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Ana Ruiz-Varona

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## European urban culture, Javier de Mesones-Cabello's planning practice and its legacy in city of Valladolid

Ana Ruiz-Varona 

Department of Urban Planning, San Jorge University, Zaragoza, Spain

### ABSTRACT

Javier de Mesones-Cabello was an influential and active planner of the 1960s and 1970s in Spain, who passed away in December, 2016. His professional career as a self-taught urban planner was extensively linked to his academic and institutional activities. These connections supported the establishment of relationships with prestigious professionals working in urban planning practice. In planning the 1969 masterplan for the city of Valladolid, in Spain, de Mesones-Cabello made several intellectual references to the Greek urban planner Doxiadis. This masterplan covers a relatively unknown example of directional city growth in a European context. My findings elucidate the extent to which de Mesones-Cabello was influenced by Doxiadis, and the circumstances in which these ideas have continued to dominate thinking about Valladolid's urban development.

### KEYWORDS

*Dynapolis*; theory of communities; Spanish urban culture; unidirectional growth; de Mesones-Cabello; Durán-Lóriga; Alonso-Velasco

### The role of Javier de Mesones-Cabello in the Spanish urban planning milieu

Javier de Mesones-Cabello (1932–2016) was an influential planner who operated in Spain during the 1960s and 1970s (Figure 1). He studied in the School of Architecture in Barcelona in the mid-50s and up to the final years of his career he stood out as a successful opportunity seeker. In fact, he soon held professional leadership positions.<sup>1</sup> His professional career was extensively linked to his institutional activity and by the end of 1980s he had already been a senior member of the Spanish Institute of Local Administration Studies (IEAL), the Spanish Association of Urban Planners (AETU), the European Council of Town Planners (ECTP) and the international Society of City and Regional Planning (ISOCARP-AIU). In the latter he served as a president from 1991 to 1993.

These connections between his role as a principal architect and his academic and institutional activities cannot be ignored in understanding the works that he developed. In conjunction, de Mesones-Cabello's easy-going character and the role of international consultant that he attempted to play enabled him to establish relationships with prestigious professionals in urban planning practice, and others in the state administration and private sectors, such as Juan Manuel Alonso-Velasco, Miguel Durán-Lóriga (1928–1997) or Konstantinos A. Doxiadis (1913–1975).

**CONTACT** Ana Ruiz-Varona  [nruiz@usj.es](mailto:nruiz@usj.es)

<sup>1</sup>Figuerola, *Medida y Memoria*, 399, 415.

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**Figure 1.** Javier de Mesones defends the masterplan to the Minister of Housing, Vicente Mortes Alfonso. Source: Figueroa, 2000.

Alonso-Velasco worked together with de Mesones-Cabello on several urban plans. He was a well-recognized architect who worked for the Spanish Ministry of Housing. In 1969 he published in the Spanish journal, *Ciudad y Territorio*, a study that would be applied as a reference to urban design plans of that time. A few years before, in the early 60s, Durán-Lóriga had conducted a detailed study of the new design criteria for the neighbourhood units (published in the *Theory of Communities*). He also collaborated with de Mesones-Cabello on an entry for in a masterplan competition. Doxiadis was invited to contribute to a number of prestigious Spanish urban planning competitions, including in Madrid, Guipúzcoa and Valle de Asúa in the 1960s. In those years Doxiadis would have met Alonso-Velasco and Durán-Lóriga would have worked with him, but it was de Mesones-Cabello who became his partner as a board manager at the Spanish office of Doxiadis Iberica for a short period of time.

The aforementioned relationships explain the intellectual references that de Mesones-Cabello later included in his planning practice and to which he clearly referred in several of the masterplans and detailed plans that he developed during the late 1960s and early 70s. In particular, these connections merged together and were most apparent in his 1969 masterplan for Valladolid city. Moreover, this masterplan covers a relatively unknown example of directional city growth in a European context.

The study of this masterplan evidences how de Mesones-Cabello incorporated their approaches to the urban development of the city. My findings show the extent to which he was influenced by these references, and the circumstances in which these ideas have (or have not) continued to dominate thinking on Valladolid's urban development.

