

## ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA

# Community Engagement Challenges in Public Space Design: Lessons from the Spanish Cases

## *Kamusal Mekân Tasarımında Toplumsal Katılımın Zorlukları: İspanyol Kentlerinden Dersler*

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to detect problems of community engagement and to develop recommendations to strengthen engagement processes in public space design in Spain by creating an analytical framework which defines dimensions and variables of community engagement in public space design. The research method is based on literature review and a case study including observation and face-to-face /online interviews on three projects in Spain, as Valladolid Millennium Square, Madrid Rio Park and Barcelona Poblenou and Sant Antoni Superblocks. The projects were analysed in three dimensions related to community engagement in public space design as legal, institutional and political context, citizen participation process, public space design and implementation process and the outcomes of the projects were evaluated. In all cases, the projects were criticized for lacking clear design objectives to address future urban design challenges, their high costs of implementation, and inefficient governance in achieving desired outcomes. Recommendations were also made to improve design and implementation processes and to enhance stakeholder participation. The original value of the study is the effort to contribute to urban design process, both academically and practically, by drawing lessons from public space projects implemented in different contexts and scales through a systematic and holistic analysis method related to community engagement in public space design.

**Keywords:** Barcelona Superblocks; community engagement; Madrid Rio Park; public space design; Valladolid Millennium Square.

### ÖZ

Bu makalenin amacı, kamusal mekan tasarımında toplumsal katılımının boyutlarını ve değişkenlerini tanımlayan analitik bir çerçeve oluşturarak, İspanya'da kamusal mekan tasarımındaki toplumsal katılım sorunlarını tespit etmek ve katılım süreçlerini güçlendirmek için öneriler geliştirmektir. Araştırma yöntemi, literatür taramasına ve İspanya'daki Valladolid Millennium Square, Madrid Rio Park ve Barcelona Poblenou ve Sant Antoni Superblocks projeleriyle ilgili gözlem ve yüz yüze/çevrimiçi görüşmeler içeren bir alan çalışmasına dayanmaktadır. Bu projeler; kamusal mekan tasarımında toplumsal katılımı ilgili üç boyut – yasal, kurumsal ve politik bağlam, vatandaş katılım süreci, kamusal mekan tasarım ve uygulama süreci üzerinden analiz edilmiş, projelerin etkileri farklı açılardan değerlendirilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, her üç projede de tasarım ve uygulama süreçleri açısından gelecekteki kentsel tasarım sorunlarının karşılanmasındaki tasarım hedeflerinin eksikliği, kaynaklar açısından projelerin yüksek maliyeti ve projelerin etkileri açısından yönetişimin verimsizliği eleştirilmiş, tasarım ve uygulama süreçlerinin iyileştirilmesi ve paydaşların katılımının artırılması için öneriler geliştirilmiştir. Çalışmanın özgün değeri, kamusal mekanda toplumsal katılıma ilişkin sistematik ve bütüncül bir analiz yöntemiyle, farklı bağlam ve ölçeklerde uygulanan kamusal mekan projelerinden dersler çıkararak kentsel tasarım sürecine hem akademik hem de uygulamalı olarak katkıda bulunma çabasıdır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Barselona Süperbloklar; toplumsal katılım; Madrid Rio Parkı; kamusal mekan tasarımı; Valladolid Milenyum Meydanı.

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## I. Introduction

Public space is widely recognized as a critical issue in global references, highlighting its benefits as a cornerstone for a high quality of life in sustainable cities (UN-Habitat, 2022). Consequently, numerous policy frameworks and tools have been published to steer central and local governments towards developing transparent participatory processes involving all stakeholders in public space design and management for quality public spaces (UN-Habitat, 2016; United Cities and Local Governments, 2016).

However, despite this recognition, community engagement emerges as a crucial necessity in public space design and management, accompanied by significant challenges spanning various levels, from national to local contexts. These challenges include a lack of trust between citizens and municipal authorities, the exclusion of individuals without access to technological resources, limited awareness of urban planning issues and community engagement concepts, low participation rates, and the disproportionate influence of certain actors (Cooper, 2021). Moreover, practices such as tokenistic consultations, presenting already finalized projects in public exhibitions, or an overemphasis on engagement without genuine intent can undermine confidence in community engagement efforts, which inherently demand considerable time, resources, and commitment (Carmona, 2017). Although public voting in design competitions has been valuable as a tool for creating a platform for discussion and conveying projects clearly, beyond presenting options, efforts fall short when participatory processes are not integrated and designed together with the design/competition processes (Adanali, 2020).

In this framework, Spain is a remarkable example as being one of the role model countries with its public space projects within the scope of culture-oriented regeneration in its cities for the last thirty years. Many cities host award-winning projects implemented within the framework of recovering public spaces. However, there are also some critics about quality of public spaces and participatory processes in the Spanish media and academic literature. Moreno Balboa (2019) specifies that there is no evidence that systematic evaluations have been made for citizen participation processes, both of the starting situation, as well as of the process and its results or its evolution over time. In fact, there is not even a consensus on what are the parameters or indicators that could facilitate such an evaluation. Fariña, (2017) states that the uselessness of the participation system in Spanish urban planning (in all of the autonomous communities), legally mandatory, but inoperative from a practical point of view is well known. Also, Sánchez Medero and Pastor Albaladejo (2018) highlights that local governments should change their approach on citizen participation and opt for quality instead of quantity with the aim of reinforcing democracy and legitimacy. Thus, there is a need to discuss the level of community engagement in public space design and public space quality through a systematic way in Spain.

In this context, the research questions of the article are as below:

- What are the dimensions and variables of Community Engagement in Public Space Design (CEPSD)?
- What are the challenges related to CEPSD in Spain?
- What can be the recommendations to improve CEPSD and to create quality public spaces in Spain?

In this research, Valladolid Millennium Square, Madrid Rio Park, Barcelona Poblenou, and Sant Martí Superblocks projects were examined to take lessons to improve the quality of public spaces and to increase CEPSD. It seems that this study can encourage many cities/municipalities in terms of developing their legal and institutional capacities, community engagement mechanisms, communication and collaboration methods with stakeholders and also design and implementation strategies related to public spaces.

## 2. Community Engagement In Public Space Design (CEPSD)

Today, citizen participation plays a crucial role in public space design and management (Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica, 2013), and there are prominent studies proposing analytical frameworks to define Public Space Management (PSM) dimensions which affect public space quality. Public space management is the governance sphere where stakeholder demands and aspirations for public space are articulated into sets of processes and practices (Carmona et al., 2008). It is an approach for the planning, design and maintenance of public spaces and concerns how planned and existing public spaces are regulated, how the facilities and their quality are provided (Alvarado Vazquez et al., 2024). PSM is evaluated in four interlinked dimensions as the coordination of interventions; the regulation of uses and conflicts between uses; the definition and deployment of maintenance routines; and investment in public spaces and their services including re-design and re-development (Carmona et al., 2008; De Magalhães & Carmona, 2009; Mandeli, 2010; Chitrakar et al., 2017). However, Zamanifard et al. (2018), state that Carmona et al.'s (2008) framework does not explain the relationships among competing stakeholders in public space shaping process and the role of different planning and design systems related to public space. In another study, Carmona (2014) proposes a new theory of urban design process as an integrated place-shaping continuum through time incorporating, first, two key contextual factors as the history and traditions of place and contemporary polity. These contexts influence four active place-shaping processes: design, development, space in use, management and finally, a set of power relationships between stakeholders operates like a lens. Zamanifard et al. (2018), state that this model lacks to account for the complexity of power relation-

**Table 1.** The analytical framework of the research: Dimensions, variables, and outcomes of CEPSPD (Author's Elaboration)

<b>Dimensions, Variables and Outcomes of the CEPSPD</b>	
<b>Legal, institutional and political context (national and urban scale)</b>	
<b>Legal framework;</b> laws, regulations, strategies and action plans related to citizen participation and public space	
<b>Institutional structure;</b> governmental/municipal departments and institutions for guiding citizen participation	
<b>Political context;</b> ideology of local government related to citizen participation	
<b>Citizen participation process (urban scale and project site scale)</b>	<b>Public space design and implementation process (urban and project site scale)</b>
<b>Resources and mechanisms;</b> informational, technological and financial resources, channels and tools for citizen participation	<b>Local context;</b> physical and social characteristics of the project site within the city
<b>Stakeholders and coordination methods;</b> diversity, awareness, willingness and capacity of actors for citizen participation	<b>Design team and way of acquiring projects;</b> competence of professionals, projects by municipality, bidding, competitions
	<b>Design approaches;</b> architectural program and design objectives
	<b>Economic resources;</b> budget of the municipalities, cost of the projects
	<b>Construction methods;</b> management and organization of the project, details and materials
<b>Outcomes (urban and project site scale)</b>	
<b>Governance outcomes;</b> impacts of government upon participatory public space design process	
<b>Social outcomes;</b> impacts of the project upon social relations and meaning of the public space	
<b>Physical outcomes;</b> impacts of the project upon built environment, infrastructure and landscape	
<b>Public space quality outcomes;</b> levels of protection, comfort, enjoyment that public space offers	

CEPSPD: Community Engagement in Public Space Design.

ship among different stakeholders that ultimately lead to a collective meaning and image of a public space. They propose a public space governance framework including governance structure (power, authority, stakeholders' relations); actors and stakeholders (their motivations, attitudes, interests and roles); governing tools (formal and informal tools); and governing tasks (steering, place shaping, finance). The proposed public space framework contributes to understanding the dynamics of context and power in public place-shaping as a collective activity which engages a wide range of stakeholders. Alvarado Vazquez et al. (2023; 2024), expanded Carmona and his friends' (2008) PSM framework by adding the context and the social participation dimensions. As the context can significantly impact the planning, design, and maintenance of public spaces and the social participation is a democratic channel of consultation to collect the aspirations and actions that users require on planned and existing public spaces, with feedback to users and linkages to government institutions.

