

Urban management and policies in Europe

URBAN DNA: PARTICIPATORY URBAN REGENERATION IN MURCIA'S NEIGHBOURHOODS: URBAN ACUPUNCTURE, ERDF FUNDING AND EUROPEAN PROJECTION

A study in urban policy and citizen participation

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FOREWORD

Participatory urban regeneration occupies a central place in the contemporary debate on city policies, both in the academic sphere of urban planning and in that of local public management. The fundamental question — whether it is possible to transform a degraded neighbourhood not only physically but also socially and economically, genuinely involving its own residents in the process — runs through decades of critical urbanism, from Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) to Henri Lefebvre's *right to the city* (1968), and from Jaime Lerner's *urban acupuncture* (2003) to European good-practice exchange programmes such as URBACT. The Urban DNA project of the Municipality of Murcia inscribes itself in this genealogy with an explicit claim to methodological innovation: a model of rapid, participatory and integrated intervention in consolidated urban neighbourhoods, articulated around the recognition of the dis-

tinctive identity of each neighbourhood and the direct involvement of its residents in the design and execution of the actions.

This book takes as its object of study that project from its genesis — with an important antecedent in the urban regeneration experience of the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood developed between 2007 and 2013 — through to its consolidation as a strategic initiative of the Municipality under the Murcia 2020 City Strategy, and its subsequent European recognition through the URBACT Good Practices Label obtained in 2017 with the pilot experience of the Santa Eulalia neighbourhood. The interest of the case lies not only in its local results — the improvement of public space, economic reactivation, the strengthening of the associative fabric — but in its institutional projection as an exportable model of urban regeneration, recognised by the European



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URBACT network and co-financed at 80% by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the Sustainable Growth Operational Programme 2014-2020.

This book subjects the Urban DNA case to a triple contrast: with the international academic literature on participatory urban regeneration and urban acupuncture; with

the tradition of thought on the right to the city, citizen participation and social cohesion developed by authors such as Henri Lefebvre, Jane Jacobs and Jaime Lerner; and with the methodological standards of URBACT, the European urban knowledge-exchange network of which Murcia is a member. The result is a text that combines



the function of a case study with that of an introduction to some of the most relevant debates in contemporary urban policy: the tension between institutional intervention and neighbourhood self-management, the role of European funds in the regeneration of vulnerable neighbourhoods, and the question — never definitively resolved — of whether citizen participation models promoted by local administrations constitute genuine co-production of public policy or, as part of the critical literature suggests, forms of institutional legitimization of decisions that, in practice, continue to be made from above. The structure of the book reproduces, with the necessary adaptations, the one employed in the preceding book in this series on Murcia's Cultural Model: two chapters of conceptual framework and key references; one chapter of documentary reconstruction of the case; one chapter on the European framework; one chapter of critical analysis; and one chapter of conclusions and recommendations. This structure responds to a methodological conviction: that the rigorous analysis of a local public policy requires the systematic articulation of knowledge of the specific case with the conceptual framework that enables its

interpretation and the comparative framework that enables its evaluation. Readers who have read the first book in the series will find in this one a continuity of method that facilitates comparison between the two projects; those approaching Urban DNA without having read the previous book will find in this one an autonomous and complete introduction to the case.

Those seeking in these pages an unconditional defence of the Urban DNA model, or a destructive critique of it, will probably be disappointed on both counts. This book aspires, more modestly, to offer a careful reading of sources — municipal, European and academic — that enables readers to form their own informed judgement about a case that, beyond its particular merits or limitations, clearly illustrates the challenges that any participatory urban regeneration policy must face in the contemporary European context.



CHAPTER 1 | PARTICIPATORY UBRAN REGENERATION: GENEALOGY OF A CONCEPT

This chapter reconstructs the conceptual framework within which the Urban DNA project is situated, tracing back to the intellectual roots of participatory urbanism and community-based urban regeneration, before positioning the Murcia case in relation to European urban policy trends over the past two decades. The purpose is not merely erudite: understanding where the ideas that articulate Urban DNA come from — urban acupuncture, neighbourhood identity, participation as method — is indispensable for evaluating the extent to which the Murcia model innovates relative to its theoretical references, or applies them in a more or less faithful manner.

The chapter is organised around four intellectual traditions that converge, with nuances and sometimes with tensions, in the design of Urban DNA: the critique of functionalist

urbanism in the second half of the twentieth century, the claim of the neighbourhood as the privileged scale of intervention, the urban acupuncture paradigm, and the European approach to integrated urban regeneration. In the following chapters, these traditions are taken up systematically to analyse each of the components of the Murcia model.

1.1. The critique of functionalist urbanism: Jacobs, Lefebvre and the right to the city

The most influential critique of the large-scale, abstract and technocratic urbanism that dominated post-war urban reconstruction in Europe and America has two canonical references worth presenting together, despite their differences in approach: Jane Jacobs and Henri Lefebvre.

Jane Jacobs published in 1961 *The*



Death and Life of Great American Cities (Jacobs, 1961), a book that constitutes simultaneously a denunciation of the urbanism of working-class neighbourhood renewal and a vindication of the value of street life, mixed uses and the human scale of the neighbourhood against the mega-projects of urban renewal that were destroying historic urban fabrics. For Jacobs, the vitality of a neighbourhood does not depend on its architectural modernity but on the density and diversity of its activities and social relations: the pavement is the space where authentic urban life is produced, and any urban intervention that suppresses it — whether in the name of hygiene, traffic flow or modernist aesthetics — destroys what makes a city liveable (Jacobs, 1961). This vindication of the small scale, of the street and the neighbourhood as the basic unit of urban experience, is one of the most recognisable conceptual premises of the Urban DNA model, which, as will be shown in chapter 3, works explicitly with the identity of each neighbourhood and with its distinctive streets and squares as the starting point for interventions.

Henri Lefebvre formulated in 1968, at the height of the May 1968 ferment, the concept of the right to the city in his eponymous work (Lefebvre, 1968). For Lefebvre, this right is not limited to the right to reside or to access urban services, but expresses a broader claim: the right of inhabitants to transformed and renewed urban life, that is, the right to participate actively in the construction and management of the urban space they themselves inhabit. In its most radical formulation, the right to the city is a commitment to the collective appropriation of urban space against its private commodification, and to the production of space from and for its users, not from the interests of real-estate capital or the technocratic state (Lefebvre, 1968). This political dimension of the Lefebvrian concept — the city as a space of dispute and the exercise of active citizenship — resonates clearly in the declared philosophy of Urban DNA, which situates neighbourhood participation not as a consultation mechanism but as the very axis of the neighbourhood transformation process.

The distinction between Jacobs and



Lefebvre is, however, relevant for the analysis of the Murcia model. While Jacobs speaks from empirical observation and the defence of what exists against urbanistic destruction, Lefebvre articulates a more structurally political critique of the production of space under capitalism. Urban DNA aligns more with the first tradition than the second: it is a project of improving what exists, not of questioning the structures of land ownership or urban governance in a broader sense. As will be argued in chapter 5, this fidelity to the scale of incremental improvement constitutes both its operational strength and one of its analytical limits from the perspective of the right to the city in the full sense.

1.2. The neighbourhood as the scale of intervention: antecedents in Spain

The claim of the neighbourhood as the privileged scale of urban policy is not a novelty of the twenty-first century. In the Spanish context, the history of neighbourhood rehabilitation and regeneration policies goes back at least to the 1980s, with the first Special Interior Reform Plans (PERI) approved following

the democratic restoration, oriented towards the rehabilitation of historic centres and the most degraded neighbourhoods in a context of intense urbanistic pressure. However, urban regeneration at neighbourhood scale as a policy specifically oriented towards social cohesion — and not only towards the improvement of the housing stock — consolidated in Spain more slowly, largely as a result of the influence of European programmes of integrated urban regeneration in the 1990s and 2000s (González Medina, 2011).

The EU URBAN community programme, active between 1994 and 2006, was the main European instrument for integrated urban regeneration of that period and had a direct impact on several Spanish cities. In the case of Murcia, the most relevant precedent for understanding Urban DNA is precisely the experience of the URBAN Murcia programme, developed in the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood between 2007 and 2013, which constitutes the direct antecedent of the model that would later be called Urban DNA (URBACT, n.d.-a). That prior experience, as will be documented in chapter 3, was what



allowed Murcia to develop the methodology and the accumulated institutional capital that would make possible the European good practice recognition obtained in 2017.

The Spanish tradition of neighbourhood regeneration in the 2007-2015 period was heavily shaped by the impact of the economic and financial crisis, which dramatically worsened the situation of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods while simultaneously reducing the municipal budgets available for large-scale interventions. It was in this context of budgetary restriction and social urgency that the paradigm of low-cost, high-impact interventions took hold — what Enrique Nieto and María José Marcos Torró would call, in their academic article on Urban DNA Santa

Eulalia, a deliberately “minor” urbanism (Nieto and Marcos Torró, 2021) — and where the methodology of urban acupuncture found its greatest terrain of application in the Spanish context.

1.3. Urban acupuncture as a methodological paradigm

The concept of urban acupuncture was explicitly formulated by the Brazilian architect and politician Jaime Lerner in his work *Urban Acupuncture* (Lerner, 2003), translated into Spanish and published in Barcelona in 2005 by the Institut d’Arquitectura Avançada de Catalunya (IAAC). Lerner, who served as mayor of Curitiba on three occasions and governor

Terminological note: ‘neighbourhoods’ and ‘pedanías’ in Murcia

The territorial structure of the municipality of Murcia is singularly complex in the Spanish context: the municipal area of Murcia includes both the capital city and an extensive network of pedanías — smaller urban nuclei with their own identity — numbering over thirty. The Urban DNA project applies both to neighbourhoods of the consolidated city and, in its more recent versions, to pedanías within the municipality. This duality is relevant because it means the model must adapt to very different realities: a neighbourhood of the historic city with high density and mixed uses differs substantially from a pedanía with a rural or semi-rural structure. Throughout this book the term ‘neighbourhood’ is used generically to designate both types of intervention context, except where territorial specificity makes it necessary to distinguish.



of the state of Paraná on two, developed the concept from his own experience of urban governance, in which he demonstrated that small strategic interventions at neuralgic points in the city could trigger transformations of far greater scope in their surrounding environment, analogously to the way acupuncture needles at specific points of the body produce effects in distant organs (Lerner, 2003). The metaphor has an undeniable pedagogical virtue: it rejects the grandiosity of large-scale master plans and vindicates the transformative capacity of precision, speed and knowledge of the territory.

In acupuncture, what matters is that the needling is swift. It is inconceivable that an acupuncture needle be inserted with slow and painful pressure. Acupuncture demands speed and precision. (Lerner, 2003, cited in Paisaje Transversal, 2007)

For Lerner, a good urban acupuncture can be any action that produces positive effects in the city: from the restoration of an emblematic building to the creation of a small meeting space, the installation of quality street furniture or the organisation of a cultural activity in an underused space. What defines urban acupuncture is not the scale

of the intervention but its precision — acting at exactly the right point — and its capacity to catalyse improvement dynamics in the surrounding area. This philosophy resonates clearly in the language and methodology of Urban DNA, which the official documentation explicitly describes in terms of “urban acupuncture” interventions, both on the project’s own website and in the academic articles published by its designers (Nieto and Marcos Torró, 2021).

The concept of urban acupuncture has been the subject of relevant critiques in the specialised academic literature that should not be silenced. It is reproached, first, for the risk of serving as a pretext for reducing public spending on urban regeneration, replacing necessary structural interventions (rehabilitation of the housing stock, improvement of infrastructure, social facilities) with superficial low-cost interventions that improve the image of the neighbourhood without addressing its structural causes of degradation. Second, it is criticised for tending to present the process of urban transformation as a technical process — who identifies the “acupuncture points” and how — without sufficiently visibly incorporating



the political dimension of priority selection (who decides what is transformed and in what direction?). These critiques, which do not invalidate the value of the paradigm but do oblige its application with methodological caution, will be taken up in chapter 5 when evaluating the Urban DNA model.

