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A LONG VIEW ON THE EUROPEAN URBAN SUMMER SCHOOL IN MADRID IN 2013

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EVALUATION AND OUTLOOK

Taking a long view from inception of the European Urban Summer Schools, EUSS in Madrid marked a natural progression along a steep learning curve. Initiated through AESOP - with Izabela Mironowicz as the creative driving force - EUSS

took off in 2010 with very high goals. In Wrocław Poland, nine projects on 'Urban change' were tackling the city as a whole, conceptually transforming specific districts, and making fine grain urban design proposals. A state-of-the-art publication supported by UN Habitat put EUSS on the global professional map. The theme of 'Urban change' ran through all the subsequent summer schools. They all focused on concrete sites while relating to time- and location-specific, often complex planning issues. They addressed 'quality of space - quality of life' in Lisbon, 'times of scarcity - reclaiming the possibility of making' in London, and 'strategies for the post-speculative city' in Madrid. Each EUSS took place in a large city, often a capital. Each had selected sites as a challenge to current planning wisdom which stretched the imagination of the participant young professionals. They delivered, in the very short time available, also in Madrid. A purpose of the EUSS publication series is to document these very rich and original contributions to pressing urban issues by young professionals from all over the world.

Madrid after the property market collapse was a great opportunity for young professionals to think about alternative urban futures while making concrete proposals for the given sites within realistic constraints. They came up with innovative ideas for a city unknown to most of them. The three adjacent sites, starting from the heart of Madrid and reaching the southeast fringe with progressively increasing scales confronted the participants with a large range of issues. They benefited from well balanced formal contributions from academics as well as practitioners and were tutored by academics with both practical experience and local knowledge.

Like at previous EUSS, the participants had diverse professional qualifications, came from a wide range of countries, and quickly found a modus operandi to harness their different cultural backgrounds and talents. Unlike at previous EUSS, they were not adverse to committing themselves to concrete solutions, albeit often of a transient nature, leaving more lasting options open for the future or to others. What was striking this time was their way of communicating. When working together

they tended to use their own digital implements, leaving face to face interaction to primal activities like sharing food during breaks.

Luck plays a part in such events. Madrid's weather was perfect for site visits and socialising in town after hours. This contributed to a convivial atmosphere despite heated discussions and differences of views. Many students appreciated the facilities they were able to use at the university and made themselves at home with pic-nicks to which they contributed homemade dishes originating in their various countries. This cultural richness had repercussions on the solutions the teams reached for their sites and also shaped the final presentations. All teams decided to share their presentations among all their members, putting solidarity before competitiveness. This made for lively moments with laughs alongside professional competence and gave me hope that planning is not a lost cause yet. EUSS showed that young professionals can give planning a new lease of life with a more shared and inclusive role, making it again the custodian of the common good. Hopefully, what the students experienced together in Madrid will be relevant and useful to them for their future professional tasks wherever they decide to carry them out next. Perhaps they choose to stay in touch and use their EUSS moment as a starting point of a global network of exchange and shared creativity.