Despite numerous discussions surrounding the effective community engagement in PSM, there remains a scarcity of definitions of dimensions and variables that affect the quality of CEPSPD. One proposed solution is the implementation of a participation evaluation matrix, serving as a simple and universal tool. This matrix is divided into two information blocks: one focusing on the features of the engagement process (general, development, evolution), and the other on outcomes

(previous conditions, outcomes, and impacts). By utilizing this matrix, participation experiences can be parameterized and evaluated, enabling comparison and the extraction of reliable conclusions and value judgments with greater rigor (Moreno Balboa, 2019). Another study offers a systematic and comparative analysis of the quality of participatory processes in the urban redevelopment policy of Madrid City Council. The authors present a series of analytical dimensions, including various explanatory variables. They identify four analytical dimensions: the initial context from which participatory processes emerge, the actors responsible for initiating, promoting, and managing these processes, the tools employed for citizen participation, and the outcomes or results of such participation. This analytical framework is deemed transferable, with some adaptations, for evaluating participatory processes in different local contexts (Sánchez Medero & Pastor Albaladejo, 2018).

This study focuses on participatory public space design processes in PSM. To improve and develop CEPSPD, there is a need to define and to evaluate the dimensions, variables and their outcomes that affect CEPSPD. In this respect, the researcher identified three dimensions that have varying impacts on governance, social dynamics, physical attributes, and the quality of public spaces based on the recent studies on PSM (Table 1). The legal, institutional, and political context is the primary dimension which is based on the laws, regulations, governmental/municipal structures and

political ideologies related to the citizen participation and the public spaces policy at the national scale. The second dimension pertains to the citizen participation process including resources, mechanisms, stakeholders and coordination methods, while the third dimension concerns the design and implementation process of public spaces including local context, design team and way of acquiring projects, design approaches, economic resources and construction methods. Although these two dimensions feature distinct variables, they interplay and yield outcomes at both urban and project site scales. This analytical framework can be used to evaluate CEPSP in PSM and stands out from others by integrating design issues with citizen participation and analysing the variables across national, urban, and project site scales (Polat, 2023). The type of public spaces (a square, a park, a courtyard or pedestrian ways in a neighbourhood) can significantly influence the requirements, scope, and methods of CEPSP.

### 2.1. Legal, Institutional, and Political Context

The first dimension of CEPSP encompasses the legal framework, institutional structure, and political context surrounding community engagement and public spaces. Galais et al. (2011) emphasize that institutional characteristics significantly influence the quality of participatory experiences. This includes factors such as the presence of institutions and regulations that promote participation, the availability of human and technical resources for citizen engagement, external funding to support participation initiatives, intermunicipal networks, and institutional isomorphism facilitating collaboration among municipalities. Consequently, governments and public administrations must establish a robust legal and institutional framework to empower social actors and facilitate their access, inclusion, and involvement in deliberative processes leading to public policies and services. Without adequate legal and institutional support, genuine citizen participation cannot be ensured (Pastor Albaladejo, 2013). Successful participation hinges on the existence of legal provisions for engagement, as well as skilled administrators and professionals dedicated to fostering community involvement.

Moreover, pioneering studies suggest that the ideology of the municipal government can significantly influence levels of citizen participation, with progressive governments often driving substantial changes in this regard. Participatory political ideologies are more commonly associated with left-wing parties than conservatives and often feature prominently in their electoral programs (Cernadas et al., 2017).

Additionally, a national perspective that values public space can foster political commitment reflected in both national urban policies and local government planning strategies (UN-Habitat, 2016). National governments play a crucial role in guiding municipal and local governments on urban public space planning and design standards. This approach ensures that local public space strategies align with national

policies and strategies, thereby facilitating the creation of an effective network of public spaces at the local level. Integrating public spaces into national policies facilitates the development of practical, impactful solutions for public spaces and enhances their visibility, ensuring efficient, sustainable, and inclusive urban growth (UN-Habitat, 2020a).

### 2.2. Citizen Participation Process

The second dimension of CEPSP revolves around resources and mechanisms, the involvement of various stakeholders, and the coordination methods for citizen participation. Financial resources play a pivotal role in the initiation, promotion, and implementation of participatory processes in public space design. Allocating sufficient budgets for these processes is essential for their successful realization. Additionally, information serves as a valuable resource to enhance the quality of participatory processes. Effective communication by local governments strengthens participation and legitimizes decisions made. Technological resources are increasingly important for disseminating information and results, as well as facilitating participation through remote engagement methods such as online surveys and voting (Sánchez Medero & Pastor Albaladejo, 2018). Technological tools promote transparency in participatory processes by enabling citizens to engage from their homes. Moreover, it's crucial to identify suitable participation methods to achieve intended objectives. Decisions regarding the timing of participant involvement should be strategic to optimize community engagement throughout the participation process (Sanoff, 2000).

On the other hand, socio-demographic factors, such as the size and dispersion of the local community, economic resources, citizen willingness, and ideological factors, also influence the quality of participatory experiences. A conducive social and cultural context acts as a catalyst for citizen engagement, strengthening democratic legitimacy. Factors like high educational levels and a strong associational tradition can positively impact citizen participation, depending on the cultural context (Sánchez Medero & Pastor Albaladejo, 2018).

At this juncture, Sanoff (2000) underscores the significance of identifying individuals or groups to be involved in the participatory activity right from the outset of the process. Typically, those who will be impacted by design and planning decisions should actively participate in the decision-making process.

According to UN-Habitat (2020b), establishing a platform for dialogue among the community, experts, and local authorities is crucial for creating high-quality public spaces. Civil society can express their needs, experts can share their technical knowledge, and local authorities can understand residents' preferences and ensure alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and local agendas. This approach resonates with SDG Goal 11, which aims for universal access to safe, inclusive, accessible, green, and public spaces by 2030,

with a particular focus on ensuring accessibility for women, children, older persons, and individuals with disabilities (United Nations, 2015). Therefore, embracing diversity is essential when planning participatory processes.

### 2.3. Public Space Design and Implementation Process

The third dimension of CEPD encompasses various factors, including the local context, design team, project delivery methods, design approaches, economic resources, and construction methods. Public spaces reflect specific features influenced by geographic conditions, cultural behaviours, legal frameworks, economic development, and the existing urban fabric. Therefore, considering urban and local contexts is essential in public space design, as each city possesses unique characteristics shaped by its territory and inhabitants (UN-Habitat, 2016).

Public spaces serve as catalysts for job creation, benefiting a wide range of professionals, including planners, landscape professionals, architects, technicians, and designers. Organizing competitions for public space projects fosters inclusivity, democracy, and transparency in the design process. Design competitions provide a platform for participants to share ideas widely, serving as an architectural communication platform. They motivate and educate young designers and students, allowing many to convey important societal messages through unique designs. This competitive environment, where diverse schools of thought present their projects, conceptual foundations, team compositions, and visualization techniques, enriches design culture both democratically and intellectually (Kutluca et al., 2022).

The Charter of Public Space which outlines definitions, typologies, and principles regarding the creation, management, and enjoyment of public spaces, emphasizes the importance of considering diverse elements such as the sentiment of citizenship, transparent participatory processes, strategies for public space networks, environmental regulations, protection against risks, and socio-economic interrelations, especially when upgrading unused public spaces. Therefore, professionals involved in public space design should incorporate these principles into their processes to promote sustainable urban development.

Key elements in public space design include a continuous, articulated, and integrated public space system, well-connected and proportioned public spaces, alternative and creative practices grounded in new communication and urban usage techniques. This involves enhancing connections, promoting multifunctionality, ensuring accessibility, and minimizing privatization and exclusion by eliminating physical barriers. Simple solutions and the use of durable, easily replaceable, and climate-appropriate materials are also crucial considerations for achieving better construction results and effective management of public spaces (Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica, 2013).