1.4. The European approach to integrated urban regeneration: URBAN, URBACT and the Urban Agenda

The European context within which Urban DNA is situated is not that of the EU Urban Agenda analysed in detail in connection with Cultural Reactives and Cultural Testing Tubes — although there is an indirect connection between the two frameworks, as will be shown in chapter 4 — but that of the URBACT network, the European programme for cooperation and knowledge exchange on sustainable urban development. URBACT is a European territorial cooperation programme co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), active since 2002, whose objective is to enable European cities to work together to develop solutions to

major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal changes (URBACT, n.d.-b). Unlike the Urban Agenda, URBACT does not produce policy recommendations at European level but facilitates the direct exchange of methodologies and experiences between cities, through thematic networks in which cities from different countries work together for two or three years around a shared urban challenge.

The most relevant mechanism of URBACT for the Murcia case is the Good Practices Label, a recognition that URBACT awards to local initiatives that meet its criteria of excellence: an integrated approach (economic, social and environmental), strong local participation, replicability in other urban contexts and capacity for knowledge transfer to other European cities (Metropolis/USE, n.d.). Murcia obtained this label in 2017, in Tallinn, under the Estonian presidency of the Council of the European Union, precisely for the Urban DNA experience developed in the Santa Eulalia neighbourhood (Ayuntamiento de Murcia, 2021). This recognition is what most clearly distinguishes the Murcia model

from other local neighbourhood regeneration initiatives, and constitutes the main verifiable element of the project's European projection, as analysed in detail in chapter 4.

It is important to note that Murcia's participation in the URBACT Interactive Cities network — within the framework of which the Santa Eulalia pilot experience was developed — did not take place in the context of the EU Urban Agenda (launched in 2016), but in the framework of the URBACT II programme (2007-2013 period) and URBACT III (2014-2020 period). This chronological precision is relevant because some divulgative texts on Urban DNA mix references to URBACT and the Urban Agenda indiscriminately, as if they were the same institutional framework, when in reality they are two distinct instruments that share some general principles but have clearly differentiated legal natures, funding mechanisms and governance structures, as will be explained in detail in chapter 4.

1.4b. The URBAN programme and its legacy in Murcia

The EU URBAN community initiative,

active between 1994 and 2006 in two successive phases (URBAN I and URBAN II), represents the most direct European institutional antecedent of Urban DNA and of the entire post-2014 ERDF urban regeneration framework. URBAN was specifically designed to address the problems of urban areas in crisis — physical decay, social exclusion, unemployment, high crime rates — through integrated action plans combining physical rehabilitation, economic promotion, social inclusion and environmental improvement in precisely delimited intervention areas, with an explicit requirement for community participation in the design and monitoring of the interventions (European Commission, URBAN Community Initiative).

Murcia's experience in the URBAN programme, materialised in the regeneration of the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood between 2007 and 2013, is the documented foundation on which Urban DNA's entire methodological edifice is built. Without understanding the URBAN experience — its integrated approach, its multi-departmental coordination requirements, its community participation procedures — it is impossible

to understand why Urban DNA's four-phase methodology took the precise form it did: the Participation, Activation, Agitation and Projection sequence is, in essence, a systematisation and acceleration of the intervention logic developed over six years in the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood under the URBAN framework, adapted for the post-2014 context of the ERDF-EDUSI instruments.

This genealogical connection between URBAN and Urban DNA is also relevant for understanding the European recognition obtained through URBACT: when URBACT's assessment panel examined Murcia's application for the Good Practices Label, what it was evaluating was not just the 2017 Santa Eulalia pilot but the entire trajectory of integrated urban regeneration in Murcia since 2007, which the Espíritu Santo experience represented. The two-month agitation of Santa Eulalia was not legible as a good practice in isolation from the decade of methodological development that preceded it in the same city — a methodological continuity that the URBACT good practice sheet itself documents by foregrounding the Espíritu Santo experience rather than the

Santa Eulalia pilot as the core recognised practice.

1.5. The role of ERDF funding in the regeneration of vulnerable neighbourhoods

The co-financing of the Urban DNA project by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) at 80% — with the remaining 20% borne by the Municipality of Murcia — is not a minor detail from the perspective of public policy analysis. The ERDF is one of the structural funds of the European Union, created to reduce regional disparities and promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and has constituted since the 1990s a first-order source of financing for urban regeneration policies in Spain, especially in medium-sized cities and municipalities with lower own fiscal capacity. In the 2014-2020 programming period, the ERDF structured its support for urban regeneration in Spain through the Sustainable Growth Operational Programme, which financed, among other actions, Strategies for Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development (EDUSI), an instrument

specifically designed to support integrated urban projects combining actions in the economic, social, environmental and governance spheres within the same urban area (Ministry of Finance and Public Administrations, 2015). The Municipality of Murcia developed its own EDUSI under the name “IT MURCIA: Innovation + Tradition”, framed within the Murcia 2020 City Strategy, in which the Urban DNA project was integrated as one of its main axes (Murcia 2020 City Strategy, n.d.).

ERDF co-financing has implications not only financial but also methodological: to access the funds, EDUSI strategies must demonstrate an integrated approach combining actions from different sectoral

policies — town planning, social services, employment, environment, culture — within the same territorial area of intervention, and must incorporate citizen participation mechanisms in their design and monitoring. This European requirement for integration and participation aligns perfectly with the Urban DNA methodology, which suggests a relationship of mutual reinforcement between the demands of the European framework and the methodological design of the Murcia project: the Urban DNA model is, in part, an adapted response to the conditions that European funding imposes for access to ERDF neighbourhood regeneration funds.

1.6. The Spanish Urban Agenda and the

A note on ERDF co-financing and Urban DNA

The sources consulted for this book confirm that Urban DNA received 80% ERDF co-financing within the Sustainable Growth Operational Programme 2014-2020 (Murcia 2020 City Strategy, n.d.), although it has not been possible to identify in the publicly available sources the total co-financed budget or the breakdown by neighbourhood or by annual call. This documentary limitation is analogous to that noted in the preceding book on Murcia’s Cultural Model with respect to Cultural Reactives, and is stated here explicitly to guide future research: a public information access request directed to the Municipality of Murcia or to the ERDF Subdirector General of the Ministry of Finance could provide the complete budgetary breakdown that the publicly available sources do not offer.



post-crisis context

The institutional context of Urban DNA is not limited to the European framework of URBACT and the ERDF: there is also a national framework of reference worth presenting briefly. The Spanish Urban Agenda, approved in 2019, establishes the principles and objectives that should guide urban policy across the country, including among its objectives the regeneration of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods and the guarantee of territorial and social cohesion in municipalities. This Agenda acts as the bridge between the European framework — the EU Urban Agenda analysed in the previous book in this series — and the concrete urban regeneration policies implemented by Spanish municipalities such as Murcia. The fact that Urban DNA is inscribed within the Murcia 2020 City Strategy illustrates in concrete terms how the different levels of governance (municipal, regional, national and European) are articulated within a local urban policy project.

The period in which Urban DNA develops coincides with one of the most

intense moments of urban transformation in medium-sized Spanish cities: the exit from the Great Recession (2008-2014), the gradual economic recovery of the 2015-2019 period, the impact of COVID-19 (2020-2021) and the beginning of a new phase of recovery policies linked to the Next Generation EU European funds. In this context, the regeneration of vulnerable neighbourhoods acquired growing weight on the local political agenda in Spain, partly due to the visibility of the territorial inequalities that the economic crisis had aggravated, and partly due to the financial incentives that the new European fund instruments made available to municipalities.

The reference to the post-crisis context is also pertinent for understanding the philosophy of urban acupuncture as formulated by Nieto and Marcos Torró (2021) in their article on Urban DNA Santa Eulalia: the text begins precisely by noting that following the Spanish economic depression between 2008 and 2014, numerous Spanish cities were left rundown and in a highly precarious state, thus situating the Urban DNA model as a specific response to the urban deterioration produced by the economic crisis. This explicit



contextualisation is methodologically honest: it alerts the reader that the model was designed to respond to a specific emergency situation, and that its transferability to other contexts with different starting conditions cannot be taken for granted without careful adaptation.

1.6b. Urban vulnerability in Spain: diagnosis of the neighbourhoods subject to intervention

The analysis of Urban DNA also requires a brief contextualisation of the situation of vulnerable neighbourhoods in Spain in the period in which the project develops. The Juan de Herrera Institute, linked to the Madrid School of Architecture, published in 2013 — in the midst of the economic crisis — the study “Urban analysis of vulnerable neighbourhoods in Spain” (Hernández Aja, 2013), which constitutes the most comprehensive reference work available on the scale and characteristics of urban vulnerability in the Spanish context. This study identifies as vulnerable those neighbourhoods presenting an unemployment rate, an

insufficient educational attainment rate or a rate of housing deficiencies above certain thresholds, and provides a detailed mapping of these neighbourhoods in Spain’s main cities.

While the Hernández Aja study (2013) does not contain specifically verified data for the Murcia neighbourhoods intervened by Urban DNA — Santa Eulalia, El Carmen, La Paz — the analytical framework of urban vulnerability it provides is directly pertinent for contextualising the Murcia case. The neighbourhoods subject to Urban DNA intervention share, according to the project’s own documentation and URBACT’s, characteristics typical of the vulnerable Spanish neighbourhoods described in that study: deterioration of public space, presence of groups at risk of social exclusion, a weakened commercial fabric, and a feeling of abandonment by the municipal administration in periods prior to the project’s commencement. URBACT’s own description of the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood — Urban DNA’s antecedent — includes explicit references to social exclusion, economic insecurity, crime and low educational





attainment as starting characteristics (URBACT, n.d.-a), which coincide exactly with the urban vulnerability profile described in Hernández Aja's study.

This contextualisation within the literature on Spanish urban vulnerability is relevant because it allows Urban DNA to be situated not as a beautification project for neighbourhoods in good condition, but as a response to situations of urban and social deterioration that have a well-documented history and structure in the academic literature. The distinction matters: the value of the project lies not only in the chromatic carpets of the Plaza de Sardoy or the artistic murals of Santa Eulalia — which are its most recognisable images in institutional communication — but in the capacity of the model to contribute to reversing processes of urban vulnerability with deep structural roots that no public space improvement policy can address definitively on its own.

1.7. The role of citizen participation in urban regeneration: from the consultation model to co-production

Citizen participation in urban regeneration processes has evolved conceptually over recent decades from a consultation model — in which the administration informs and collects citizens' opinions on decisions already taken or in the process of being taken — towards a public policy co-production model, in which citizens, communities and administrations jointly design and implement urban interventions. This evolution is not linear nor has it reached a definitive conclusion: in practice, the different models coexist, and a single project may combine elements of consultation, participation and co-production in different phases and for different types of decision.