### **The 1969 masterplan for Valladolid**

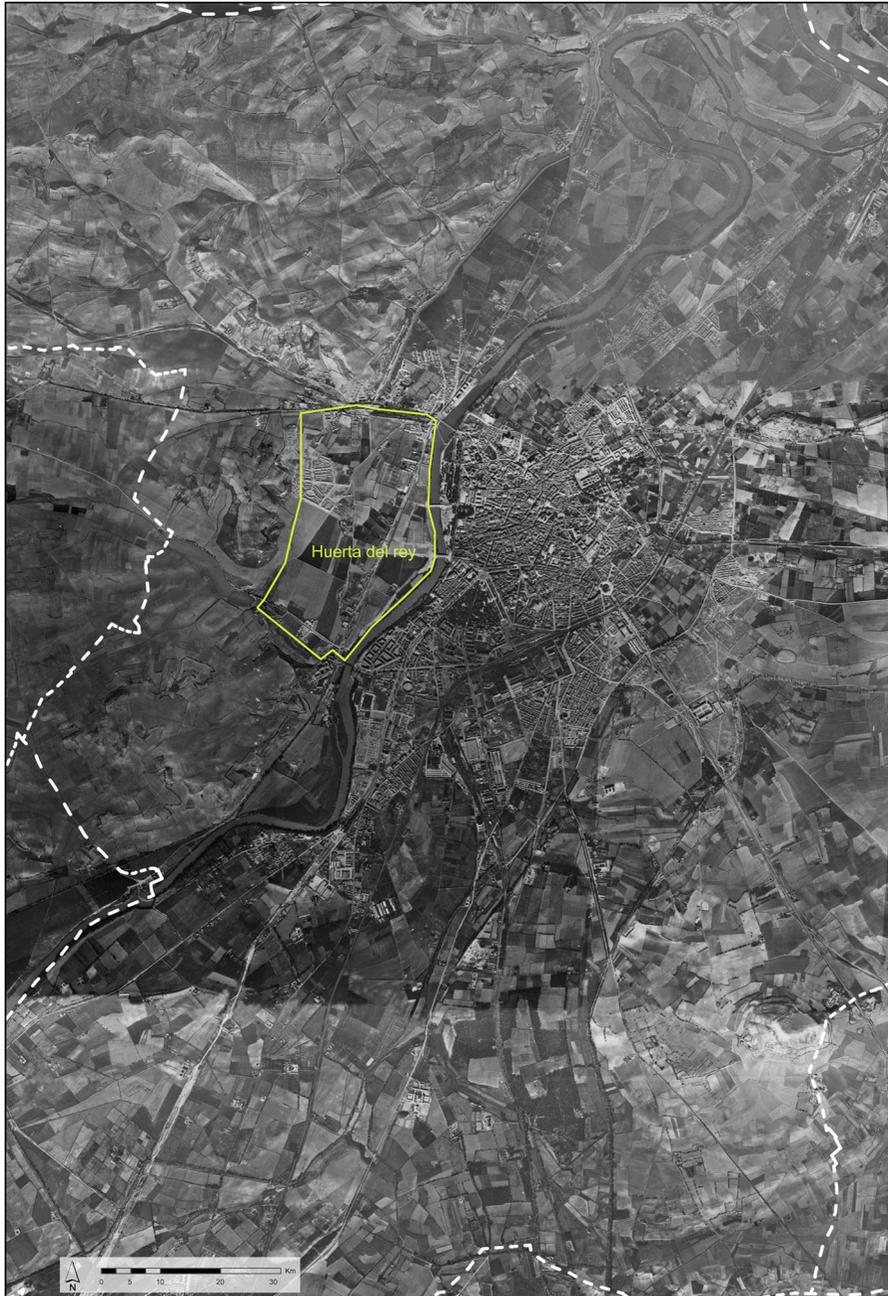
With a population of 300,000 inhabitants, Valladolid is currently the thirteenth most populated Spanish municipality. It is also the capital of the autonomous region (NUTS 2) of Castile and Leon. As one of the main industrial centres in the region, it enjoys a strategic position as a communication and infrastructure hub for the northwest of Spain. Valladolid is a remarkable example of a



**Figure 2.** Orthophotography of Valladolid, present situation. Context of the city regarding the province (NUTS 3) at the national scale and the 12 municipalities included in the 1969 Plan Comarcal at the regional scale. Source: National Geographic Institute and the author.

medium-size Spanish city (Figure 2). Two main episodes define the contemporary urban history of the city: the transformation of the core of Valladolid based on the arrival of the railway to the city in 1860, and the extension of the city from one side of the river to the other in 1959.