### 2.4. Outcomes of the CEPD

The results of CEPD can be evaluated on urban scales, including governance, social and physical outcomes, and on project site scales, such as public space quality. Place governance shifts control from the public sector to collaborative structures involving governmental and non-governmental actors. This approach empowers community groups, fosters leadership among residents, and promotes neighbourhood advocacy. Involving communities in public space planning enhances community cohesion and ownership, increasing space utilization. Moreover, it enhances civic well-being by boosting trust among neighbours and willingness to contribute. Public spaces thus become democratic forums for cultural exchange and negotiations of belonging and power. Overall, place governance supports increased public life, stewardship of places, and community trust (Love & Kok, 2021).

CEPD enhances place value through comprehensive improvements across health, social, physical, economic, and environmental outcomes. It fosters healthier public spaces that benefit physical and mental health, enhancing quality of life by increasing emotional well-being and reducing fear through safety considerations. Socially, it promotes integration, educational outcomes, and civic pride, supporting inclusiveness and environments for disadvantaged groups. Physically, it enhances connectivity between districts, and diversity in uses, with sustainable urban design principles like pedestrian-friendly layouts and adaptive reuse. This approach also reduces energy consumption, carbon emissions, waste, and pollution, enhancing resilience and thermal comfort. Economically, CEPD drives property value growth, reduces vacancies, attracts investments, and boosts local tax revenue while cutting public expenditures (Carmona, 2018).

On the project site scale, providing public space quality, measured by various indicators and tools, is crucial. According to UN-Habitat (2016), the main goal is to improve the supply, quality, and distribution of public spaces. The Project for Public Spaces (2005) identified four essential qualities of successful public spaces: they are accessible with strong visual and physical connections to their surroundings; they offer opportunities for a variety of activities; they are comfortable and visually appealing; and they are sociable places that foster interaction.

There are numerous studies defining the quality criteria of public spaces. Yener Metin and Polat (2021) describe physical quality criteria as including typological variety, ecological efficiency, accessibility, flexibility, mixed-use, and physical comfort. Social criteria include perceptibility, meaning, experience, active and passive interaction, security, control, and psychological comfort. A recent study evaluating nine public spaces in Spain to measure their safety, accessibility, and inclusiveness—conditions emphasized in SDG 11.7—found that formal, spatial, and social use conditions are



**Figure 1.** The location of the Millennium Square in Valladolid.

Google Earth, 2023.



**Figure 2.** Millennium Square project area before (2009)/after (2011) implementation (Ruiz-Geli, 2012, Photos by Luis la Forga and Tafyr respectively).

closely related to the quality of public spaces (Bambó Naya et al., 2023). Furthermore, tools like the Twelve Quality Criteria (TQC), as outlined by Gehl (2022), assess whether various aspects of a public space provide a protective, comfortable, and enjoyable environment for users. In this study, three public space projects in Valladolid, Madrid, and Barcelona were analysed through three dimensions to evaluate and discuss the various outcomes of CEPSP.

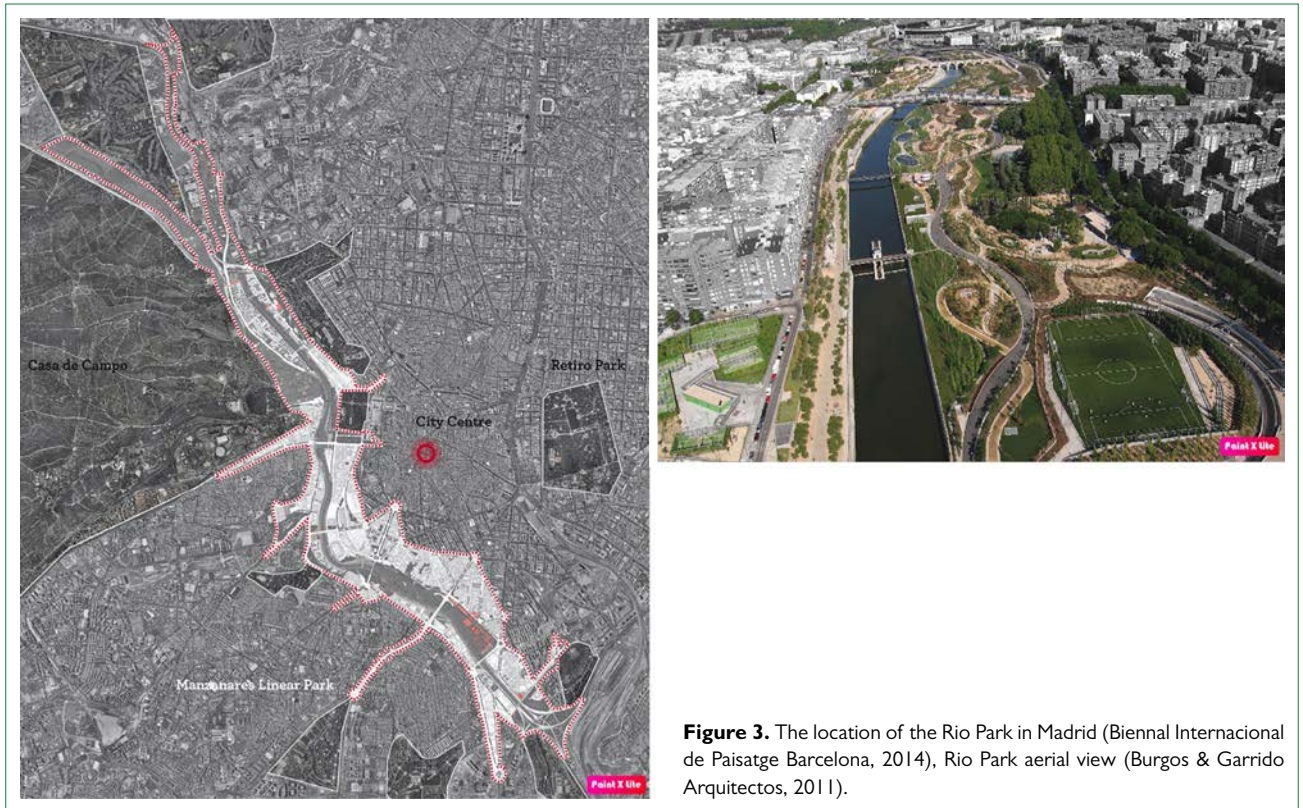
### 3. Methodology

For the case study, public space projects from the industrial city Valladolid (population: 297.775, Castilla y León), the capital city Madrid (population: 3.305.408), the port city Barcelona (population: 1.636.732, Catalonia) were selected

(Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2022). While these cities have different governmental and urban contexts as well as different characteristics in terms of their sizes and populations, the selected projects are well-known projects as winning international prizes. In addition, it is thought that the diversity of the cases will offer different perspectives on the CEPSP in various cities in Spain in recent years. The characteristics of the case study areas are as below:

#### 3.1. Valladolid Millennium Square Project, 2010–2011

The Millennium Square project site was a neglected area with full of cars and pollution near the city centre and the Pisuerga River in Valladolid (Fig. 1). In 2010, the Valladolid City Council decided to revive this urban fabric. The aim



**Figure 3.** The location of the Rio Park in Madrid (Biennial Internacional de Paisatge Barcelona, 2014), Rio Park aerial view (Burgos & Garrido Arquitectos, 2011).



**Figure 4.** Avenida de Portugal-Madrid Rio before / after implementation (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2011).

was to make an urban acupuncture by injecting synthetically added value in this area. To do this, the city council bought the dome of the Expo Zaragoza 2008 and it was revised with some environmental considerations due to its local context. It was a pilot project in experimenting with a new

city model that combats climate change (Ruiz-Geli, 2012) related to the action plans of on sustainable mobility and urban planning. The project (Fig. 2) received the certification of GREEN 5 and won first prize in the category of best performance in energy 2012 (New European Economy, 2012).