The Urban DNA model positions itself discursively at the co-production extreme: residents are the “key protagonists” of the process, the actions respond to their demands and, in some cases, are implemented by the residents themselves. However, as noted in chapter 2 in connection with Arnstein's ladder (1969) and as will be argued in greater detail in chapter 5, the evaluation of the extent to which this rhetoric of co-production translates into real practice depends on



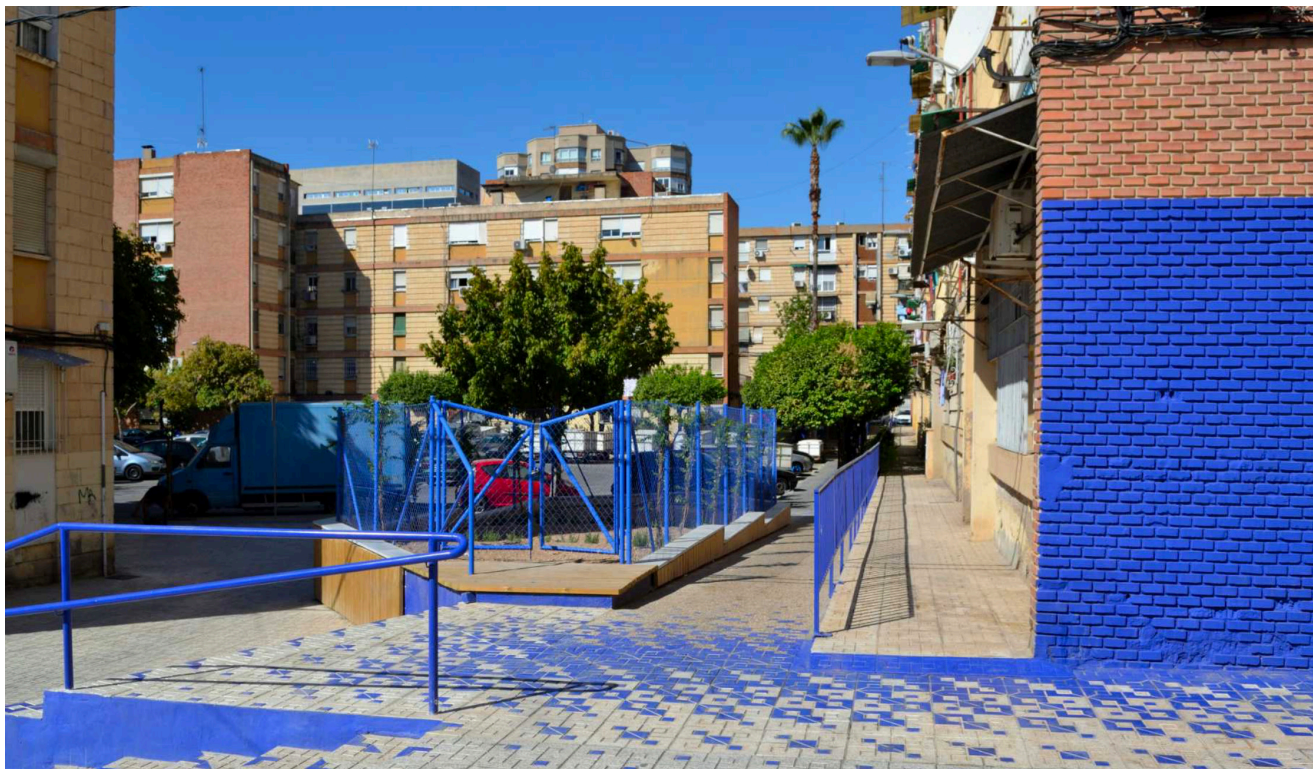
information that is not available in the public sources consulted for this book. What can be stated with certainty is that the Murcia model represents a visible advance over the pure consultation model that dominates much of contemporary Spanish urban policy, and that this advance — however partial — deserves to be recognised and documented as an element of value in the model.

The distinction between participation as consultation and participation as co-production also has direct implications for the evaluation of process results: consultation projects tend to be evaluated by the tangible products they generate (how many residents participated, how many proposals were collected, how many were implemented), while co-production projects should also be evaluated by the effects on the social fabric and collective organisational capacity that the process has generated, independently of the physical actions carried out. This second dimension of evaluation — that of the social capital generated — is the hardest to measure and the one with the least presence in the documentation available on Urban DNA, which constitutes one of the principal

methodological gaps of the case analysed in this book.

1.8. Neighbourhood identity and urban heritage: the cultural dimension of regeneration

One final element of the conceptual framework that deserves a section of its own is the relationship between neighbourhood identity and urban heritage in the Urban DNA model. The project's declared philosophy is, as has been noted repeatedly, to respect and reinforce the idiosyncrasy and distinctive identity of each neighbourhood. This commitment to identity has an explicitly heritage dimension in some of the neighbourhoods subject to intervention: the recovery of the trace of Murcia's medieval city wall in Santa Eulalia, the recreation of the Medieval Souk in the same intervention, or the commitment to the heritage of the huerta in the Urban DNA Connects programme lines are concrete examples of how Urban DNA's urban regeneration articulates, in some cases, around the valorisation of the neighbourhood's historical and cultural



heritage.

This heritage dimension of Urban DNA establishes a conceptual link with the Cultural Model of Murcia analysed in the preceding book — especially with the Cultural Testing Tubes thematic axis centred on the reuse of pre-existing heritage spaces — and with the EU Urban Agenda's Partnership on Culture and Cultural Heritage, which includes among its thematic axes precisely that of the transformation, adaptive reuse and

urban reconversion of existing heritage. This conceptual convergence between the two Murcia projects — one on urban regeneration and one on cultural policy — is not at all coincidental, and suggests the existence of an overall strategic vision on the role of urban heritage in Murcia's transformation that connects both projects, even if that vision is not always made explicit jointly in the institutional communication of each of them separately.



CHAPTER 2 | KEY REFERENCES IN URBAN REGENERATION AND PARTICIPATORY URBANISM

If the preceding chapter reconstructed the general conceptual framework in which Urban DNA is situated, this chapter presents the authors and currents of thought whose analytical categories will be employed systematically in the case analysis chapters. The choice of these references is not arbitrary: as in the preceding book on Murcia's Cultural Model, authors have been selected whose categories are directly operational for analysing the specific dimensions of the Murcia case, rather than offering an exhaustive review of the entire literature on urban regeneration, which would far exceed the scope of this book.

The four main references of this chapter are Jaime Lerner, whose urban acupuncture paradigm is employed explicitly by Urban DNA's own designers; Jane Jacobs, whose defence of neighbourhood scale and mixed

uses offers the most direct theoretical referent for understanding the project's intervention philosophy; Henri Lefebvre, whose concept of the right to the city enables the formulation of critical questions about the political dimension of citizen participation in Urban DNA; and the Murcian architecture team led by Enrique Nieto — with the collaboration of urban manager Gerardo Sánchez Romero — who designed the project's urban strategy, and who have produced the only peer-reviewed academic publication specifically on the Santa Eulalia case available in open university repositories.

2.1. Jaime Lerner and urban acupuncture: rapid, high-impact interventions

Jaime Lerner (1937-2021) was an architect and urban planner, mayor of Curitiba



(Brazil) on three occasions (1971-1975, 1979-1984 and 1989-1992) and governor of the state of Paraná on two (1994-1998 and 2002-2006). His work *Urban Acupuncture* (Lerner, 2003, translated into Spanish in 2005) distils the learning of decades of innovative urban governance into an accessible methodological proposal: cities can and should be transformed through punctual interventions, strategically located, rapid in their execution and capable of triggering chain effects of far greater scope than the concrete action itself (Lerner, 2003).

The direct pertinence of Lerner as a reference for the analysis of Urban DNA is straightforward: the very designers of the Murcia model explicitly employ the concept of “urban acupuncture” to describe the type of interventions carried out in the public space of each neighbourhood (Nieto and Marcos Torró, 2021; *La Casa de la Arquitectura*, n.d.). This conceptual appropriation is not merely rhetorical: the methodology of small, rapid, multi-scale and heterogeneous actions that characterises Urban DNA faithfully reproduces the Lernerian principles of urban acupuncture, from the speed of execution — Enrique Nieto describes the process of transforming the

Santa Eulalia neighbourhood as a process of “two months” of concentrated actions (*La Casa de la Arquitectura*, n.d.) — to the variety of types of intervention, ranging from “urban tattoos” on facades to urban gardens, open-air museums and the recycling of street furniture elements.

From an analytical standpoint, however, the reference to Lerner should be employed with the methodological caution it deserves, for two reasons that will be developed in chapter 5. First, the Curitiba context in which Lerner developed his most influential theories and practices is substantially different from that of the consolidated neighbourhoods of a medium-sized Spanish city like Murcia: Lerner’s most impactful actions frequently had a scale and systemic impact that qualitatively differentiates them from the minor acupuncture interventions that define the Murcia model. Second, Lerner’s work is fundamentally prescriptive — it proposes a model for making the city — and not evaluative, which makes it useful as a methodological reference but insufficient as a critical evaluation framework for the results of a specific programme.

Application to the case study

The Lernerian reference enables the formulation of a central analytical question for the analysis of Urban DNA that the municipal documents themselves do not formulate explicitly: which specific interventions have actually functioned as acupunctures — that is, have triggered chain effects in the immediate surroundings — and which have remained as punctual improvements without a multiplier impact? This distinction, which Lerner raises but does not operationalise into measurable indicators, is one of the principal methodological challenges of any rigorous evaluation of the Urban DNA model.

2.1b. Lerner's legacy: from Curitiba to European neighbourhoods

The transfer of the urban acupuncture concept from the Latin American context — Curitiba, Brazil — to the European context and specifically to medium-sized Spanish cities is not an automatic process and is not without conceptual frictions worth identifying clearly. Curitiba, the city where Lerner developed his most emblematic interventions, is a Brazilian metropolis of over 1.7 million inhabitants with an urban morphology, social structure, land ownership legal regime and municipal financial capacity very different from those of Murcia. Lerner's most cited urban acupunctures — the integrated public transport system, parks in flood-risk zones, waste exchange programmes — are metropolitan-scale

actions that required decades of political continuity, high-level technical capacity and very effective communication with the population, under conditions not directly replicable in all contexts.

This distance between the original context and the context of application does not invalidate the usefulness of the concept for the Murcia case, but it does oblige its use with the methodological caution that any conceptual transfer between very different contexts requires. The main risk is that of using the acupuncture metaphor as an attractive communicative label — quick, precise, non-invasive — without ensuring that the conditions of application of the model actually share the characteristics that make acupuncture effective: deep knowledge of the “patient” (the neighbourhood), precision



in the selection of the “acupuncture points” (the actions), and continuity of treatment over time. In the case of Urban DNA, the available sources offer reasonably solid evidence on the first condition — knowledge of the neighbourhood through the participatory process — but more limited evidence on the second and third, whose verification would require follow-up data that exceed the temporal scope of this book.

2.2. Jane Jacobs and neighbourhood vitality: the street as a living space

Jane Jacobs (1916-2006) was not an academically trained urban planner but a New York architectural journalist and urban activist, which paradoxically sharpened the acuity of her observation: she wrote from direct observation of the street, not from the drawing board. Her work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Jacobs, 1961) is one of the most influential books in the history of urbanism, and its influence on the design of Urban DNA — though rarely cited explicitly in the project’s documentation — is perceptible in several of its fundamental premises.

Jacobs identifies four conditions that, combined, generate the vitality of a neighbourhood: a mix of primary uses (so the street functions at different times of day); short blocks (to maximise pedestrian routes and encounters); a mix of buildings of different ages and states of conservation (to accommodate activities with different budgets); and sufficient population density (Jacobs, 1961). These conditions, formulated in the context of Manhattan and the Greenwich Village where Jacobs lived, are not directly transferable in their literalness to the urban morphology of Murcia’s neighbourhoods, but their underlying logic — the defence of complexity and human scale against monofunctional urbanism — does resonate directly with Urban DNA’s philosophy, which seeks to activate and reinforce the distinctive identity of each neighbourhood rather than replace it with a generic urban model.

Jacobs’s critical dimension is also relevant: her work was born as a response to Robert Moses’s urban renewal policies in New York, which demolished entire historic working-class neighbourhood fabrics to replace them with modernist housing



blocks. Urban DNA, by contrast, starts from an explicitly Jacobsian principle: nothing is demolished or substituted, but existing assets are improved starting from the recognition of the values and distinctive identity of the neighbourhood. The difference from radical renewal urbanism is precisely the point where Urban DNA and Jacobs converge most clearly.

One dimension of Jacobs's thought that Urban DNA does not incorporate as explicitly, and that deserves to be noted as an analytical gap, is the one relating to social mixing: Jacobs actively defended the diversity of incomes and occupations as a condition of urban vitality, and considered gentrification — the process by which lower-income residents are expelled from a neighbourhood by the price rises generated by its upgrading — a direct threat to that vitality. The question of whether Urban DNA could, in the medium term, be generating real estate pressure processes in the neighbourhoods it intervenes in — by upgrading them through improvements to public space — is one of the questions that the available documentation does not answer, and that will be formulated

more explicitly in chapter 5.

2.2b. The gentrification threat: when neighbourhood improvement displaces its residents

A dimension of Jacobs's analysis that contemporary urbanism has taken up with particular urgency is the risk of gentrification: the process by which the improvement of a neighbourhood — through the rehabilitation of public space, the arrival of new cultural facilities, the valorisation of its historical heritage, or simply the improvement of its image and reputation — triggers a rise in land prices and rents that ends up displacing the lower-income residents who originally inhabited that neighbourhood. The paradox of gentrification — the improvement of the physical environment coincides with the deterioration of the living conditions of historic residents — has been documented empirically in numerous European and North American cities since the 1970s, and constitutes one of the most serious risks that threatens urban regeneration projects when they succeed in their objective of improving the image and

quality of life of the neighbourhood.