In contrast to other Spanish cities, the urban model followed in the last decades of the XIXth was not based on an expansion plan. Indeed, in the first half of the XXth, a few planning projects show that Valladolid's population had outstripped the urban capacity of the



**Figure 3.** Urban development of Valladolid previous to the approval of the 1969 masterplan. Flight made by the Army Map Service, USA (January 1956-November 1957). Source: National Geographic Institute.

city.<sup>2</sup> At a time when last functionalism defined the European urban planning scene, the accelerated urban growth of Valladolid, like that of many Spanish cities, led to the proliferation of some informal settlements and the development of *Polígonos de viviendas* (from the National Housing Plans) that characterized the periphery of the city (Figure 3). It was not until 1956 that the National Planning Act introduced two important tools into Spanish urban planning practice: urban plans played a key role in the expansion of the city, in the same way that masterplans defined the urban structure of the city. The majority of urban projects were now no longer based primarily on the transformation of the urban fabric (through Interior Reform Plans, Ordinances and Building lines) but on the growth of the city through the addition of new residential areas.<sup>3</sup> The 1969 masterplan for Valladolid, the city's first, was requested in 1963 when the local government needed to update its planning tools in conformity with the 1956 National Planning Act.

De Mesones-Cabello led the team of three architects that was in charge of the development of the masterplan. The area of study was already known by de Mesones-Cabello because in 1959, the same year that CIAM was dissolving with one last meeting held in Otterlo, he took part in the *Huerta del Rey* international competition on the urban development of a newly planned residential area (250 hectares) (Figure 3). The proposal that he presented was not selected but he had the opportunity to meet Manuel Cortés-Pérez, one of the architects who had won the competition and who would initially be part of the 1969 masterplan team, together with Durán-Lóriga.<sup>4</sup>

The team presented an analysis of the area covering 600 sq. km as a preliminary version of the 1969 masterplan for Valladolid.<sup>5</sup> There were several draft versions of the masterplan before it was finally approved in 1969. De Mesones-Cabello remained in charge of the project as the team changed. Durán-Lóriga and Cortés-Pérez left the project and Rodrigo Baeza-Seco, a civil engineer and delegate of the local administration in Madrid, joined the team in his place.

Some of the difficulties that they had to address concerned land use mismatched with regard the road network plan approved by the Ministry of Public Works (1966-1969) and the industrial development zone defined in the Economic and Social Development Plan (1968). The delay on the final approval promoted the inclusion of 12 municipalities around the central city in the 1969 masterplan and it became a *Plan Comarcal* concerned with both the local and the regional scale. However, the masterplan did not consider the idea of poli-centrality and the interest was specifically concentrated on the city of Valladolid (Figure 4).

## The intellectual references applied to the masterplan

A first approach to the masterplan supports the statement that Mesones-Cabello referred to *dynapolis*, and translated this concept from Doxiadis, in the planning of the city in a linear fashion. Doxiadis referred to the transformation of a concentric city into a dynamic one, and urban parabolic growth, following a system of rectilinear axes. In this regard, he conceived of the *dynapolis*, the city of the future, as a one capable of overcoming any limits to its spread, due to the inclusion of a dimension ready to host new residential developments and urban centres. The *dynapolis* contrasted with concentric cities (also known as *static* cities, since the forces of the urban centre cannot grow in

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<sup>2</sup>García Fernández, *Crecimiento y estructura*.

<sup>3</sup>De Terán, *Historia del Urbanismo*, 226.

<sup>4</sup>Cortés et al., *Polígono Huerta del Rey*.

<sup>5</sup>de Mesones, *Plan General, avance*.