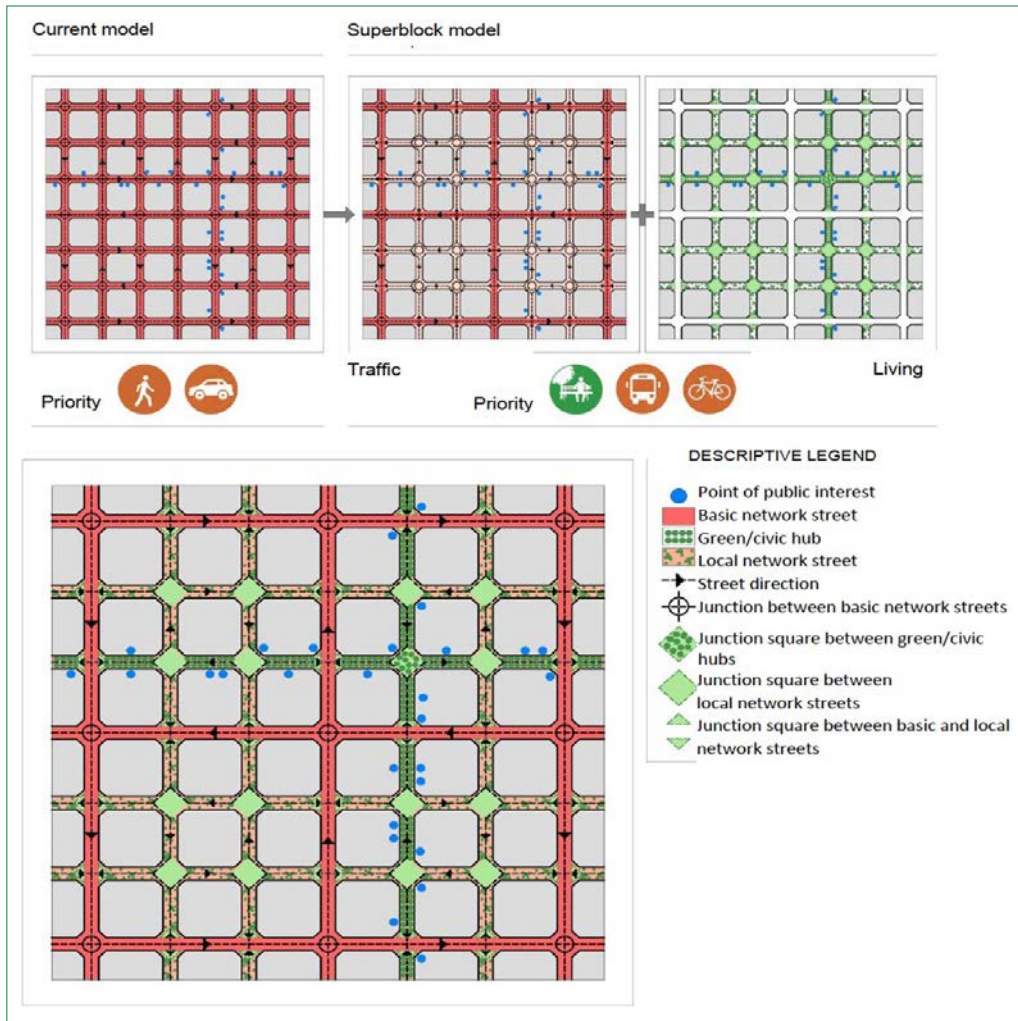


Figure 7. Superblock model (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016b).

Phase 2- Madrid Río Project (2007–2015): The river and its banks were transformed to a natural habitat (Fig. 4) for residents to enjoy with new recreational spaces and an environmental axis from Monte de El Pardo to Getafe were created (NYC Global Partners, 2012) according to the awarded project. The project has also won many awards so far such as the 12<sup>th</sup> Veronica Rudge Green Prize in Urban Design in 2015 and lastly Simon Architecture Prize Collective Places 2022.

### 3.3. Barcelona Superblock Project (2014-ongoing)

The Superblocks project, a collaborative effort between the Barcelona City Council and the Urban Ecology Agency, embodies an urban planning approach by creating Superblocks as territorial units in the Barcelona’s dense urban pattern grid. The superblock is composed of a set of basic roads forming an inner area with several blocks. The interior of this new urban cell is restricted to vehicles but open primarily to residents. The exterior constitutes the funda-

mental road network, spanning approximately 400 meters in width for the use of motorized vehicles (BCNecologia, 2022). The objective behind establishing these superblocks is to reclaim space for the public, conserve urban biodiversity, enhance sustainable mobility, and foster social cohesion and collaboration. The pilot program, spanning four years from 2014, aimed to implement five superblocks. The city council’s vision in executing this initiative was to create a city that operates in a more integrated, compact, efficient, and diverse (Joanneum Research-Life, 2022). For the case study, Poblenou in Sant Marti and Sant Antoni in Eixample Superblocks were analysed (Fig. 5-7). The first one, Poblenou Superblock received special mention at the 2018 European Prize for Urban Public Space.

The research methodology (Table 2) was designed to analyse the three dimensions of CEPSPD: legal, institutional, and political contexts; citizen participation processes; and public space design and implementation outcomes. The study uti-

**Table 2.** The methodology of the research: Dimensions, variables, and techniques to analyse CEPD in three cases in Spain (Author's elaboration)

Variables of dimensions related to community engagement in public space design		Data collection techniques	
Legal, institutional and political context	Legal framework	Review of the laws and regulations, strategies and action plans related to citizen participation and public space Analysis of the official web site of the municipalities Review of the academic literature	Interview questions 1. What are the challenges related to community engagement in public space design in Spain? 2. What are your recommendations to improve community engagement in public space design and to create quality public spaces in Spain? 3. What are your views about the governance, social, physical outcomes and public space quality of these projects? Please explain your answers with the reasons The Millennium Project, Valladolid, 2011 Madrid Rio Project, Madrid, 2015 Barcelona Superblock Project, Barcelona, 2014-ongoing
	Institutional structure Political context		
Citizen participation process	Resources and mechanisms Stakeholders and coordination methods	Analysis of the community engagement processes and tools of the municipalities from their websites Review of the academic literature Review of the official project websites Review of the digital media news	
	Local context Design team and the way of acquiring projects Design approaches Economic resources Construction methods	Review of the specifications about the competitions and jury reports on the awarded projects Review of the official project reports Review of the academic literature	
Outcomes	Governance outcomes Social outcomes Physical outcomes Public space quality outcomes	Review of the academic literature Review of the digital media news Observation at the project sites by using twelve quality criteria tool	

CEPSD: Community Engagement in Public Space Design.

lized a comprehensive approach, including a review of laws and regulations related to citizen participation and public space, analysis of official websites from three municipalities and their projects, literature review, and examination of digital media coverage. Physical and social analyses were conducted through site observations, supplemented by structured interviews with academics and officials in Spain focusing on CEPD. The analysis was conducted at both urban and case-specific scales, except for the national legal context due to Spain's decentralized governance structure. Spain's governance, established post-Franco dictatorship in 1978, comprises three tiers: the central government, 17 autonomous communities, and local municipalities. Autonomous communities hold significant political autonomy, with their regulations carrying legal weight (Keleş, 1993), par-

ticularly in spatial planning. Urban plans, however, are subject to national planning provisions (Erbay & Akgün, 2017). Since the cases spanned three autonomous communities, evaluation of legal, institutional, and political contexts for community engagement and public space design occurred at national and urban levels. Besides, the Spanish Constitution ensures citizen participation in decision-making through various processes, although the implementation methods can vary. These factors dictate the scale at which dimensions of CEPD were analysed, emphasizing the influence of regional autonomy and national guidelines on local governance and public space development.

For the case study in 2022, twelve interviews (Table 3) were conducted with academics and officials selected based

**Table 3.** The interviewee profile and the method of the interviews (Author's elaboration)

The cases	Interviewee profile	Affiliation	Number of the interviews	Type of the interviews and language	Processing way
Valladolid	Academics	University Institute of	3	Face to face-in English	Recorded and transcribed
		Urban Planning (UVa-IUU)	2	Written in Spanish	Translated to English
	Officials	Valladolid Municipality	3	Face to face-in Spanish	Recorded, transcribed and translated to English
Madrid	Academics	Polytechnic University of	1	Online-in English	Recorded and transcribed
		Madrid Higher Technical	1	Written-in Spanish	Translated to English
		School of Architecture (ETSAM)			
Barcelona	Officials	Barcelona City Council	1	Online-in English	Recorded and transcribed
		Barcelona Regional	1		

on their expertise in public spaces and community engagement, and their familiarity with the case studies examined. Over twenty emails were sent to arrange interviews with stakeholders from three cities, prioritizing those involved in relevant municipal departments. Due to logistical challenges, interviews were predominantly conducted in Valladolid. Notably, contacts in Madrid Municipality and Barcelona academia were difficult to reach, though one academic from ETSAM had extensive involvement in Madrid's governmental studies, and Barcelona officials were engaged in the Superblocks project.

The interview questions for the case study focused on exploring challenges, recommendations, and outcomes related to governance, social dynamics, physical environments, and public space quality within the framework of CEPSPD (Table 2). Interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online, lasting between 30 minutes to one hour each. A descriptive analysis approach was employed, organizing interview data around the outcomes of CEPSPD. Data analysis proceeded through three main stages: firstly, establishing the outcomes as primary analysis themes; secondly, meticulously processing, classifying, and sorting interview responses based on these themes; thirdly, selecting compelling examples from the data to illustrate and enrich these themes. Finally, interpretations and evaluations were drawn from the findings and interview insights (Baltaci, 2019). To assess public space quality across the three cases, the researcher visited project sites on two separate occasions (morning and midday), applying the twelve-point quality criteria tool developed by Gehl (2022). Each criterion -protection, comfort, and enjoyment- was rated on a scale from 1 to 3 points based on observed conditions. Therefore, the study aimed for a comprehensive evaluation of the dimensions and outcomes of CEPSPD, drawing insights from perspectives across municipality, academia, media, and the researcher's own observations.