The question of whether Urban DNA could be contributing, in the medium term, to real estate pressure processes on the intervened neighbourhoods — and in particular on Santa Eulalia, the most central neighbourhood with the greatest upgrading potential among those subject to intervention — is a question that the sources available do not allow to be answered with current data, but that deserves to be raised explicitly as a potential risk to monitor, rather than being ignored in the name of institutional communication optimism. Gentrification is not an inevitable outcome of any urban improvement — it depends on multiple factors, including the structure of the local real estate market and the existence or otherwise of affordable housing policies that cushion the pressure on lower-income tenants — but neither can it be ruled out without specific monitoring data on the evolution of land prices and rents in the intervened neighbourhoods.

2.3. Henri Lefebvre and the right to the city: participation or legitimization

The Lefebvrian concept of the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968) introduces into the analysis of Urban DNA a political dimension that the references to Lerner and Jacobs do not offer as directly. For Lefebvre, the city is not only an object of urbanistic analysis but the product of social power relations, and citizen participation in urban management can only be described as genuine if it implies a real shift in decision-making power from institutions towards inhabitants (Lefebvre, 1968).

This requirement raises a fundamental question for the analysis of any institutional citizen participation programme: is the participation that Urban DNA articulates a form of genuine empowerment of residents, in the Lefebvrian sense, or is it more a form of legitimization of decisions that, in the final analysis, continue to be made by the Municipality? The distinction is not trivial: numerous evaluation studies of citizen participation programmes in urban policy have documented that participatory processes managed from public administrations tend to reproduce the preferences and biases of the most organised groups with the greatest social capital, while residents with fewer



resources, less available time or weaker communication skills — precisely those with the greatest need for representation in processes of neighbourhood transformation — are underrepresented in working groups and participatory workshops (Hernández Aja, 2013).

The Urban DNA documentation consistently employs a language of empowerment and neighbourhood protagonism: residents are described as “the key protagonists” of the project (adnmurcia.es, n.d.), and the participatory methodology — working groups, surveys, citizen agoras, urban mappings — is presented as the guarantee that the actions respond to the neighbourhood’s real demands rather than to a technically imposed vision from outside. However, as will be argued in chapter 5, the question of who actually participates and on what terms in these processes remains systematically unanswered in the available documentation, which prevents a precise evaluation of the extent to which Urban DNA’s participation approximates the Lefebvrian paradigm or what critical literature calls “facade participation”.

It can only be formulated [the right to the

city] as a right to transformed and renewed urban life. (Lefebvre, 1968, p. 138)

2.4. Enrique Nieto, María José Marcos Torró and minor urbanism

The fourth reference of this chapter is not a canonical author of international urbanism but the direct designers of the Urban DNA model: architect Enrique Nieto Fernández, general coordinator of the project, and architect María José Marcos Torró, authors of the only peer-reviewed academic article published specifically on Urban DNA Santa Eulalia and available in open university repositories.

The article “UDN Santa Eulalia (Murcia). A laboratory of urbanism”, published in the digital journal Planur-e (issue 21, 2021), constitutes the most direct academic source available on the case, insofar as it presents the project from the perspective of its own material designers, with access to design information not available in the institutional press. The article is deposited, in restricted access, in the University of Alicante’s repository (RUA) (Nieto and Marcos Torró, 2021; RUA, n.d.).

In this article, Nieto and Marcos Torr  formulate the central conceptual key of the model with a precision that does not appear in the institutional communication documents: Urban DNA consists of “a model of rapid intervention in neighbourhoods from the tools and perspectives provided by a deliberately ‘minor’ architecture and urbanism, as well as from the recognition of certain identity patterns and the potential of neighbourhood intervention” (La Casa de la Arquitectura, n.d., reproducing the authors’ formulation). This self-designation as “minor” urbanism — in opposition to the large operations of “major” urbanism of general planning or large urban reform projects — is a declaration of positioning both aesthetic and political: the vindication of small scale, low budget, speed, heterogeneity and openness to failure as possible and legitimate outcomes. The article also provides technical data on the Santa Eulalia project of interest for the analysis: the built area of the urban acupuncture actions developed between September 2017 and October 2019 reached 17,650 m², at a cost of 45 euros per square metre (Fundaci n Arquia, n.d.). This unit cost datum —  45/m², illustrates very concretely

what “minor” urbanism means in economic terms: low-intensity investment interventions per unit area, offset by their dispersal across multiple points of the neighbourhood and their capacity to generate social and economic dynamism at a reduced direct investment cost.

	Conceptual contribution	Application to Urban DNA
Jaime Lerner	Urban acupuncture; rapid, punctual, high potential-impact interventions	Evaluate which actions actually function as catalysts and which remain as punctual improvements without multiplier effect
Jane Jacobs	Neighbourhood vitality; mixed uses; human scale; gentrification risks	Contrast the philosophy of ‘respect for neighbourhood identity’ with the risk of real estate pressure
Henri Lefebvre	Right to the city; production of space; genuine participation vs. institutional legitimization	Evaluate whether neighbourhood participation in Urban DNA constitutes real empowerment or instrumental participation
Nieto and Marcos Torr�	Minor urbanism; urbanism laboratory; rapid, multi-scale actions in a post-crisis context	Primary source for the conceptual and technical design of the model from the perspective of its designers



2.5. Evaluating participatory processes: a cross-cutting methodological question

A final section of this chapter should be devoted to the methodology for evaluating participatory processes in urban policy, since it constitutes a cross-cutting question to all the references presented and connects directly with the questions that will be raised in chapter 5. The urban policy evaluation literature distinguishes, in the case of participatory programmes, between three levels of analysis: the evaluation of the participatory process itself (how was it organised?, who participated?, what mechanisms were employed?), the evaluation of the tangible results generated by the actions (what has physically improved in the neighbourhood?), and the evaluation of the impact on social cohesion and citizen empowerment in the medium and long term (has the capacity of residents to organise and act collectively in the improvement of their neighbourhood changed?).

Urban DNA has, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, abundant documentation on the first two levels — the description of the participatory process and the enumeration of

the physical actions carried out — but scarce or no publicly available documentation on the third level, that of impact on social cohesion and citizen empowerment, which is precisely the hardest to measure and the most relevant for evaluating whether the model achieves its declared objectives of social transformation of the neighbourhood and not only of improvement of its public space. This documentary asymmetry — abundant in physical results, scarce in social impact — is a pattern shared with the Cultural Model of Murcia case analysed in the preceding book, and suggests that it is a structural limitation of public documentation of Murcia's local policies, not a characteristic exclusive to Urban DNA.

2.5b. The gentrification threat as an analytical lens

A dimension of the analysis that deserves specific additional treatment, beyond what has already been noted in the Jacobs section, is the question of gentrification risk as an analytical lens for evaluating the Urban DNA model. The gentrification literature — which in the European context has experienced



rapid growth since the 2010s, with studies in cities ranging from London and Amsterdam to Barcelona and Madrid — identifies a consistent paradox: the participatory rehabilitation of public space in vulnerable urban neighbourhoods can, when successful, trigger dynamics of real estate valorisation that end up displacing the very residents who participated in the regeneration process. This displacement dynamic, sometimes called “participatory gentrification” in the literature to highlight its ironic dimension, is not a necessary outcome of every regeneration process, but it is sufficiently well documented to require explicit attention in any rigorous analysis of a project like Urban DNA.

The available documentation for this book does not include specific data on the evolution of rental prices or real estate transactions in the neighbourhoods intervened by Urban DNA, so it is not possible to determine whether displacement dynamics are already occurring or may occur in the future. This limitation should be noted explicitly: the absence of this type of monitoring data in the project’s institutional documentation is itself a methodological finding worthy of note, since it suggests

that gentrification risk was not explicitly incorporated as a variable to be monitored when designing the evaluation system for the Urban DNA interventions. Incorporating this variable into future programme evaluations would be one of the most valuable contributions that academic research on the case could make.

2.6. Sherry Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation

An additional methodological reference that is indispensable for evaluating the quality of citizen participation in Urban DNA is the so-called “ladder of citizen participation”, formulated by the American researcher Sherry Arnstein in a seminal article published in 1969 in the Journal of the American Institute of Planners (Arnstein, 1969). This article, which remains one of the most cited references in the literature on citizen participation in urban policy, proposes a typology of eight levels of participation organised in an ascending ladder that runs from non-participation — manipulation and therapy — through tokenism — informing, consultation and placation — to the various



degrees of citizen power — partnership, delegated power and citizen control.

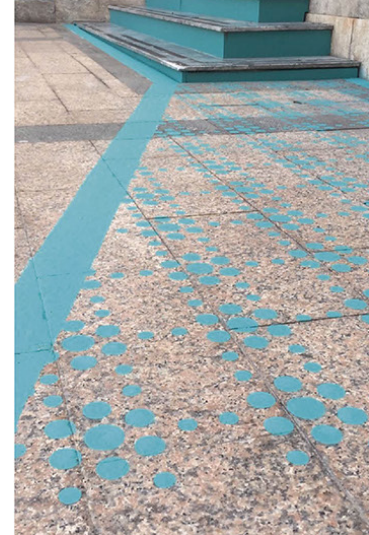
Arnstein's relevance to the analysis of Urban DNA is direct: the model explicitly positions itself in the upper rungs of the ladder — those of genuine participation and citizen power — with its rhetoric of neighbourhood empowerment and resident protagonism. However, evaluating whether the model effectively reaches those upper rungs or remains at the intermediate ones — consultation and placation, in Arnsteinian terminology — requires precisely the information on the profile of participants, the real decision-making power and the accountability mechanisms that, as has been noted repeatedly in this book, the available documentation does not provide systematically. Arnstein's ladder does not resolve the evaluation problem on its own — it is a descriptive and normative tool, not an instrument of quantitative measurement — but it does provide the vocabulary needed to formulate with precision the questions about the real quality of participation in Urban DNA.

It is worth noting that Arnstein herself formulated her eight levels with an explicit critical and political intention: her article

was written in the context of the urban renewal policies of 1960s America, and as a response to what she perceived as the use of participatory processes by administrations to legitimise decisions already taken, rather than to genuinely incorporate citizens' preferences. This critical dimension of the tool — participation as a potential instrument of institutional legitimation rather than citizen empowerment — is exactly what Lefebvre also identifies from a different philosophical perspective, and what the citizen participation in urban regeneration literature has confirmed empirically in numerous contexts since then.

2.7. Urban management in contexts of austerity: a Spanish perspective

A final reference that is pertinent for the analysis of Urban DNA from the perspective of public management is that of urban action strategies in contexts of budgetary restriction, which have been studied in the Spanish case especially for the period following the 2008 crisis. Research on urban management in medium-sized Spanish cities during that period documents consistently a pattern of adaptive innovation:



faced with the impossibility of sustaining the large investments in infrastructure and equipment that had characterised the economic expansion period, numerous Spanish municipalities developed forms of low-cost, high-visibility urban intervention with a strong participatory component that, in many cases, achieved results of improved perceived quality of life in neighbourhoods with a fraction of the budget of the large-scale urban renewal operations of the previous phase.

Urban DNA is clearly inscribed in this pattern of adaptive innovation: the model emerged precisely in the period of greatest budgetary restriction for Spanish municipalities (2010-2016), and its premises of working with existing resources, low-cost interventions, acceleration of visible results and strong reliance on the neighbourhood's

social capital directly reflect the conditions of austerity in which it was designed. This context of origin is relevant for evaluating the model's transferability: in municipalities with greater budgetary capacity and without the need to optimise resources in the way that austerity imposed, the premises of urban acupuncture could be less urgent or less differentiated from more conventional public space improvement interventions. The question of whether Urban DNA works better — or worse — in contexts of greater budgetary availability than in those of extreme restriction is one that future comparative research should address.