**Figure 4.** Variations on the 1969 masterplan considering southward directional growth and both directional growths. Source: Figueroa, 2000.

continuity and, consequently, their functional structure becomes altered),<sup>6</sup> and linear cities (a term which only corresponds to parts of cities, which have no central functions, and which do not therefore constitute true cities).<sup>7</sup> Central urban functions would not be disrupted but would instead expand parabolically, and the city's form would be shaped by rectilinear reference axes.<sup>8</sup>

The references to the Pisuegra River and Zorrilla Avenue support the potential southward directional growth of the city (Figure 4). The 1969 masterplan notes that 'residential development [...] consolidates this growth of the city, while providing a link to the core of the city, based on the definition of the main thoroughways'.<sup>9</sup> An ambitious road network was imagined and organized hierarchically at three different levels comprising intercity, urban and regional highway routes. This approach is informed by definitions of clustering structures, and the existence of a hierarchy in

<sup>6</sup>Doxiadis, *Ekristics*.

<sup>7</sup>Doxiadis, "On Linear Cities," 35–42.

<sup>8</sup>Doxiadis, *Architecture in*.

<sup>9</sup>de Mesones, *Plan General*.

the pedestrian and road systems that is related to the neighbourhood as the basic unit and super-block in the planning schemes of the late functionalism of Bakema and Van der Broek, Metabolist' organic organization of urban extension and Doxiadis' practice in the 50s and early 60s. An area of over 650 hectares was initially estimated to be able to accommodate a population increase of some 180,000 inhabitants, at a time when the city had 150,000 inhabitants.

This type of directional growth pattern was initially planned for the southern area of the city. But, between the draft and the final version the author included a westward extension of the city, bounded by the Pisuerga River and the inter-regional Helsinki-Lisbon highway (Figure 4). It was also referred to in the masterplan as directional growth.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, according to the content of the masterplan, this expansive strategy of growth southwards and westwards presents similarities with the notion of dynamic cities, as the model followed in the masterplan leads to the contiguous growth of the urban centre by creating a grid that covers the entirety of the land. However, the westward directional growth clearly represents a more irregular pattern because of the complex topography. Indeed, the only difference that the author mentions refers to the intercity highway as a limit to the directional spread.

De Mesones-Cabello also referred to the *Theory of Communities* developed by Durán-Lóriga. He provided a comprehensive analysis of community life and the urban standards that were necessary for supporting these residential developments.<sup>11</sup> The study was initially commissioned by the Spanish Planning Office in the early 60s, at the very time when Durán-Lóriga had been collaborating with Doxiadis in Athens. The *Theory of Communities* was ultimately published in the journal, *Temas de Arquitectura*, and later became a significant reference point for the Spanish planning milieu. It is linked to the Anglo-American experience over the course of the preceding decades,<sup>12</sup> and argues for a hierarchical urban structure based on self-sufficient urban neighbourhoods.<sup>13</sup> Its scheme of growth is related to Doxiadis' elaborate settlement plans as it refers to the definition of an urban module for the organization of social functions in the city. In this sense, Doxiadis's theory of the city of the future at a global scale overlaps with those of late functionalist approaches such as human association, mobile architecture, and pattern language. Despite the fact that one of the main criteria for its definition was based on the walking distance notion which had already been introduced by Clarence A. Perry, his main contribution points to the importance of time as the fourth dimension in the city expansion in the territory.

The Valladolid masterplan specified the estimated population for each of the urban neighbourhoods (20,000 inhabitants), their zoning (residential, industrial or public facilities) and planning standards (maximum 4.0 FAR, with a minimum of 1000 sq. metres per lot and a maximum density of 100 residences per hectare).<sup>14</sup> The aim of doing so was to locate public facilities at a central position for the 'implementation of the civic and commercial services that correspond to a dynamic city'.<sup>15</sup> However, the masterplan defined by de Mesones-Cabello only partially matches this pattern of clustering, not only because this hierarchical scheme was not applied to some extensions of the city, but also because it did not include other municipalities defining the future dynamic city at the regional scale.

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<sup>10</sup>de Mesones, *Plan General*, 16.