## 4. Results And Discussion

### 4.1. Legal, Institutional, and Political Context About Community Engagement and Public Spaces in Spain and the case of Valladolid, Madrid, and Barcelona

The evolution of citizen participation in Spain is linked to the modernization of the legal regime and public administrations (Pérez González, 2013). Regarding the legal framework, the Spanish Constitution of 1978 recognizes participation as a fundamental right of citizens and as a duty of public institutions. While governments are not legally required to promote participatory processes in public decision-making, the implementation of such initiatives largely depends on the willingness of the governments. Nevertheless, since the 2000s, various levels of government have embraced participatory measures, regulations, and legislation as significant tools for fostering participatory processes. A noteworthy example is the Law of Measures for the Modernization of the Local Government (2003), which mandates municipalities to implement a range of participatory mechanisms and processes: an advisory city social council, participatory budgets, better communication channels with citizens taking advantage of ICTs, suggestions and claims commissions for the defence of the neighbours, petitions and popular consultations, etc. (Borge et al., 2008). In 2011, Spain became a member of the Open Government Partnership, prompting a transformation in its institutional structure towards a governance culture that advocates for the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability, and engagement with stakeholders (Administración General del Estado, 2022). Thus, many ministries and city councils try to provide citizen participation which mostly means public consultation. In some cities, there are also participation bodies such as councils or commissions to promote active involvement of citizens and to protect the participation rights of citizens. However, the effectiveness of community engagement processes change according to the autonomous communities and the city councils. Related to

the case study, when the legal and institutional structure on community engagement in Valladolid, Madrid, and Barcelona city councils are examined, it can be seen that they have also the required participation regulations, citizen participation departments and participation bodies.

In terms of legal framework about public spaces, White paper on Sustainability in Spanish urban planning defined criteria to foster the diversity, quality and versatility of urban public spaces and to integrate participation into planning (Ministry of Housing, 2010). Also, the three cities have been developing many strategic and action plans related to creating sustainable mobility and city, increasing citizen participation, providing gender equality, designing welcoming and accessible public spaces and preventing climate change to provide sustainable development goals. Accessibility Order in Urbanized Public Spaces was the first state regulation established basic criteria of universal accessibility in public spaces in 2010 (updated in 2021) (Ministerio de Transportes, Movilidad y Agenda Urbana, 2021). In 2022, the Law on the Quality of Architecture which aims to protect, promote and disseminate the quality of architecture of buildings and public spaces was approved (Congreso de los Diputados, 2022). Recently, some guidelines have been published for planning healthy cities which recommend design of meeting and coexistence spaces for all with citizen participation (Fariña et al., 2022). Related to the case study, it can be seen that the urban regulations of these cities have specific parts including articles/catalogues related to types, design qualities, technical standards, types of interventions and vegetation conditions of squares and pedestrian spaces. Madrid has also Instructions for the Design of the Public Roads and Barcelona has municipal regulations such as Ordinance on the Use of Roads and Public spaces and also has technical prescriptions for urban space for professionals.

In terms of political context, the 15M Movement (Anti-austerity Movement) in 2011 and 2012 was a strong outburst in which thousands of citizens took to the streets in Spain, demanding better democracy, through increased transparency, accountability and participation. Although the immediate impact of the 15M Movement was limited, the local elections of 2015 brought about substantial changes in numerous city councils. Even municipalities governed by right-wing parties seized the opportunity to promote participation by opening up institutions, to answer the citizens' demands. Despite the strong digital development in the new local governments, there exists a weak culture of participation, attributed to numerous legal and political barriers to political engagement (Peña-López, 2017).

In the context of the case study, since the 2010s, political parties in Spain have shown evolving approaches to citizen participation as reflected in their electoral programs. The People's Party (PP, a center-right party), which held power nationally

from 2011 to 2018 and locally in Valladolid (1995–2015) and Madrid (2003-present), initially emphasized participatory programs aligning with broad citizen interests. However, by their next electoral program, participation was notably absent (Partido Popular, 2008; 2011). During Convergence and Union's (CiU, a center-right party) tenure in Barcelona from 2011 to 2015, their electoral program highlighted democratic regeneration and empowerment of civil society in public life, advocating for citizen-driven initiatives and participation freedoms (Convergència i Unió, 2011). Barcelona en Comú, a left-wing party governing Barcelona since 2015, prioritized open democracy and collective intelligence in decision-making, aiming for less bureaucratic, more effective governance responsive to residents' needs (Barcelona en Comú, 2015). Following the PP's tenure, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE, a centre left party), which regained power in Valladolid and nationally from 2018, outlined plans in their 2019 electoral program to enhance democracy through increased participation, transparency, and citizenship education. They proposed a Code of Good Practice to guide NGO and civil society involvement in policymaking (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, 2019). These shifts illustrate a trend toward more inclusive and participatory governance models across Spain's political landscape since the 2010s. Each party's approach reflects evolving attitudes towards citizen empowerment, transparency, and responsiveness in public administration.

#### 4.2. Citizen Participation Processes in the case of Valladolid, Madrid, and Barcelona

Today citizens have digital tools that enable them to publish any thought, or suggestion, interacting with public administrations and other people on an equal level. Spanish local councils have been very active with regard to developing online citizen participation platforms for such as Decide\_Madrid (since 2015) and Decidim. Barcelona (since 2017). With these tools, the councils enable local residents to decide how to spend their money, whilst others have consultations about how to rename a street or what option to choose to redevelop a public square (Ministerio de Política Territorial y Función Pública, 2018). In 2021, the School of Citizen Participation (ACTUVA) was founded as a novel initiative aimed at providing associations, groups and any interested person, all kinds of tools and resources to promote activities and projects of participation in Valladolid (Ayuntamiento de Valladolid, 2020). In a recent research, it is indicated that the informing phase of participation have been achieved in many Spanish cities. The research reveals that city governments' expressed intent to involve citizens in the plenary sessions of the city council, but also confirm that city governments are less concerned about soliciting opinions or engaging in discussions with citizens. It appears that their primary focus is on attaining legitimacy for their actions and minimizing agency costs (Rodríguez Bolívar et al., 2020).



Figure 8. Madrid Río Park project exposition and public information brochure (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, undefined).

Related to the case study, it can be said that the community engagement processes and instruments were very limited during the Valladolid Millennium Square project process at that time. The project was presented through a website, a model at the Town Hall, a monographic exhibition in a civic center and a public mailbox to get opinions only during the exhibition (Ayuntamiento de Valladolid, 2010).

The Madrid Río Park project faced initial obstacles due to a deficiency in comprehensive and reliable communication between the administration and the citizens. Then, due to the pressures, the community engagement processes and instruments were developed through a three-month citizens' outreach program. In 2009, various communication channels were implemented, including public meetings, (Fig. 8) dedicated websites containing comprehensive project-related information, mailbox and phone call services for handling individual inquiries, and the establishment of information centers (Perini, 2017).

Likewise, the Barcelona Superblock project encountered opposition from both political and societal domains in its initial stages. Later, with the community engagement processes and instruments which included open days, thematic

meetings, monitoring committee meetings in different phases and with the digital citizen participation platform Decidim.Barcelona, community was partly involved (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016a).

In terms of stakeholder types, a research, which analyses 145 Spanish local governments, show that factors such as the size of the municipality, population density, the age distribution of the population, and the educational levels of residents' influence citizen participation. The findings confirm that city governments are more inclined to encourage citizen consultation, engagement, and cooperation in areas where the population consists of medium to highly-educated individuals in Spain. Moreover, it is indicated that the cultural and generational gap regarding the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has been overcome, and all citizens are accustomed to utilizing ICTs for interactions with the government (Rodríguez Bolívar et al., 2020).

Related to the case study, it can be said that the participation and coordination of stakeholders were not almost provided during the Valladolid Millennium Square project process, it was mainly a top-down project as a result of the excessive



**Figure 9.** Poblenu Superblock Project Protest (Klause, 2018, Photo by Ferran Nadeu). Open Day for Evaluation and Proposals (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016).

desire of the mayor (Almonacid, 2013). At that time the citizen participation culture has not developed in the city yet.

In the Madrid Rio Park project process, many comments have been made about the dominant role of the mayor in the project and lack of institutional coordination and citizen participation (Flórez de la Colina, 2016). In the first phase of the development, public participation was entirely overlooked. The authorities avoided genuine debate and postponed legally required citizen information until after construction had begun, knowing that an open discussion and broad public involvement would hinder the mayor's ambitious plans (Margies, 2015). Despite the limitations, the Madrid Rio contest offered a democratic approach to selecting the best design idea for redeveloping Madrid's riverfront. Notably, throughout the children's ideas competition process, there was no direct interaction between the designers and children, nor between the designers and the jury. Furthermore, the municipality did not provide an evaluation of the competition or its outcome (Freutel, 2010). In 2010, a second phase of the Madrid Río Project began and stakeholders were invited to comment and participate in the expansion of the project. The city council focused on new public-private partnerships to include them in infrastructure development and in remodeling the buildings nearby in the later steps (NYC Global Partners, 2012).