2.8. Towards an integrated evaluation framework for Urban DNA

A final section of this chapter is worth devoting to bringing together the



four analytical references presented — Lerner, Jacobs, Lefebvre and Nieto/Marcos Torró — into a single integrated evaluation framework that can serve as a practical guide for applying the categories of this chapter to the analysis developed in chapters 3, 4 and 5. The integration of these four references is not simply additive — one reference per chapter section — but requires a certain hierarchical ordering that reflects the relative weight each contributes to the evaluation of Urban DNA's specific dimensions.

For the analysis of the design and execution of the physical interventions, Lerner's framework of urban acupuncture is the most directly applicable: it provides the vocabulary (strategic punctuality, speed, precision, chain effects) and the evaluative questions (is each action a genuine catalyst or a punctual improvement?) most suited to the nature of the Urban DNA actions. For the analysis of the neighbourhood scale and the risk of unintended consequences of improvement, Jacobs's framework is the most directly applicable: it provides both the affirmative case for small-scale intervention and the critical warning about gentrification risks that the urban acupuncture literature

alone does not address. For the analysis of the quality and political nature of citizen participation, Lefebvre's framework — operationalised through Arnstein's ladder — is the most directly applicable: it provides the theoretical grounding for asking not just how many people participated, but with what real power, and in whose interest the process was organised.

Finally, for the analysis of the technical design choices and their conceptual grounding, the Nieto and Marcos Torró framework is indispensable as the only source that offers access to the designers' own reasoning about those choices. The combination of these four frameworks, rather than the exclusive use of any one of them, is what enables this book to offer an analysis of Urban DNA that is simultaneously respectful of its genuine merits and honest about its unresolved tensions — the methodological ambition that was stated in the foreword and that this chapter has sought to operationalise through the presentation of these four complementary analytical tools.



CHAPTER 3 | THE URBAN DNA PROJECT: DOCUMENTARY RECONSTRUCTION

This chapter reconstructs, with the greatest possible documentary rigour based on verified sources, the institutional architecture of the Urban DNA project: its genesis, its intervention methodology, the neighbourhoods in which it has been applied, the actors who have driven it, and the funding structure that sustains it. As in the preceding book on Murcia's Cultural Model, a strict methodological principle is adopted: nothing is claimed that cannot be supported by a verifiable source, and documentary grey areas are explicitly noted where the available information does not permit firm conclusions. The exposition follows a combined chronological and thematic order: first the antecedent of the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood (2007-2013), which gave rise to the methodology; then the Santa Eulalia pilot experience (2017), which generated

European recognition; then the subsequent applications in El Carmen, La Paz and other neighbourhoods; and finally a synthesis of the methodology, the actor structure and the funding.

3.1. Antecedent: urban regeneration of the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood (2007-2013)

The origin of the Urban DNA model is not, as the most recent institutional documentation sometimes suggests, the Santa Eulalia neighbourhood in 2017, but a prior and more extensive experience of integrated urban regeneration developed in the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood between 2007 and 2013. This experience, documented by URBACT as the direct antecedent of the project (URBACT, n.d.-a), was implemented through an integrated approach combining



three strategically interrelated areas: improvement of the environmental conditions and quality of public space; improvement of economic conditions and employment; and improvement of social cohesion and inclusion of groups at risk of exclusion.

The URBACT documentation on this experience — one of the good practice sheets in its knowledge bank — describes the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood as a peripheral and degraded neighbourhood of Murcia, with serious problems of social, economic and labour exclusion that particularly affected its sizeable Roma population, and that had been systematically ignored by the dynamics of expansive economic growth that characterised the municipality of Murcia during the housing boom years (2000-2007) (URBACT, n.d.-a). The project was structured through a citizen participation and local stakeholder engagement process — Municipality, Local Board, NGOs, neighbourhood associations, cultural, youth and parents' associations, representatives of minorities and groups at risk of social exclusion, as well as business organisations, regional government, schools and other entities — which constitutes the direct

precedent of the participatory methodology that would later be systematised under the name Urban DNA.

The URBACT Good Practices Label finally obtained in 2017 explicitly recognised this Espíritu Santo experience — not the subsequent Santa Eulalia neighbourhood experience — as the reference initiative, under the title “Integrated and participative urban regeneration” (URBACT, n.d.-a). This chronological precision is relevant because the institutional communication of the Municipality tends to present the Good Practices Label as recognition of Urban DNA Santa Eulalia (the 2017 experience), when in reality the European good practice label validated the integrated and participatory methodology originally developed in the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood between 2007 and 2013, of which Santa Eulalia was, in the words of the mayor himself, the first “pilot laboratory” of a stylised and accelerated version of that earlier model (Ayuntamiento de Murcia, 2020).

3.2. The Santa Eulalia pilot (2017): origin of the current model

The Urban DNA project in its current configuration — with its name, its four-phase methodology and its communication brand — was born in the Santa Eulalia neighbourhood, in the historic centre of Murcia, whose intervention process began in April 2017, when Mayor José Ballesta presented the project at a press conference (adnmurcia.es, n.d.). The urban acupuncture actions themselves were carried out between September 2017 and October 2019, with a total of 17,650 m² of intervened area at an approximate cost of 45 euros per square metre, with the participation of more than 300 municipal technicians and workers in the execution phase (Fundación Arquia, n.d.; adnmurcia.es, 2017).

Santa Eulalia is described in the project documentation as one of the most cosmopolitan and alternative neighbourhoods in Murcia, but also one with important elements of history, such as the city wall of Murcia (Ayuntamiento de Murcia, 2020). This characterisation of the neighbourhood's identity — diverse and creative, but also bearing significant historical heritage — is consistent with the declared philosophy of Urban DNA of respecting and reinforcing the

distinctive character of each neighbourhood, and explains some of the most characteristic actions of the Santa Eulalia intervention: the completion of the trace of Murcia's city wall along its entire perimeter (3,000 metres), completed in 2020; the recovery of the ancient Medieval Souk of the city, with special paving reproducing the historical earth-tone colour; the chromatic carpets in the Plaza de Sardoy; the creation of the 'huertolab' (collective urban garden); artistic murals produced by Fine Arts students; and the "soft steps" installed over the hard plaza.

In the words of the mayor himself at the public presentation of the results of the intervention in November 2020: "Some time ago we started right here an absolutely innovative project, which we called Urban DNA. Urban DNA aimed at the transformation of Murcia's consolidated neighbourhoods through neighbourhood participation, not only through the contribution of ideas and suggestions, but also with direct involvement. In fact, many of the things that have happened in this neighbourhood were carried out by the neighbourhood residents themselves" (Ayuntamiento de Murcia, 2020).

Urban DNA was the first episode of this journey, very useful both for defining the model itself and for glimpsing its limitations and its scope. An urban strategy model built with collective enthusiasm and with the speed of the two months in which the neighbourhood is transformed. (Enrique Nieto, cited in La Casa de la Arquitectura, n.d.)

Murcia's participation in the URBACT Interactive Cities network — focused on how to engage citizens through social tools and digital platforms in the management of public affairs that affect their daily lives (Ayuntamiento de Murcia, 2021) — was the European framework within which the Santa Eulalia pilot experience was specifically developed, and generated as a specific result an online platform that allowed residents to express their proposals, ideas and opinions digitally, selecting areas and indicating the most pressing problems in their neighbourhood (URBACT Blog, 2018). This digital innovation in the participatory process — the combination of online tools with face-to-face meetings in the main neighbourhood squares — constitutes one of the most distinctive elements of the Murcia model compared to other participatory urban

regeneration projects of the same period in Spain.

3.2b. The Santa Eulalia process: detailed chronology

To complement the general description of the Santa Eulalia pilot presented in the preceding section, it is useful to reconstruct in greater detail the chronology of the process as documented by the available sources. The project was publicly presented on 25 May 2017, when Mayor José Ballesta announced it at a press conference as the new Murcia Urban DNA Project (adnmurcia.es, 2017). The participation phase — with working groups, surveys and neighbourhood mappings — developed over the following months, with an online process that allowed residents to indicate problems on a digital map and propose improvements (URBACT Blog, 2018). The agitation phase — with the entry of more than 300 municipal technicians and workers — began in June 2017, when it was announced that approximately 1,000 actions would be carried out in the neighbourhood (adnmurcia.es, 2017).

According to the technical data of the project

A^P

Antonio Parra

"El tiempo, aquella secreta aurora
de la mano del padre
por las veredas de la infancia"

A^M

Antonio
Marín Albalade

"Navegante vosotros digo: soy un p

sitios nuevos. de



collected in the Fundación Arquia sheet, the urban acupuncture actions proper extended from September 2017 to October 2019, a period of more than two years — considerably longer than the two months that the model description suggests in its most condensed formulation (Fundación Arquia, n.d.). This apparent contradiction between the rhetoric of speed — the “speed of the two months in which the neighbourhood is transformed” (Nieto and Marcos Torró, 2021) — and the reality of an execution extended over time does not invalidate the model, but does invite a more nuanced reading: the two months of maximum intensity of the agitation phase are not necessarily the totality of the intervention process, but the peak concentration of resources that generates the most immediate visibility effect, while the complete process — from participation through to final execution — may extend over years.

This distinction between the time of the “agitation” and the total time of the process is methodologically relevant because it directly affects the evaluation of the model’s efficiency: if the complete process lasts two years, the total cost — including the time of technicians and political officers throughout

that period — is substantially higher than if it lasted only two months, and should be accounted for as such in any cost-efficiency analysis of the programme. The available sources do not provide data to perform that complete calculation, which constitutes another of the documentary gaps noted in section 3.9 of this chapter.

3.3. The four-phase methodology

Urban DNA’s methodology is articulated around four successive phases that are applied as a standard in each neighbourhood or pedanía of intervention, though with adaptations to the specific characteristics of each context: Participation, Activation, Agitation and Projection (Murcia 2020 City Strategy, n.d.; adnmurcia.es, n.d.).

The **Participation Phase** is the one that sets the process in motion in each neighbourhood: it begins with a first contact between the Municipality and the associations, organisations, collectives, entities, neighbourhood movements and municipal boards. Working groups are then set up — a process lasting six weeks — in which residents can identify the neighbourhood’s

main problems and propose their ideas, suggestions and improvements, through the various associations and collectives. The participatory process also includes online and face-to-face surveys, citizen agoras and urban mappings, with the aim of identifying problems and proposing ideas and suggestions for improvement (Ayuntamiento de Murcia, 2021). This phase concludes with the elaboration of a neighbourhood diagnosis that serves as the basis for the following phases.

The **Activation Phase** is the technical phase: the projects selected in the participatory phase are technically defined by a team of architects and municipal technicians, who elaborate the action plans from the demands identified by the residents. It is in this phase that the technical team — led in the Santa Eulalia experience by Enrique Nieto and María José Marcos Torró — translates neighbourhood demands into concrete urban acupuncture interventions, establishing the sequence, scale and budget of each action (Nieto and Marcos Torró, 2021).

The **Agitation Phase** is the phase of visible execution: hundreds of municipal workers and technicians enter

the neighbourhood simultaneously and execute in a few weeks the improvement actions defined in the preceding phase. This concentration of human resources and activity in a brief and highly visible period is one of the most striking features of the model — “stirring up” the neighbourhood — and has a communication function and an expectation-generating function as important as its technical function: the massive municipal presence in the neighbourhood during the execution weeks has a symbolic and emotional impact on residents that the physical actions alone would not produce (adnmurcia.es, n.d.).

The **Projection Phase**, finally, is that of monitoring and outward projection: once execution is complete, the actions carried out are monitored and the project is disseminated outward, both at local scale (to reinforce residents’ sense of ownership of the improvements achieved) and at European scale (to feed the knowledge transfer process through URBACT and other city networks). This phase is the one that connects most directly with the international projection component of the model, analysed in chapter 4.