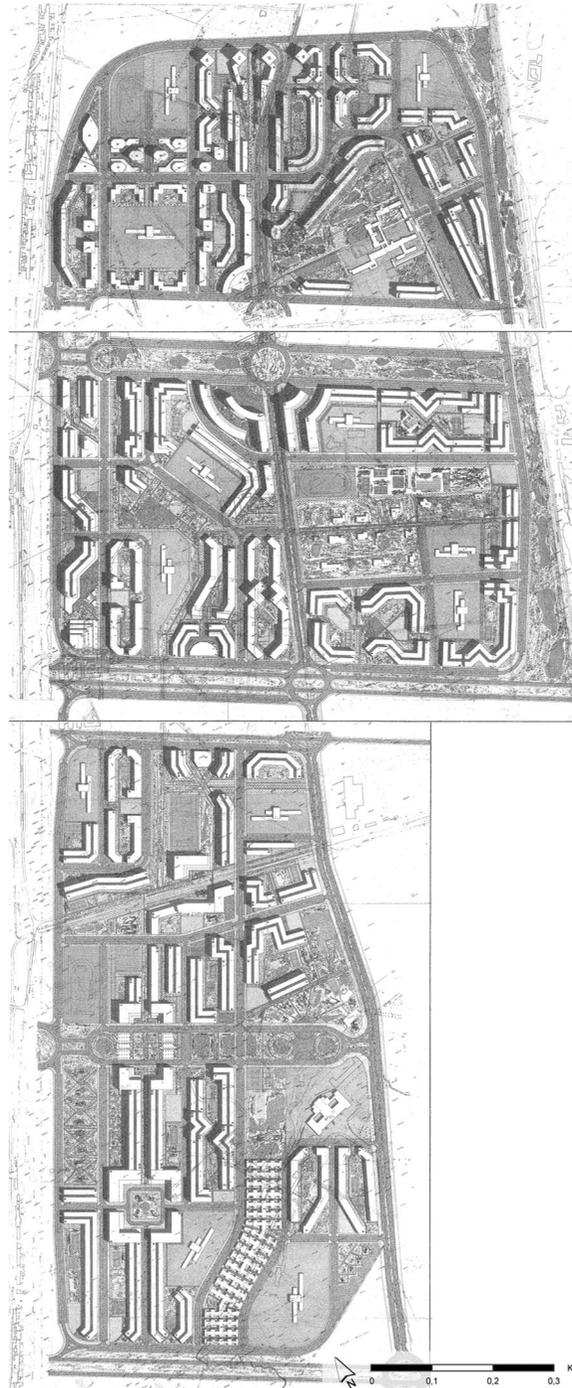
<sup>11</sup>Durán-Lóriga, "Planeamiento," 1.

<sup>12</sup>Sharp, *Town and; Sharp, Town Planning*; RPNY, *Neighborhood and; Alomar, Teoría de; and Alomar, Comunidad*.

<sup>13</sup>Durán-Lóriga, "Planeamiento," 4.

<sup>14</sup>de Mesones, *Plan General*.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 30.



**Figure 5.** Covaresa urban plan. Source: AMV.

## The effects of these ideas for the later development of the city

The need to update the 1969 masterplan (one of the last first-generation masterplans to be approved in Spain<sup>16</sup>) to conform to the new national regulatory framework – the 1975 National Planning Act<sup>17</sup> – and the delay with which this masterplan was implemented meant that it was not extensively applied. Nevertheless, these directional growths would come to decide the future real estate activity of the city, as the decade of the 70s was defined by the two most extensive residential proposals for the expansion of the city.

On the one hand, industrial activities and the railroad network were determining factors for the southward directional growth (Figure 5). It meant that the residential use would be referred to three main road axes (Rueda road, Cañada Real and Simancas old road) instead of following a radio concentric pattern of growth to give continuity to the extension of the city. From 1976 to 1978, real estate developers sought to promote new residential areas that were laid out initially in an area of 300 hectares. The Covaresa urban plan became the reference for the area, not only because of its size (200 hectares) but also because of the six urban-unit scheme that referred from the 1969 masterplan. Indeed, it was designed, in 1977, by the previously mentioned architect Alonso-Velasco. However, this proposal was not executed and it was modified and resized in accordance with the criteria set out in the later masterplan that was approved in 1984.<sup>18</sup> The adaptation of the urban plan gave priority to more enclosed urban blocks with private inner open spaces and the idea of a directional growth vanished.