During the Poblenu Superblock project in San Marti, the lack of sufficient communication with citizens was a significant drawback of the project. There were many oppositions, media attack, protests of local residents and resistance (Fig. 9), revolving around parking and cars and the cheap appearance (Duchêne, 2019). The other one, San Antoni Superblock project started with some lessons from the Poblenu Superblock. Significant efforts were provided for community engagement processes and instruments from informing to

consulting and involving. Many participatory studies such as workshops and promotion group, neighbourhood, and traders sessions and for action plans, preliminary and tactical urbanization projects, sidewalk and school environment projects, car parking, loading and unloading areas projects were conducted between 2017 and 2019 (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017). In all cases, it is concluded that citizen participation processes are evolving with the changing approaches of municipalities and the development of digital platforms.

#### 4.3. Public Space Design and Implementation Processes in Three Cases in Valladolid, Madrid and Barcelona

A recent study indicates that public space projects in Spain typically have well-defined urban forms; however, the pre-existing urban conditions play a crucial role. Accordingly, the success of a public space project is no longer depends solely on the expertise of the project design team and the material conditions of the intervention. Instead, it hinges on a range of contextual and strategic urban conditions that extend beyond the immediate responsibilities of the design team (Bambó Naya et al., 2023).

For the Valladolid Millennium Square project (Fig. 10), numerous criticisms have been directed at the architect's lack of responsibility in revising the dome. The dome has been deemed impractical for events due to the greenhouse effect it generates in summer, and there are concerns about inadequate infrastructure for the fountain and energy turbines. Additionally, the bridge's surface has been criticized for being slippery. The dome, in particular, has faced significant backlash due to its high initial cost, ongoing maintenance expenses, and additional costs incurred to address thermal issues after its implementation (Almonacid, 2013).



**Figure 10.** Millennium Square project.  
Ruiz-Geli, 2012.



**Figure 11.** Madrid Río Park first prized project (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2005) - The Book of Madrid Río children's and youth ideas contest (En Babia, 2005).

The Madrid Río Park project successfully achieved its aims and objectives. The master plan was developed through an international contest involving three architectural studios from

Madrid and a landscape studio from the Netherlands (Fig. 11). Despite the high mobility and internet use that facilitate the homogenization of public spaces through repetitive design

formulas often ignoring local context, as noted by Carmona (2010), the international idea contest for Madrid Rio Park was won by three Madrid-based Spanish architectural firms, chosen over renowned international architects (Margies, 2015). In addition, younger generations were also engaged through the Madrid Rio Children and Young People contest (Fig. 11), which led to the creation of the Madrid beach, now a major attraction in Arganzuela Park (Perini, 2017). On the other side, although the project (Fig. 12) was completed on time, it faced significant criticism for causing traffic congestion during implementation. The project's high cost, which led to city council debt and limited other investments, remains a major point of contention due to the perceived insufficient benefits to justify the expense (Rivas Sanz, 2013).

In the third case, it is noteworthy that Superblocks are not a recent concept in Barcelona; the first one was established in 1993 near a historic church in the Gràcia neighbourhood within the city centre. Encouraged by its positive outcomes, the initiative led by Rueda, then the director of BCN, aimed to expand the Superblock model and secured funding from the Barcelona government (Garfield, 2017). Despite its low cost, which was criticized, the project advanced. In September 2016, the Poblenou Superblock project was implemented, and following complaints and proposals, final mobility adjustments were made in early 2017, along with various actions to adapt the model in public spaces (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016a). For the Sant Antoni Superblock project (Fig. 13), a local design group was tasked with enhancing tactical urbanism to align with Barcelona's reputation as a design capital (De Boeck, 2021). In all cases, it is evident that public space design and implementation processes led to controversial discussions.

#### 4.4. Outcomes of the Three Cases in Valladolid, Madrid, and Barcelona

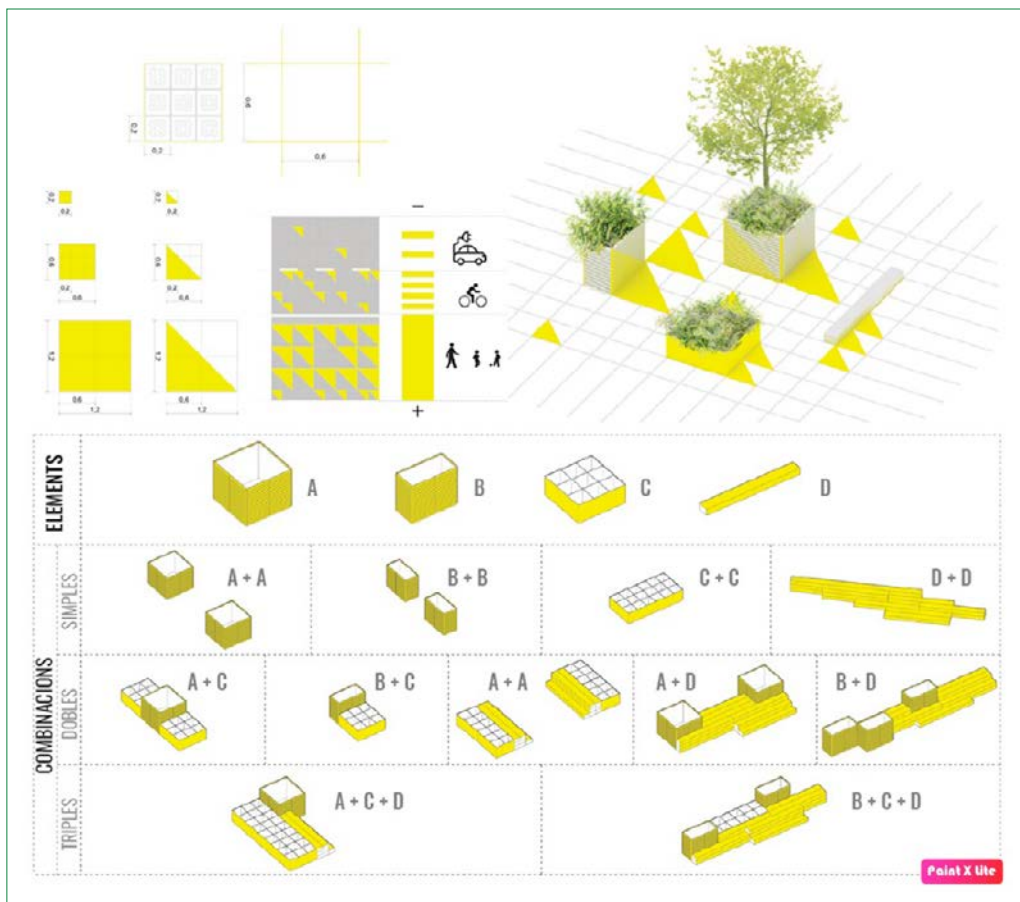
The outcomes of the three cases were evaluated through the literature research, observations of the researcher and the responses of the interviewees. For the governance outcomes, the findings suggest that the degree of Open Government development remains relatively low in Spanish local governments. Thus, there is considerable potential for enhancement in the future if local governments aim to actualize genuine citizen participation (Rodríguez Bolívar et al., 2020). Related to the case study, the governance of the Valladolid Millennium Square project can be defined as insufficient in terms of citizen participation process. According to the interviews, the governance of the project is seen negative as it is defined as an apriori decision and Mayor's project and it is criticized because of its high implementation cost. Madrid Rio Park project was also insufficient at the beginning, it started as a top-down project of the mayor, but then with the political pressures, community was partly engaged. According to the



**Figure 12.** Madrid Rio Park project sites map (Biennial Internacional de Paisatge Barcelona, 2014).

interviews, Madrid Rio project is also defined as an authoritarian project and it is so much criticized because of being the most expensive project in Spain so far. The Poblenou Superblock started as a top-down project with the eagerness of the city's political actors by taking ownership of the project and using it to push their own agenda (Klaue, 2018). In the San Antoni Superblock project, it seems that the City Council has improved its governance approach in favour of integrat-





**Figure 13.** Sant Antoni Superblock project concept.

IFLA Europe, 2020.

ing citizen participation from the beginning of the Superblock programme. According to some of the interviewees, the Superblock project is an urban marketing effort, while others think that governance in Barcelona is developing through effective participation. In addition, it is seen as an achievement with its moderate budget at the beginning, but today the new superblock projects are criticized because of their high budgets. It is emphasized that in Barcelona, tactical urbanism has been always fiercely rejected by architects, neighbours and also political forces who think it's like a cheap investment, which is not worthy of Barcelona.