	Description	Main actors	Duration
Participation Phase	Neighbourhood vitality; mixed uses; human scale; gentrification risks	Residents, associations, municipal boards and technicians.	6 weeks
Activation Phase	Technical definition of selected projects	Architecture team, municipal	Variable
Agitation Phase	Concentrated execution of urban acupuncture improvements	Evaluate whether neighbourhood participation in Urban DNA constitutes real empowerment or instrumental participation	2 months
Projection Phase	Monitoring and internal/European dissemination	Primary source for the conceptual and technical design of the model from the perspective of its designers	Ongoing

3.4. The neighbourhoods intervened: from Santa Eulalia to Conexión Sur

Following the Santa Eulalia pilot experience (2017), the Urban DNA model was successively extended to other neighbourhoods in Murcia: El Carmen and La Paz, already developed with success according to the official Municipality source in January 2021, alongside Santa Eulalia, and more recently the neighbourhoods of Santiago el Mayor and El Progreso, within the initiative named Conexión Sur (Municipality

of Murcia, 2021). The name “Conexión Sur” (Southern Connection) suggests a territorial cohesion intention that goes beyond the individual neighbourhood: the idea of connecting southern city neighbourhoods that share similar starting conditions in terms of urban and social vulnerability. The El Carmen neighbourhood generated in the participatory process one of the most frequently cited initiatives of the entire project: the Mixtura international gastronomic and craft market, described as the first international gastronomic and



craft market in which countries from five continents are present with their culture, traditions, crafts and gastronomy — Spain, Ukraine, Bolivia, Ecuador, Senegal, Nigeria, Morocco, Mexico and Colombia — which emerged directly from the participation phase carried out with all the collectives in the neighbourhood (Murcia 2020 City Strategy, n.d.). Over time, Mixtura consolidated as a monthly neighbourhood fixture, becoming one of Murcia's most recognised cultural events and one of the most frequently cited success stories of the Urban DNA model. The documentation available on El Carmen also records the participation of more than 80 collectives and entities in the participatory process, with more than 3,000 contributions made by residents (Murcia 2020 City Strategy,

n.d.), a quantitative participation datum that — while it does not allow assessment of the quality or depth of participation — suggests neighbourhood mobilisation of some scale.

The La Paz neighbourhood presents a profile more distant from the cosmopolitan character of Santa Eulalia or El Carmen: it is a predominantly residential neighbourhood of relatively recent construction, whose main need identified in the participatory process was to overcome its physical and social isolation from the rest of the city. Actions in La Paz were oriented especially towards making the physical boundaries between the neighbourhood and its surroundings more permeable, and towards creating in its public space zones of greater intensity — squares, play areas, exercise zones — that

Documentary limitation on Conexión Sur neighbourhoods

The sources consulted for this book offer relatively detailed information on Santa Eulalia, El Carmen and La Paz, but substantially more limited information on the Santiago el Mayor, El Progreso and other more recent interventions under Conexión Sur. This documentary asymmetry does not imply that those interventions are less relevant, but rather — as in the case of Open Venues relative to the Cultural Model of Murcia analysed in the preceding book — that the publicly available documentation at the time of preparation of this book does not permit the same level of analysis as for the earlier neighbourhoods. Researchers interested in these neighbourhoods are recommended to consult directly with the Municipality of Murcia's Department of Citizen Participation to obtain updated documentation.

would endow it with a more active social life (antonioabellanaarquitectura.com, n.d.). The technical team itself acknowledges in the available documentation that the La Paz actions have a markedly “superficial” character — affecting fundamentally surfaces, walls and already-built elements — which illustrates clearly the limits of the model in contexts where the needs call for deeper structural transformation.

3.5. The institutional actors of the project

Urban DNA is institutionally presented as a Municipality of Murcia project that relies on the involvement of all its departments to revitalise the city’s neighbourhoods, urban, economic and socially (adnmurcia.es, n.d.). This formulation of departmental cross-cutting is one of the distinguishing features of the model compared to the usual sectoral interventions in local policy: rather than each municipal department acting in isolation within its sphere of competence (town planning, social services, culture, employment), Urban DNA aims to coordinate the interventions of all of them in the same space and time. The political coordination of the project

initially fell to the Department of Sustainable Mobility and Youth, under Councillor Rebeca Pérez, though the public presentation of the Santa Eulalia results in November 2020 was shared with the Councillor for Culture and Heritage Recovery, Jesús Pacheco — the same officer who coordinated Cultural Reactives and Cultural Testing Tubes during that period — and with Mayor José Ballesta himself (Ayuntamiento de Murcia, 2020). This concurrence of several departments at the same public presentation of the project illustrates concretely the model’s declared aspiration to departmental cross-cutting, though it also suggests, as will be discussed in chapter 5, that inter-sectoral coordination in practice may be more complex than in the institutional discourse.

At the technical level, architects Enrique Nieto Fernández and María José Marcos Torró were responsible for designing the urban acupuncture strategy in Santa Eulalia, El Carmen and La Paz, with urban manager Gerardo Sánchez Romero responsible for the process and participation management dimension (La Casa de la Arquitectura, n.d.). In the specific La Paz intervention, the direction of the architectural interventions fell to

Antonio Abellán Alarcón, with Enrique Nieto in the role of general project coordinator (antonioabellanarquitectura.com, n.d.). Citizen participation tasks were managed with the collaboration of Teresa Luján, and involved in different phases the support of architecture students from the University of Murcia organised in the “Huerta Bizarra” collective (antonioabellanarquitectura.com, n.d.).

3.6. The communication dimension: ADN Murcia and the digital platform

One of the Urban DNA model’s innovations not always highlighted in the available academic literature is that of its communication strategy: the project has its own dedicated website (www.adnmurcia.es), which functions as a repository of information on all actions carried out in each neighbourhood, as an agenda of events and activities linked to the project, and as an online citizen participation space. This platform, developed precisely in the context of Murcia’s participation in the URBACT Interactive Cities network — whose thematic focus was precisely citizen participation

through digital tools — allowed residents of Santa Eulalia to participate in the diagnosis of their neighbourhood online, selecting areas on a map and indicating the problems they considered most urgent (URBACT Blog, 2018).

The existence of this digital participation platform distinguishes Urban DNA from many other contemporary participatory urban regeneration projects in Spain, which continue to depend exclusively on face-to-face participation in tables and workshops. However, as the citizen participation in urban policy literature points out (Arnstein, 1969; Fung, 2006), the existence of a digital participation channel does not in itself guarantee that participation is effective, representative or transformative: the digital divide may exclude groups with less access or fewer digital skills — often the same groups with greater social vulnerability — from online participation processes, reproducing in the digital space the same representation biases observed in face-to-face participation.



3.6b. The La Paz intervention: when a neighbourhood needs permeability

The La Paz neighbourhood presents a very different morphological and social profile from Santa Eulalia or El Carmen, and its inclusion in the Urban DNA model illustrates the project's capacity to adapt to heterogeneous urban realities. La Paz is a predominantly residential neighbourhood of recent construction whose main difficulty is not the aesthetic deterioration of public space — relatively well maintained — but its physical and social isolation from the rest of the city of Murcia. The technical documentation of the project, produced by the architect directing the interventions in this neighbourhood, Antonio Abellán Alarcón, describes La Paz as a neighbourhood that has been the subject, over recent years, of various efforts to reconnect it to the development of the rest of the city, and whose physical boundaries with surrounding neighbourhoods constitute one of the most keenly felt problems by its own residents (antonioabellanarquitectura.com, n.d.).

The actions designed for La Paz within

Urban DNA consequently had a different character from those of Santa Eulalia or El Carmen: while in the latter the emphasis was placed on reinforcing the vitality of an already active but deteriorated urban fabric, in La Paz the priority was to improve the neighbourhood's physical connections with its surroundings and to create in its public space zones of greater intensity — renovated squares, play areas for different age groups, exercise zones — that would endow it with a richer and more visible social life. The available documentation describes the La Paz actions as interventions of fundamentally "superficial" character — affecting surfaces, walls and already-built elements, rather than the structure of the public space — which the technical team itself acknowledges as a decision adapted to the specific characteristics of a neighbourhood whose most urgent needs did not require demolitions or large-scale reurbanisation works (antonioabellanarquitectura.com, n.d.).

This adaptation of the intensity of the intervention to the specific needs of each neighbourhood is one of the most methodologically valuable elements of the



Urban DNA model: the fact that the same four-phase methodology produces tangibly different results in Santa Eulalia, El Carmen and La Paz — reinforcing cosmopolitan identity in the first, activating cultural diversity in the second, and increasing accessibility and permeability in the third — confirms that the model is not a rigid template applied identically in all contexts, but a flexible methodological framework that can accommodate very different urban realities without losing its underlying philosophical coherence.

3.7. Urban DNA Connects: extending the model to the pedanías

In parallel with the interventions in the consolidated neighbourhoods of the city, the Municipality of Murcia developed a variant of the Urban DNA model specifically oriented towards the municipality's pedanías: the Urban DNA Connects project, described in institutional sources as a new, pioneering and participatory project to be carried out in all the municipality's pedanías and neighbourhoods (adnmurcia.es, n.d.). This extension of the

model to the rural and semi-rural sphere of the pedanías — which constitute a substantial part of the territory of the municipality of Murcia, with its characteristic structure of dispersed nuclei historically linked to the huerta — is a relevant element from the perspective of territorial equity: it reflects the Municipality's declared objective of ensuring that all Murcia residents, regardless of their place of residence within the municipality, have access to the same urban improvement and citizen participation instruments.

The extension of the model to the pedanías raises, however, specific methodological challenges that the available documentation does not address in depth. The morphology and social structure of an agricultural or semi-rural pedanía differ substantially from those of a consolidated neighbourhood of Murcia's historic centre: associative networks are weaker, the density of formal collectives is lower, land uses are different, and the problems identified as priorities by residents may differ markedly from those that structure the interventions in Santa Eulalia, El Carmen or La Paz. The adaptation of the four-phase process to these



different realities would require, in principle, significant methodological refinement that the sources consulted do not permit description of in detail.

3.8. Murcia Urban DNA in the context of neighbourhood regeneration policies in Spain

To avoid presenting the Murcia case in isolation, it is useful to situate it briefly within the broader context of neighbourhood regeneration policies in Spain during the period analysed. Neighbourhood regeneration has been, since the approval of the State Housing Plan in its various versions — which include specific aid lines for rehabilitation in residential intervention areas — a recognised priority in the discourse of Spanish urban policy, though not always translated into budgetary resources proportionate to the identified needs.

In the 2014-2020 period, the ERDF-funded EDUSI strategies constituted the most ambitious instrument available to Spanish municipalities in the field of integrated urban regeneration, and their national-scale evaluation — still underway at the time of preparation of this book — will in the future allow the

Murcia experience to be situated in comparative perspective with other Spanish cities that developed analogous strategies. Murcia was not, in this sense, the only medium-sized Spanish city that bet on a participatory ERDF-funded neighbourhood regeneration model; what distinguishes it from many others — and what justifies the academic interest of this book — is the methodological soundness and the European visibility achieved by its specific model, which make it a reference case beyond the strictly regional sphere.

3.9. Acknowledged documentary limitations

Academic rigour requires the explicit acknowledgement of the limitations of one's own research, and this chapter is no exception. First, most of the information available on the participatory process in each neighbourhood comes from the Municipality's own institutional communication sources — the adnmurcia.es website, official press releases, the Murcia 2020 City Strategy — without it being possible to contrast it systematically with independent sources, such as external academic studies or third-party evaluations.

Second, information about the more recent intervention neighbourhoods — Santiago el Mayor, El Progreso and the Urban DNA Connects pedanías — is appreciably more limited than that available on Santa Eulalia, El Carmen and La Paz, which limits the capacity for comparative analysis between the different experiences. Third, and more generally, the available sources offer a reasonably detailed description of the processes and physical results of the project, but virtually no verifiable public information on its social impacts in the medium and long term, which are precisely the most relevant for evaluating whether the project achieves its declared objectives of social transformation of the intervened neighbourhoods.

3.10. The completion of Murcia's city wall trace: urban acupuncture at large scale

Among all the documented actions of Urban DNA, the completion of the full trace of Murcia's medieval city wall in the Santa Eulalia neighbourhood — 3,000 metres of recovered trace (Ayuntamiento de Murcia, 2020) — deserves a specific section for its scale and symbolic significance.

