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THE NON OLYMPIC MADRID

EVALUATION
AND OUTLOOK

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The day before the kick off of the EUSS, all the local media were broadcasting the election of the city that would host the Olympic games of 2020. The mediatic display of the Madrid bid had gathered thousands of people on the streets, and the mayor of the city stressed the quality of public spaces and the leisure offer in Madrid. It did not occur to me at the time that there was a relationship with the EUSS course.

The reality the participants found was very remote from that 'would-have-been' olympic Madrid. The work did not focus on a beautified Madrid central area or the urban and architectural landmarks of the last ten years, although there was some of that too. For ten days we walked and researched unresolved urban and suburban environments in Madrid. The participants explored the speculative desert of the Southeast Developments, the lame design of the new neighbourhood of Vallecas and the vacant left over areas of Delicias.

Throughout the course the team of participants remained very critical about how things are supposed to be done or the way they have been done until now. And the debate was always active.

When the result of the workshops came together on the last day very diverse reflections were shown. But there was in all of them a positive approach. The following aspects were more or less common to all:

- Political message: putting the social in the picture, reusing existing conditions, enhancing communities.
- Identity: working bottom-up on the identity for the new neighbourhoods, in spite of mediocre oversized public spaces, claiming the urban realm for people that inhabit it and not just for speculative forces.
- Time: most importantly, allowing room for the future. Instead of throwing big ideas up that are self fulfilling, most of the work strived for open solutions that would let new things happen.

In this context, the olympic project comes up as an example of the opposite: a tailored urban utopia and a branded identity for the city. It represents the old toolkit. It reminds us of all the failed futures that shape our cities. But in the end the city survives planning. And this survival becomes the driving force for new inventive strategies. There was a final reflection from one of the participants who introduced the question of what is the role of the planner now. Far from having the answer to that, the course has been successful in bringing this transition forward.