For the social outcomes, Valladolid Millennium Square project has positive social outcomes as being an icon for Valladolid and hosting many events for social integration, but a Guggenheim effect expectation is too pretentious according to the scope and the scale of the project. According to the interviews, Millennium Square is seen positive in terms of social aspects. The interviewees thought that Valladolid has gained an iconic square with a lot of uses. Madrid Rio Project revealed positive results related to social aspects such as, supporting the most disadvantaged neighbour-

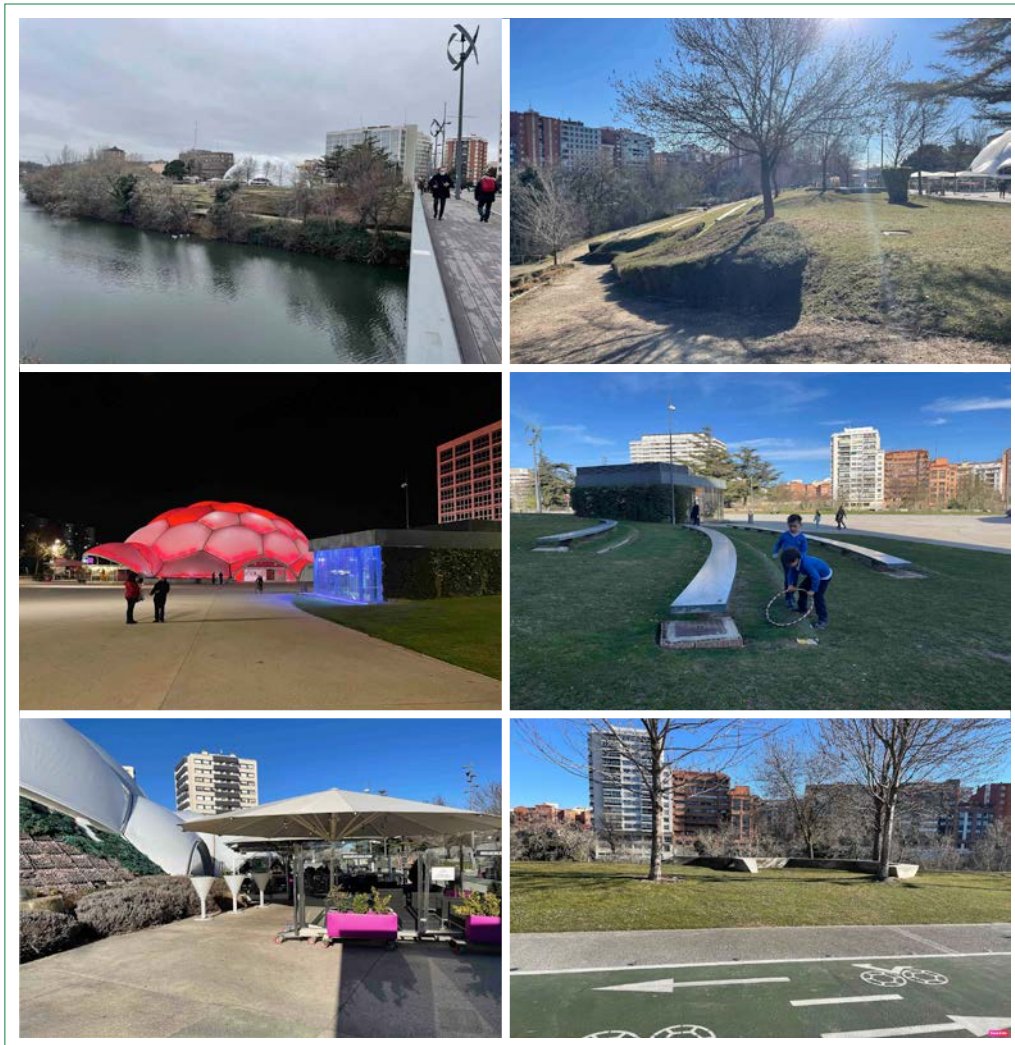
hoods, bridging communities, being an inclusive, and informal platform for various activities and healthier lifestyles, providing a catalyst for a better civic life, social cohesion and citizen appropriation, being a universal and local model. According to the interviews, Rio Park is seen positive in terms of social aspects. The interviewees thought that Madrid gained a great national and international echo. They also emphasized that the Rio project has linked different neighbourhoods and Madrid people are using this space a lot. With the Poblenou Superblock project positive social outcomes have been gained. It has become a highly symbolic project for the future of the city's public space, which provides more lively, calmer, safer and vital places for social interactions, but with the discussions related to lack of urban rights and causing gentrification (Pendle, 2020; De Boeck, 2021). With the San Antoni Superblock many positive social aspects have been gained such as quiet, comfortable, safe spaces for the neighbours with great satisfaction and appropriation (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2021; Duchêne, 2019). However, according to the interviews, Superblock project is criticized with causing gentrification problem while creating a more liveable city.

For the physical outcomes, creation of a new multiuse free public space with an expression of innovation was appreciated with the Valladolid Millennium Square project, but soon it became a current issue with its broken infrastructure systems and inadequate climatic comfort conditions and called as dome of thirst, the story of a waste, bottomless pit and false sustainability (El Norte de Castilla, 2014; Asua, 2013; Anonym, 2012). According to the interviews, the Millennium square is seen as a conventional project with a mixture of success and failure. Even it is seen as a small-scale project, it is accepted as a part of green system along the Pisuerga river in Valladolid. Most of the interviewees see the dome useless and criticized broken technical systems, bad acoustics, poor landscape and pedestrian spaces, it is not seen as a sustainable project. For the Madrid Rio project, integration of different parts of the city by a green corridor, revealing the micro-climatic potentials of the Manzanares River, generating a better mobility for pedestrians, increasing green and public spaces ratio are the most prominent physical results, (Garrido, 2015; Flórez de la Colina, 2016), however long tunnels for drivers and shallow soil depth for the trees are the negative sides of the project (Corkery & Hernando, 2012). According to the interviews, the Rio Park is seen as a controversial project, as there are certain positive elements in the project, such as generating an urban green system in Madrid, providing recovery of the River, creating new spaces for leisure and contributing to the urban strategies of the city. Most of the interviewees think that M30 project was unnecessary. The half of the interviewees think that it can be a model to follow and Madrid can compete with Barcelona with this project. With the Poblenou Superblock, 75% of the surface was freed from cars, with an increase in public space ratio and air quality. However, some limitations for loading and unloading times emerged, drivers began to take a more roundabout route. In any case, the intervention was not a failure. Beyond being a typical urban regeneration endeavor, the Poblenou Superblock can be viewed as a cultural product embodying a commitment to fostering more equitable and sustainable mobility. This commitment serves as a response to urgent issues such as spatial injustice, poor air quality, and climate change. In this context, the first pilot project has played a pivotal role to open the way for subsequent superblocks in Barcelona (Bravo, 2019). With the Sant Antoni Superblock, an axis-based approach was developed to mitigate the substantial inequality between inside and outside of the superblock. While public spaces for relaxing and socialization are increasing, noise and air pollution decreased. However, the realised perpendicular axes are still limited in proportion to the entire district (De Boeck, 2021). Consequently, over the past five years of Superblock implementations, the city has undergone an iterative process. This evolution spans from the Superblock archetype to the establishment of green axes, from simple

street paintings to sophisticated branding of tactical urbanism, from tactical urbanism to the creation of high-end walkable streets, and from predominantly top-down decisions to an increased emphasis on participation (De Boeck, 2021). According to the interviews, Barcelona Superblock project is criticized because of its urban strategy. It is stated that old principles are repeated and the Superblock project offer nothing for sustainable mobility, but it is seen suitable for compact cities. It is thought that it cannot be a model for Barcelona's other neighbourhoods and suburbs which are not planned with a grid system as Eixample. Traffic calming in favour of pedestrians and potentials of tactical urbanism are emphasized as the good sides of the project. Thus, Superblock projects are seen positive, as they created more green areas to rest, more space for playing.

For the outcomes related to public space quality, the researcher observed that the Valladolid Millennium Square and the playground are usually empty except special event days, but the dome is used for many social events and is one of the symbols of the city. It seems to be a qualified public space which mainly provides comfort criterions, but has some drawbacks related to the criteria of protection and enjoyment (Fig. 14). According to the interviews, the Millennium square is seen a relevant space, but not adaptive to climate. Madrid Río can be defined as an urban park accessible to all people regardless of their physical, mental and sensory characteristics. It offers positive aesthetic experiences with comfortable public spaces equipped with different kind of urban furniture, however it does not take advantage of local climate conditions and safety precautions and not provide human scale in some parts of the park (Fig. 15). According to the interviews, in Rio Park people enjoy walking and doing exercise, but air pollution does not decrease by taking cars underground. The Poblenou Superblock offers more comfort than protection and enjoyment to its users. The pedestrians have the priority in the district, but lack of safety feeling, human scale, climate control elements in some spaces can be disturbing in the district (Fig. 16). The Sant Antoni Superblock seems as a qualified public space which offers protection, comfort and enjoyment to its users. The only problem is that the landscape elements and street furniture seem a bit worn and graffiti decrease the positive sensory experiences (Fig. 17). According to the interviews, Superblocks are presenting many activities, but also safety problems for pedestrians because of the high speeds of cars.