This action, which transcends the usual concept of small-scale “urban acupuncture” intervention to constitute a heritage project of considerable scale, illustrates one of the most interesting tensions of the model: the tension between the philosophy of small and rapid interventions and the need to address, in some cases, elements of urban heritage requiring a considerably greater investment and technical planning effort.

The recovery and signage of Murcia's city wall trace was not a two-month action executed by municipal workers following neighbourhood demands: it was the result of a long process of heritage research, technical planning, coordination between municipal departments — town planning, heritage, culture — and obtaining permits for works in a protected historic environment. In this sense, the Santa Eulalia wall illustrates how the Urban DNA model, in practice, combines interventions of very different scale, complexity and execution timescale under the same communicative umbrella, which may generate an impression of methodological homogeneity that does not always correspond to the underlying technical process reality.





3.11. The El Carmen Artistic Laboratory (LAC) as an example of cultural outcome

Another Urban DNA result that deserves specific mention, for its direct connection with the cultural dimension of the project, is the El Carmen Artistic Laboratory (LAC, from its Spanish acronym), situated next to the El Carmen church, where a programme of cultural activities derived from the neighbourhood's participatory process was developed (adnmurcia.es, n.d.). The LAC illustrates how Urban DNA is not limited to the physical improvement of public space but can also generate or reinforce cultural facilities and activities in the neighbourhood, in a line that converges with some components of Murcia's Cultural Model — especially with Open Venues, whose declared objective was to bring culture to the city's streets and squares.

The existence of the LAC also evidences the territorial and thematic overlap between Urban DNA and the Cultural Model of Murcia: the El Carmen neighbourhood, one of the main intervention areas of Urban DNA, is also one of the spaces with the greatest density of municipal cultural

facilities in Murcia — the Artillery Barracks is located within its perimeter — which generates a synergy between participatory urban regeneration interventions and the Cultural Model's cultural activities that is not always made explicit jointly in the institutional communication of both projects. This potential synergy between urban policy and cultural policy at neighbourhood scale is, in itself, a research object that deserves more systematic exploration in future academic work.

3.12. Murcia's urban context: heritage, huerta and the architecture of memory

To fully understand the scope of Urban DNA's interventions — particularly the recovery of the medieval city wall, the recreation of the Souk, and the references to the huerta in the communication lines of Urban DNA Connects — it is useful to briefly recall some features of Murcia's urban and historical context in which the model is embedded. Murcia is the capital of the Region of Murcia, one of Spain's seventeen autonomous communities, and constitutes, by population, one of the main municipalities of the south-eastern Iberian





peninsula, with a historic centre of notable heritage richness that combines traces of the different phases of its urban history: Roman, Andalusian, medieval Christian and Baroque.

This historical stratification explains the presence, among the spaces and heritage elements that Urban DNA's interventions mobilise, of layers of urban memory of very different historical periods: the medieval city wall whose trace was recovered in Santa Eulalia is a reminder of Murcia's Islamic and Christian medieval past; the zoco (souk) whose axis was recreated in the same intervention refers to the Andalusian commercial structure of the city before the Christian reconquest; the huerta referenced in Urban DNA Connects evokes the historic irrigation and agricultural cultivation system that has traditionally shaped the peri-urban landscape of Murcia, constituting a first-order element of intangible cultural and landscape heritage for local identity. This multi-temporal heritage dimension — simultaneously Islamic, Christian, agricultural and commercial — is one of the most distinctive aspects of the Santa Eulalia intervention in particular, and suggests that Urban DNA's "identity of

neighbourhood" is not a purely contemporary construct but is explicitly rooted in the long history of the city.

This brief urban and cultural contextualisation note does not seek to substitute a proper urban history study, which clearly exceeds the purpose of this book, but enables readers not familiar with Murcia to better understand why the Urban DNA model has given such weight, in its Santa Eulalia intervention specifically, to the recovery of heritage and historical memory, alongside the urban acupuncture actions of more immediate contemporary character (chromatic carpets, urban gardens, murals). This combination of historical depth with contemporary lightness of intervention is, in itself, one of the most distinctive methodological features of Urban DNA Santa Eulalia compared to more generic urban acupuncture experiences in other Spanish contexts.



CHAPTER 4 | THE EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK: URBACT, ERDF AND THE INTERNATIONAL PROJECTION MODEL

This chapter reconstructs the European institutional framework in which Urban DNA is situated, distinguishing precisely between the different instruments and networks cited in the project's documentation: the URBACT programme, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Urbelac network. As in the preceding book on Murcia's Cultural Model, the purpose is to systematically distinguish between the institutional divulgative narrative and what the European primary sources permit to be verified with certainty, noting honestly the areas where the available information does not permit firm conclusions.

A preliminary observation is necessary: unlike the preceding book, which could draw on an official evaluation document — the

European Urban Initiative booklet on Action 3 of the European Partnership on Culture and Cultural Heritage (2021) — the European sources available on Urban DNA are more varied in their nature and more heterogeneous in their level of rigour. This does not diminish the relevance of the case, but does require a more careful process of source selection and cross-referencing, which this chapter carries out systematically.

4.1. URBACT: the institutional framework for knowledge transfer

URBACT is a European territorial cooperation programme co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and by member states, active since

2002, whose mandate is to enable European cities to develop integrated and sustainable solutions to major shared urban challenges. URBACT operates through thematic city networks — generally of ten to twelve members from different countries — that work together for two or three years around a specific urban challenge, exchanging methodologies and experiences, and producing local action plans and transferable learning documents for other European cities (URBACT, n.d.-b).

It is important to distinguish from the outset between URBACT's network mechanism and its Good Practices Label mechanism, which are two distinct instruments of the same programme. URBACT networks are collective city learning initiatives, with direct funding for participation; the Good Practices Label, by contrast, is a recognition that URBACT awards to locally-developed initiatives independent of the network programme, which meet its criteria of excellence and whose purpose is to facilitate their transfer to other cities (Metropolis/USE, n.d.). Murcia participated in both mechanisms, but at different times and with different objects: in the URBACT Interactive Cities network (within URBACT III,

2014-2020) as one of the participating cities to develop its digital participation strategy; and through the Good Practices Label (obtained in 2017) as recognition of the integrated urban regeneration experience of the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood (2007-2013).

4.2. The URBACT Interactive Cities network: Murcia as a laboratory for digital participation

The URBACT Interactive Cities network was a thematic network of the URBACT III programme focused on how to engage citizens through social tools and digital platforms in the management of public affairs that affect their daily lives (Ayuntamiento de Murcia, 2021). Several European cities participated in this network — including Genoa, Madrid, Lisbon, Alba Iulia, Riga — alongside Murcia, and it gave rise to a knowledge exchange gathering in the city of Murcia attended by representatives of around twenty cities from Spain, Italy, Belgium, France, Portugal, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Estonia, Greece, the United Kingdom, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay and Ecuador (adnmurcia.es, n.d.).

According to the URBACT Blog documentation on the Interactive Cities network, Murcia's experience in the Santa Eulalia pilot project illustrated how digital participation could complement — but not replace — face-to-face participatory processes: the project website allowed residents to indicate problems on an online map and propose improvements, quickly and simply, while face-to-face meetings in the neighbourhood's squares provided the dialogue and collective construction dimension that the digital channel alone could not provide (URBACT Blog, 2018). This complementarity between digital and in-person participation is one of the methodological elements that URBACT's European documentation highlights as most transferable and replicable from the Murcia model.

Murcia's participation in the Interactive Cities network also generated as a formal product an Integrated Action Plan (IAP), a strategic planning document that is the main formal output that participating cities in URBACT networks are required to develop during their participation. According to the reference on the URBACT website, a document entitled "Interactive

Cities Integrated Action Plan Murcia" exists (URBACT, n.d.-c), though access to the full content of this document has not been verified in the open sources consulted for this book. This document, if available, would allow more precise contrast of the objectives declared and the commitments made by the Municipality of Murcia within the network, against the results effectively documented that have been reconstructed through the other sources consulted.

4.3. The URBACT Good Practices Label (2017): recognition and context

The most relevant European recognition of the Urban DNA model — and the one most frequently cited in the institutional communication of the Municipality of Murcia — is the URBACT Good Practices Label, obtained in 2017 in Tallinn, under the Estonian presidency of the Council of the European Union (Ayuntamiento de Murcia, 2021). This label is awarded by URBACT to local initiatives that meet its criteria of excellence in sustainable and integrated urban regeneration: an integrated approach (economic, social and environmental), strong

local participation, replicability in other urban contexts and capacity for knowledge transfer to other European cities (Metropolis/USE, n.d.).

The URBACT good practice sheet on the Murcia experience — available in the programme's good practices repository (URBACT, n.d.-a) — presents as the recognised practice the “Integrated and participative urban regeneration” of the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood (2007-2013), not the subsequent Urban DNA Santa Eulalia experience (2017). This precision is relevant because the institutional communication of the Municipality tends to present the label as recognition of Urban DNA Santa Eulalia, when in reality the European good practice label validated the methodology originally developed in the Espíritu Santo

neighbourhood, of which Santa Eulalia was a later and more systematic version.

The description that URBACT offers in its platform of the recognised Murcia practice is particularly valuable because it formulates the European diagnosis of the problems addressed in terms that the municipal institutional documentation does not always make explicit: the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood presented social and economic exclusion, labour insecurity and instability, poverty and conflict in the coexistence of residents, delinquency and a poorly educated and low-skilled population (URBACT, n.d.-a). This characterisation of the starting situation — with a language of social vulnerability and exclusion more direct than that employed in the municipal institutional communication — is relevant

Clarification on the Good Practices Label

The URBACT Good Practices Label does not imply additional direct funding for the recognised project, but fundamentally a recognition of excellence and a commitment to knowledge transfer to other European cities that request it. Nor does it imply that the project has satisfactorily achieved all its objectives: URBACT's evaluation refers to the methodology and the potential for replicability, not to the verification of long-term impacts. This nuance is important for correctly situating the scope of the European recognition obtained, and for avoiding the temptation — perceptible in some divulgative texts on the project — of interpreting the label as a comprehensive success certification of the model.



because it establishes the context in which the model acquires its full meaning: Urban DNA is not only a project of aesthetic improvement of public space, but a response to complex social degradation processes affecting neighbourhoods with high levels of vulnerability.

The practice is in every way worthy of being called a good practice, and we would gladly share our experience, which complies with the core values of effectiveness, efficiency and relevance. (URBACT, n.d.-a)

4.4. The Urbelac network: knowledge exchange with Latin America

The Municipality of Murcia's documentation also mentions participation in the Urbelac network as part of the European and international framework of the Urban DNA project (adnmurcia.es, n.d.). Urbelac is a cooperation network between cities in Europe and Latin America in the field of sustainable urban development, which has had different phases of activity linked to European cooperation programmes with Latin America.

The mention of Urbelac in Urban

DNA documentation always appears in the same context: the holding in Murcia of a knowledge exchange gathering attended by representatives of cities from both networks (Interactive Cities and Urbelac), from not only European countries but also from Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay and Ecuador (adnmurcia.es, n.d.). This gathering, which could not be dated precisely from the sources consulted, highlights an Ibero-American projection dimension of the model that the Municipality's institutional communication does not always emphasise as much as the European dimension, but which is relevant for understanding the real scope of the knowledge transfer generated by Urban DNA.

The sources consulted do not permit precise determination of whether Murcia's participation in Urbelac generated, beyond the mentioned gathering, a formal process of transfer of the Urban DNA methodology to Latin American cities, or whether it was fundamentally an exploratory exchange of visits and experiences. This documentary limitation is stated explicitly because the distinction between formal methodological transfer — with adaptation and application in

other contexts — and divulgative exchange visits is relevant for evaluating the real scope of the model's international projection.

4.5. The ERDF co-financing: direct funding versus methodological recognition

Unlike the Partnership on Culture and Cultural Heritage analysed in the preceding book — where the European component was fundamentally one of governance and methodology, without direct funding from the Partnership — in the case of Urban DNA the European component includes real direct funding, in the form of the 80% ERDF co-financing mentioned in the project's official documentation (Murcia 2020 City Strategy, n.d.). This difference is substantial and worth emphasising: in Urban DNA, European funds are not only an institutional framework of validation and recognition, but a source of direct funding representing the largest share of the budget executed.