On the other hand, the reference to the westward directional growth becomes a key point in order to clarify the interpretation that de Mesones-Cabello made of these contemporary references, as he was commissioned in 1974 to design the urban plan to develop the area of Parquesol (278 hectares). Interestingly, Alonso-Velasco was part of the team headed by de Mesones-Cabello (Figure 6). This ambitious private real estate initiative (12,000 residential units) was developed at a time when there was an intense demand for housing, even though it did not take social housing into consideration. In the 60s real estate agents started to acquire a large area of agricultural land that the 1969 Mesones masterplan intended for urbanization despite topographical irregularities in the area.

He proposed to give continuity to the core of the city through directional growth in which minimal units were identified and central functions were located close to Zorrilla Avenue, according to the theory of the dynamic city. However, there is evidence that this area was far from the core of the city, and even today this neighbourhood is poorly connected, and the definition of the super-blocks was dependent on topographical irregularities.<sup>19</sup> In this regard, de Mesones-Cabello believed that a ring road infrastructure might adapt better to those irregularities and priority was given to the circulation of vehicular traffic over pedestrian walking routes. This residential development provided an improved quality of the existent residential supplies (open blocks, easy vehicular accessibility and plenty of parking lots). A mixture of building typologies specified the use of the ground level as primarily private and the residential use was combined in medium to high-density open blocks, with multi-storey buildings and a large land area bound up in perimeter verges, in order to avoid the steepest zones.<sup>20</sup>

The very features that characterized the Parquesol urban plan were also subjected to certain adjustments, in accordance with the criteria set out in the updated 1984 masterplan. In 1989 the

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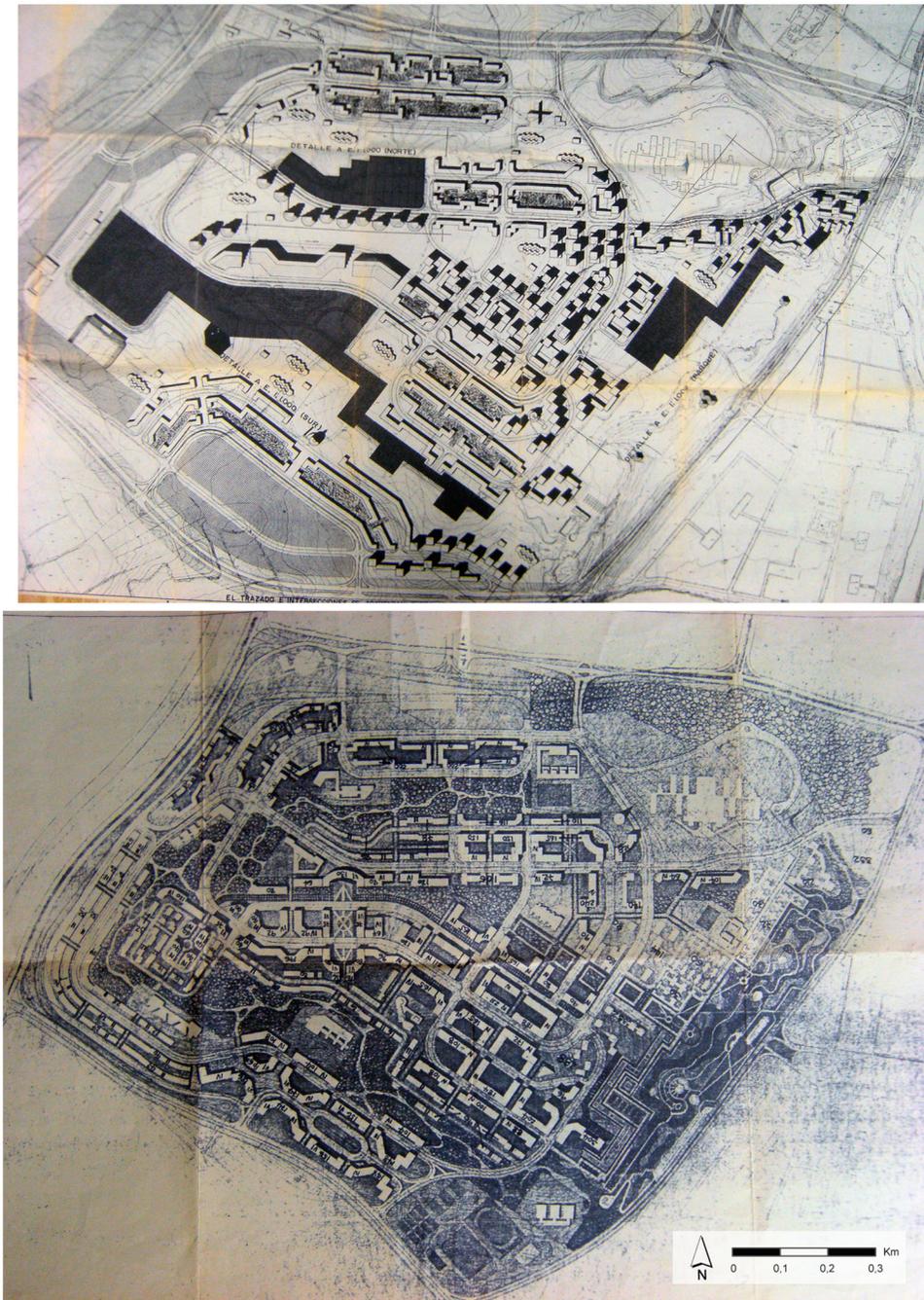
<sup>16</sup>De Terán, *Planeamiento urbano*.