When the results of the analysis and the answers of the interviewees are compared, it can be seen that the results overlapped for the Valladolid Case. For the Madrid and Barcelona cases, the dimensions related to governance and social outcomes also matched. However, interviewees seem more optimistic about the physical outcomes of the Madrid and Barcelona cases according to the literature review results. This



**Figure 14.** Millennium Square.

Author archive, 2022.

may be related to the interviewee profile as the interviewees who do not live in Madrid or Barcelona and visited the project sites a few times, delivered more positive opinions about the physical outcomes. Thus, these results present the significance of the CEPSPD, as the local people experience and know the problems or deficiencies of the project sites much more than the outsiders. During the interviews additional to the cases, the challenges related to CEPSPD in Spain were also asked. The answers were also categorized according to the dimensions and outcomes of CEPSPD.

Challenges related to the legal, institutional, and political context in Spain include the lack of structural or regulatory bases that guarantee a minimum quality in public space projects and the prevalence of judicial processes opened against public space transformations. There is also a poor institutional culture regarding participation, a tradition of speculative urbanism and developmentalism, and the short-sightedness

of public administrations. Additionally, these challenges are compounded by intrinsic characteristics of Spanish culture.

Challenges related to citizen participation processes in Spain include the use of participatory mechanisms according to the importance of the projects and a general perception of not having successful processes in designing public spaces in Spain. There are also opposite or different public space policies in different Spanish cities and very insulated design processes within municipalities that lack contact with other stakeholders. Additionally, there is a difficulty in coordinating the agents involved in the process, poor communication between administrations and departments, and insufficient rates of participation, including a lack of stakeholder, citizen, or user involvement. Other challenges include a lack of public awareness, citizen resistance to change, the presence of effective and hard-to-convince lobbies in urban decisions, being under attack by the media, and the difficult reconciliation of various interests.



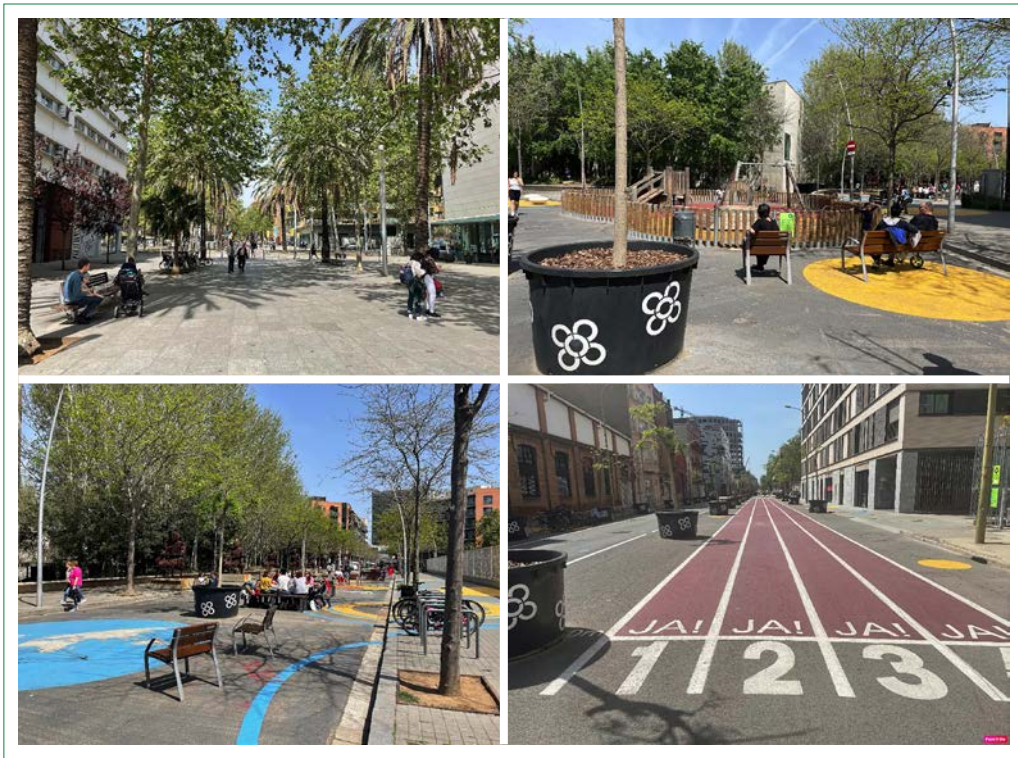
**Figure 15.** Madrid Rio Park.

Author archive, 2022.

Challenges related to public space design and implementation processes in Spain include the destruction of city centres, a lack of intervention, hyper-design such as an excess of design on waterfronts, and the touristification of historic centres in big cities like Barcelona and Madrid. There is a lack of an overall vision for all public spaces, and city councils often undertake projects that are not well considered, focusing heavily on economic and technical issues with a priority on easy maintenance. Teenagers are often forgotten in the design of public spaces, and scant attention is paid to pedestrians. Solutions tend to be standardized with little focus on innovative functional or environmental aspects, prioritizing urban-architectural aesthetics over functionality. Additionally, there is a deficiency in bioclimatic urban design and landscaping-gardening culture.

Challenges related to the outcomes of public space projects in Spain include a disparity between municipalities' implementations and public expectations and complaints from traders and residents about pedestrianization. There is also the issue of the mineralization of the city, especially in historic areas, and pavements are often not widened due to old trees that cannot be cut down, resulting in wrong trees being placed in wrong locations and excessive lighting leading to light pollution.

When the answers of interviewees were compared, the academics especially emphasized the lack of environmental design issues and participatory approaches, officials from the municipalities pointed out more technical issues related to implementation, stakeholder coordination, media and effec-



**Figure 16.** Poblenou Superblock.

Author archive, 2022.



**Figure 17.** San Antoni Superblock.

Author archive, 2022.

tive lobby pressures and the use of judicial power. Actually, they can be accepted as the causes of the challenges in three cases. Thus, to overcome the community engagement challenges in public space design in Spain a set of recommendations were presented as a conclusion.

## 5. Conclusion

The cases in this study are prominent public space projects in local, national and international arenas, as they have had many achievements and failures starting from the beginning to the end of the project processes. Thus, it was important to take the recommendations of the interviewees to be successful in public space design process in Spain, as community engagement and quality public spaces are important issues to adapt sustainable development goals and to create more sustainable and healthier cities today. The recommendations were also categorized in three dimensions of CEPSP and summarized as below:

To strengthen legal, institutional and political contexts in Spain;

- A delimiting planning and new guidelines for the management of uses and protection of public spaces.
- A strong political and public commitment, an agreement between all political forces and public actors.

To develop citizen participation processes in Spain

- A good budget.
- Conducting public processes and participation under their own rhythms without media pressure.
- Taking all opinions into account, evaluating and balancing public opinions according to results of public surveys.
- A good gear of the different public administrations, good articulation and integration between different municipal departments in the development and supervision of the projects.
- Technicians with responsibility, good training and update of participation concepts and techniques.
- High public awareness, with the implication of the different stakeholders.

To enrich public space design and implementation processes in Spain;

- Providing optimum density and liveability.
- Being designed by professionals with relevant qualifications and demonstrated expertise.

- Organizing open contests to decide the project of specific public spaces by inviting local offices of architects and studios, instead of developing the project on its own with the municipal office.
- Planning all actions in all public spaces with the observation of the needs of the area they serve, and the connections with other public spaces. Knowing the local conditions, the needs of the neighbours, the user perspective.
- Favouring pedestrians and letting people spending time there by favouring commerce and leisure.
- Incorporation of traffic calming measures to improve the quality of spaces.
- Designing shaded streets.
- Developing strategies to avoid unwanted users in public spaces and to fight against gentrification.

As it is seen, the recommendations of interviewees were various, the academics emphasized the need for design contests, good budget, responsible technicians, optimum urban density and liveability, design that favour pedestrians, while officials pointed out the need for political and public commitment, right management of media pressure and public opinions and strategies to avoid gentrification, also they both mentioned the necessity of more regulatory and institutional structures, coordination of municipal departments, public awareness, understanding local conditions and cultural characteristics.

As a conclusion, with the strong emphasis on citizen participation and public space quality in international references to reach sustainable cities, laws, regulations and strategies related to citizen participation and also quality of architecture (including public spaces) are being revised in Spain. Today, a large number of municipalities are trying to develop their internal/external structures and mechanisms to improve community engagement processes with the help of digital technology. However, it is still difficult to catch a quality standard in citizen participation processes in public space design as it is seen in these cases. Therefore, this analytical framework, which defines dimensions and variables to analyse CEPSP, can be useful for municipalities to conduct a self-assessment to identify their competences and deficiencies in this area. It can also be further developed in future studies to align with new approaches to citizen participation and public spaces. In addition, understanding national, urban, and local contexts is crucial as the type of public spaces influences the requirements, scope, and methods of CEPSP. Increasing public awareness related to citizen participation and public space design are also significant factors for enhancing citizen participation and the quality of public spaces. In this respect, it is obvious that there is still a need

for tools and models to guide municipalities to facilitate participatory public space design and citizen participation education programs to create public places for all.

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