings that contributed to create a segregated urban sector. Secondly, the 1992–2008 events engagement with neoliberal planning policies further escalated the already dynamics highlighted in the 1888–1929 period: expensive iconic buildings, top-down decision-making by political elites, and risk-taking at the expense of the public purse. These features have influenced entire economies at the local, regional, and national level. Thirdly, notwithstanding the increasing requirements for sustainability and legacy planning into their respective bid processes,⁸⁶ the apparent more robust 1992–2008 pre-event planning and design strategies elaborated for the events organization in comparison with the 1888–1929 events. However, as shown in other contemporary cases,⁸⁷ the 1992 and 2008 plans demonstrated to be insufficient, with post-event reuse resulting more dependent

⁸²Camerin and Córdoba Hernández, "Interrogating Event-Induced," 37–8.

⁸³Davis, "Avoiding white elephants," 829–32.

⁸⁴Levin and Miriam, "What Were World's Fairs for?" 1214–17.

⁸⁵Minner, Grace, and Toy, "Global City."

⁸⁶Di Vita and Morandi, "Mega-Events and Legacy."

⁸⁷Davis, "Avoiding White Elephants?"

on the economic burst provoked by both events and oversized buildings implying high-cost reuse work.⁸⁸

Did Spanish MIE influence local planning culture?

The research shows how the relationship between local planning culture and MIE evolved over time, being fuelled by international and national emulation and competition to meet the Western challenges created by the pace of global change over more than a century.⁸⁹ This evolution has pushed cities to convert entire sectors ‘into major stages for a continual stream of events, which can lead eventually to a “festivalization” of the city’,⁹⁰ especially for the showcases of Barcelona 1888, 1929, and 2004, and Seville 1929 and 1992.

For Spanish cities, the manner in which MIE were executed and their relationship with urban planning, as well as their different influence to city growth and evolution, vary significantly, as do the differences between the processes of event gestation and development in the two periods. Both 1888–1929 and 1992–2008 Expositions constituted the pretext and the ideal occasion to undertake major works and ambitious proposals for urban transformation, as well as to create or renovate infrastructures, to provide them with facilities and to give them the economic and cultural pulse that their history and strategic importance demanded. In particular, the 1888–1929 MIE appears to have been strongly influenced by the planning culture at that time as they leveraged MIE for beautification and monumentalization based on the City Beautiful movement to convert hosting cities into ‘works of art’,⁹¹ as it was happening in other European capitals (1888–1929 events). On the contrary, the more recent events contributed more powerfully to shape the planning culture with a strong input exerted by neoliberal urbanism patterns and the globalization of urban event strategies that modify the existing spatial plans (Seville 1992 and Zaragoza 2008) and implement strategic visions (Barcelona 2004). This fact confirms the shift from a comprehensive planning to urban projects approach to urban development typical of this period.

Conclusion

An analysis on a very large timeline – 120 years, from 1888 to 2008 – involves ranging from very different situations and issues affecting Spanish cities and society. This work specifically provides insights from an époque characterized by the absence of spatial plans and a focus on city’s extension and improvements in the existing urban environment to another period in which cities were changing from a comprehensive approach to urban planning to urban projects influenced by strategic plans (e.g. Barcelona’s Areas of New Centrality). This analysis, with the perspective of the relationship between Spanish MIE and urban planning, has thus taken into account the abundant local interpretations of each case study under analysis, but has applied a wider vision that make this research relevant to broader literature on mega-events.

As shown by recent studies,⁹² the long-term approach applied to this research meant envisaging mega-events as part of the development history of society that can result in understanding the adaptation of previous models, such as the ones implemented between 1888 and 1929, to more

⁸⁸Camerin and Córdoba Hernández, “Interrogating Event-Induced,” 31.

⁸⁹Ward, “International Diffusion.”

⁹⁰Richards and Palmer, *Eventful Cities*, 2.

⁹¹Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art*, 82.

⁹²Smith, Gold, and Gold, “Olympic Urbanism.”

recent one that have become occasions for innovations. In fact, this research demonstrates that the most recent MIE planning was influenced by the capacity of 1888–1929 events to speeding up and aligning with existing development plans. However, the 1992–2008 MIE made a step further by working as urban planning and design laboratories with broader structural transformations based on large-scale urban projects. Taking into account urban planning led to formulate an updated and more specific characterization of Spanish MIE.

To conclude, the analysis of urban planning and MIE with a wide historical perspective provides not only for better understanding past planning episodes in Spanish cities, especially for the Anglo-phone readers, but also allows to learn what is valid, what is still used and obsolete, and the current issues concerning future events in relation to urban planning. The possible future research lines can vary depending on the focus. Firstly, the case study analysis can be enlarged to other Spanish non-sporting mega-events left aside in this research, such as the European Capital of Culture (e.g. Madrid 1992) and failed bids to host international expositions (such as Malaga 2027) to understand how urban planning has, or not, established a relationship with these events. Secondly, our research can be of interest while approaching the 100th anniversary of the 1929 expositions in Barcelona and Seville. The City Councils are respectively planning to invest 174 million to refurbish most of the Barcelona's showgrounds and to launch a strategic plan as a springboard to enhance the international projection of Seville, highlighting its cultural and heritage legacy. Eventually, future research may focus on an urban-planning-oriented comparison between Spanish non-sports and sports events enlarged not only to the Olympics but competitions such as the America's Cup and Formula 1 to detect further patterns.

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Notes on contributors

Federico Camerin, city planner at the Università Iuav di Venezia (2014), was awarded in 2014–15 and 2016–17 with two fellow research grants at the same University. In 2020, he achieved a double degree of Doctor and PhD awarded respectively by the Universidad de Valladolid (UVa, Spain) and Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

(Germany) within the European Joint Doctorate ‘UrbanHist’. He was a post-doc fellow in Urban Planning at Iuav and UVa (2021 ‘Go-for-IT’ and 2022–24 ‘Margarita Salas’). He is currently ‘Ramón y Cajal’ fellow at UVa and his research/working interests intertwined city-making process with spatial planning, planning history, and urban governance.

Miguel Fernández Maroto is an architect and PhD in Architecture, and he is associate professor in the Department of Urban Planning and Representation of Architecture at the School of Architecture of the University of Valladolid, as well as current director of its University Institute of Urbanism. His work focuses on urban planning techniques and tools, taking into account both its recent history and current lines of innovation. Currently, he is participating in a research project that explores the urban ‘Baukultur’ in medium-sized cities in Spain.

ORCID

Federico Camerin  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8659-3761>

Miguel Fernández Maroto  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6853-2167>

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