<sup>17</sup>Ministerio de Vivienda, *Ley sobre régimen del suelo*.

<sup>18</sup>Ynzenga, "Luego y ahora"; and Ynzenga, *Adaptación y Revisión*.

<sup>19</sup>De Mesones, *Plan General*.

<sup>20</sup>UIASA, *Plan Parcial Parquesol*.



**Figure 6.** Parquesol urban plan and draft version. Source: AMV.

architect Alonso-Velasco was asked to present a revised proposal for the area.<sup>21</sup> He focused on the pedestrian scale, providing more continuity for public usage on the ground level, the floors of the

<sup>21</sup>Alonso-Velasco, "Equipo urbano," 24–35.

multi-storey buildings were reduced and collective housing was included in more enclosed urban blocks.<sup>22</sup>

### Mesones's legacy in the actual growth of the city

The 1969 masterplan was considered a turning point in the understanding of the urban growth of the city. Traditional concentric growth mutated into a dynamic notion of Valladolid and the increase in urbanized territory would eventually be twice the size of the urban core at a time when there was an intense demand for housing. This oversizing in the expected south and west urbanized areas became one of the most criticized issues.<sup>23</sup> Bernardo Ynzenga-Acha, the author of the 1984 masterplan of Valladolid, found that the update of the 1969 masterplan was an opportunity to fragment or resize the detailed plans in accordance with different urban criteria.

In terms of urban planning, the 1969 masterplan was behind the times in relation to the European scene, where these techniques were being replaced by other critical approaches. The analysis has revealed that the application of the ideas of *dynapolis* and the *theories of communities* in the planning of Valladolid was subjected to some interpretation and the formal scheme and the planning provisions of growth did not match the real expansion of the city. As a matter of fact, the subsequent masterplan recovers the concentric urban model established in the road network.<sup>24</sup>

There is also evidence that de Mesones-Cabello's role in this masterplan does not essentially refer to the accuracy with which he transfer the intellectual influences to the masterplan for the city of Valladolid. Instead, he become a reference in the European context and was able to connect recognized and avant-garde Spanish urban planners around the ideas of Doxiadis.

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### Notes on contributor

*Ana Ruiz-Varona* holds a Master's degree in Architecture and Town & Urban Planning (2007) from the University of Navarra, a Master's in Geographic Information Technologies for Planning (2015) from the University of Zaragoza and a PhD in Spatial Planning from the University of Navarra (2011). She is Certified Planner from the National Institute of Public Administration, Madrid (2014). In 2015 she was a Fulbright Fellow at the Department of Urban Planning and Social Welfare, UCLA. Her current research focusses on the relationship between history of urban and regional planning and urban policies to evaluate the current spatial segregation and territorial inequalities.

### ORCID

*Ana Ruiz-Varona*  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8807-4917>

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<sup>22</sup>Alonso-Velasco, *Proyecto de Adaptación Parquesol*.

<sup>23</sup>Solá-Morales, "Valladolid," 12.

<sup>24</sup>Gigosos & Saravia, *Arquitectura y Urbanismo*; Ruiz, *Valladolid, del*.

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