This co-financing is framed within the Sustainable Growth Operational Programme 2014-2020, which allocated more than 5% of the ERDF resources assigned to Spain to the support of Strategies for Sustainable and In-

tegrated Urban Development (EDUSI), under Article 7 of Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 (Ministry of Finance and Public Administrations, 2015). Murcia's EDUSI — named "IT MURCIA: Innovation + Tradition" — was the instrument through which the Municipality channelled ERDF co-financing for the projects included in its Murcia 2020 City Strategy, including Urban DNA (Murcia 2020 City Strategy, n.d.).

The co-financing percentage — 80% ERDF, 20% Municipality — is strikingly high, and highlights the importance of European funds for making a project of this scale viable from a medium-sized municipality such as Murcia. Without a co-financing instrument of this nature, the Municipality would have been unlikely to sustain with its own resources the scale of intervention that Urban DNA reached between 2017 and 2021. This simultaneously raises an important question for the analysis of the model's sustainability: what will happen with Urban DNA when the 2014-2020 ERDF programming period ends and the new 2021-2027 period opens? Has the project created the conditions for its continuity with the Municipality's own funding, or does it depend structurally on European co-financing

to function at the scale at which it has been developed?

4.6. Urban DNA in the context of the EU Urban Agenda

Although the EU Urban Agenda — the main institutional framework of the preceding book on Murcia's Cultural Model — is not the primary framework within which Urban DNA is situated, it is worth noting the connection between the two frameworks to offer the reader a more integrated vision of Murcia's participation in European urban governance. The EU Urban Agenda, launched through the Amsterdam Pact in 2016, includes among its thematic areas that of integrated urban regeneration, which is precisely the object of Urban DNA.

More specifically, Urban DNA is cited as a good practice reference in at least one official EU Urban Agenda document: the toolkit on the reuse of abandoned or underused spaces elaborated within the Cultural and Cultural Heritage Partnership (the same Partnership analysed in the preceding book), which explicitly mentions "Urban fabric - ADN Murcia (Municipality of Murcia, Spain)" as

one of the reference cases of use of existing urban fabric for participatory regeneration (EU Urban Agenda, 2021). This mention in an official Urban Agenda document — though in toolkit format rather than a pilot action evaluation booklet like the one for Cultural Testing Tubes — confirms that Urban DNA is recognised at European level as a relevant example of participatory urban practice, beyond the URBACT label obtained in 2017.

The coexistence of Urban DNA and the Cultural Model of Murcia (Cultural Reactives and Cultural Testing Tubes) on the map of internationally recognised initiatives of the Municipality of Murcia is therefore not coincidental: both projects form part of the same ecosystem of municipal urban innovation that has managed to project itself simultaneously across several different European institutional frameworks, which suggests a deliberate strategy — though not always made explicit as such in the institutional communication of each project separately — of positioning the Municipality of Murcia as an innovative city in the European urban governance space.

4.7. Clarification on the participants in Murcia's international gathering

The institutional documentation of the Municipality mentions that Murcia hosted a knowledge exchange gathering attended by representatives of approximately twenty cities from Spain, Italy, Belgium, France, Portugal, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Estonia, Greece, the United Kingdom, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay and Ecuador, from the two European networks: URBACT Interactive Cities and Urbelac (adnmurcia.es, n.d.). This reference to twenty or so cities from sixteen countries deserves a note of precision.

The sources consulted for this book have not been able to determine precisely the date of this gathering, its duration, its format, or the agreements or documents it may have generated. The mention of Latin American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay and Ecuador, alongside European countries, suggests the gathering was held under the Urbelac network, whose scope of operation precisely covers cities in both Europe and Latin America. However, the coexistence in the same description of cities from two distinct networks (Interactive Cities and Urbelac) also indicates that the gathering may have been a broader exchange event, not necessarily a formal event of either network specifically.

This documentary imprecision — characteristic of institutional communication on international cooperation projects, which tends to emphasise the breadth and diversity of international contacts without always detailing the formats and concrete results — is noted explicitly here, following the methodological principle adopted in this book of systematically distinguishing between what the sources verify with certainty and what remains in the territory of an assertion without sufficient documentary backing.

4.7b. The Interactive Cities network and digital citizenship: European lessons

Murcia's participation in the URBACT Interactive Cities network inscribes the Murcia case within a broader debate about the role of digital technologies in citizen participation in urban policy, which is one of the most actively researched topics in contemporary urban

public management literature. This debate has two well-identified analytical poles: that of the digital optimists, who see in online participation platforms an unprecedented opportunity to broaden the social base of urban decision-making, reduce the transaction costs of participation and reach social groups that do not usually participate in face-to-face processes; and that of the digital sceptics, who point to the digital divide as an exclusion factor for groups with less access to technologies or fewer digital skills, and to the tendency of online participation platforms to reproduce — and in some cases amplify — the social class and educational biases that characterise face-to-face participation (Fung, 2006).

Murcia's Interactive Cities experience, as described in the URBACT Blog reports available for this book, adopted a digital-physical complementarity approach that is methodologically consistent with the intermediate position between both poles: the project website did not replace neighbourhood square meetings or working tables, but complemented them, offering an additional channel for residents who could not attend in person to also express their preferences

and indicate their problems (URBACT Blog, 2018). This complementarity is probably the most reasonable strategy in the current state of knowledge on digital participation, and the fact that URBACT itself identified it as one of the most transferable elements of the Murcia experience suggests that this pragmatic approach of digital as a complement — not a substitute — to the in-person has validity beyond the specific context of Murcia.

The integration of digital participation into the Urban DNA model also has an administrative innovation dimension worth noting: the creation and maintenance of a dedicated website for a neighbourhood regeneration project — with interactive maps, surveys, updates on ongoing works, event calendars and archives of the history of the participatory process — implies a level of technical capacity and institutional commitment to process transparency not available to all medium-sized Spanish municipalities. This investment in digital participation infrastructure, though not quantified in the available sources, constitutes in itself an element of administrative innovation that contributes to explaining why the Murcia model was recognised as a transferable good practice by URBACT.

4.8. The ERDF as a methodological conditioner: integrated approach and participation as requirement

An aspect that deserves additional specific analysis is the relationship between the ERDF's methodological requirements and the design of the Urban DNA model: to what extent is Urban DNA's integrated and participatory approach the result of a genuine philosophical and methodological conviction of the municipal and technical team that designed it, and to what extent is it an adaptation to the requirements that the ERDF imposes on projects aspiring to its co-financing?

The honest answer is that both factors have probably operated simultaneously and in a mutually reinforcing way. On one hand, the Municipality of Murcia's prior experience in the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood (2007-2013) preceded the systematisation of the model under the Urban DNA name, which suggests that the participatory and integrated vocation was not designed from scratch to fit ERDF requirements, but had its own roots in Murcia's institutional practice. On the other hand, the fact that the model consolidated and

expanded precisely in the 2014-2020 period — coinciding with the opening of the ERDF-EDUSI instruments and with the financial incentives these offered to municipalities that adopted integrated and participatory urban development methodologies — suggests that the availability of European co-financing acted as a powerful catalyst for the model's expansion to new neighbourhoods and pedanías.

This relationship of mutual reinforcement between the model's own methodological vocation and the European institutional and financial incentives is, in itself, a relevant finding for the analysis of urban policy in Spain: it illustrates how European public policy instruments can act as catalysts of local innovation not only through the direct financing of projects, but also — and perhaps more profoundly — through the definition of the methodological standards that projects must meet to access that financing, standards that end up shaping the management practices of the very municipalities that adopt them.

4.9. Urban DNA's footprint in European reference documents

Beyond the mention in the EU Urban Agenda toolkit on space reuse noted in section 4.6, the Murcia experience also appears referenced in at least one other document of European relevance: the evaluation document of the EU Urban Agenda's Partnership on Culture and Cultural Heritage, analysed in the preceding book on Murcia's Cultural Model, includes in its good practices toolkit the reference "Urban fabric - ADN Murcia" as an example of urban fabric reactivated through citizen participation (EU Urban Agenda, 2021).

This dual presence of the Murcia case in European reference documents — one in the field of participatory urban regeneration (through the URBACT toolkit and the Urban Agenda) and another in the field of cultural policy and heritage (through the Culture Partnership) — is not a minor coincidence. It suggests that the Municipality of Murcia has managed to project its presence in the European urban governance space simultaneously across at least two different thematic areas, which constitutes an institutional positioning achievement all the more notable given that Murcia is a medium-sized city in southern Spain that does not

belong to the large European metropolises that usually dominate international urban policy forums.

This dual European projection — urban and cultural — also enables a link to be established between the two books in this series: Urban DNA and Murcia's Cultural Model (Cultural Reactives, Cultural Testing Tubes) are distinct municipal projects, with distinct institutional frameworks, funding sources and methodologies, but share the same strategic orientation of positioning the Municipality of Murcia in the European space of urban and cultural innovation. This strategic coherence, though not always made explicit as such in the institutional communication of each project separately, emerges clearly when both cases are analysed together, as the parallel reading of the two books allows.

4.10. Lessons for multilevel urban governance

A closing reflection that can be drawn from the European analysis of Urban DNA is the one relating to multilevel urban governance: the complexity of simultaneously articulating the local level



(the neighbourhood, the community), the municipal level (the Municipality's EDUSI strategy), the national level (the Ministry's ERDF Operational Programme) and the European level (the URBACT network, the European Commission's structural funds) in a single local public policy project on neighbourhood regeneration. This multilevel articulation is a characteristic shared by Urban DNA with many other urban policy projects in contemporary Europe, and its effective management requires specific institutional capacities — technical, legal and coordinative — that not all municipalities have available.

The capacity of the Municipality of Murcia to simultaneously manage its role as the local promoter of neighbourhood actions, as the holder of the EDUSI strategy under the ERDF, and as a member city of the URBACT Interactive Cities network, is itself an indicator of the institutional maturity achieved by the Murcia municipal administration in the management of European projects. This institutional maturity — manifested in the capacity to produce the technical and financial documentation that European funds require, and to actively participate in URBACT knowledge exchanges — is an accumulated institutional

capital that goes beyond the Urban DNA project itself, and constitutes, indirectly, one of its most durable results for the Municipality as an organisation.

This dimension of organisational learning — the municipal administration that learns to manage European institutional complexity through participation in projects such as Urban DNA — rarely appears in the impact analyses of this type of project, which tend to focus almost exclusively on results for the territory and for citizens. However, from the perspective of public policy management, it is an equally relevant result: a municipality that has learned to navigate European fund mechanisms, to produce and communicate quality technical documentation for international audiences, and to participate in knowledge exchange networks with other European cities, is a municipality with substantially greater future capacity for action than before having gone through that experience.



CHAPTER 5 | CRITICAL ANALYSIS: INNOVATION, LIMITS AND TENSIONS OF THE URBAN DNA MODEL

With the documentary evidence gathered in chapters 3 and 4, and the conceptual framework set out in chapters 1 and 2, this chapter subjects the Urban DNA project to critical analysis organised around five questions, deliberately avoiding both the uncritical laudatory assessment that dominates institutional communication and the dismissive critique that ignores the available empirical evidence. The ambition is the same as guided the analysis of Murcia's Cultural Model in the preceding book: to offer a nuanced judgement, grounded in verified sources and conscious of its own documentary limitations.

The five questions are: does Urban DNA constitute a genuine methodological

innovation in the context of neighbourhood regeneration policies in Spain?; is the citizen participation that articulates the project effective and representative, or is it subject to the habitual biases?; what is the real scope of the model's European recognition, and what type of knowledge transfer has it generated?; what are the limits of the urban acupuncture model for addressing the structural causes of vulnerability?; and what remains of the project when the ERDF funding period ends?

5.0. The model in the mirror: four prior methodological assumptions

Before entering the question-by-question analysis that structures this

chapter, it is worth explicitly formulating four methodological assumptions that will guide that analysis and that the reader should bear in mind when interpreting the conclusions that will be derived from it. The first is that the analysis is based exclusively on public and verified sources: no interviews have been conducted with those responsible for the project or with residents of the intervened neighbourhoods, which means that the institutional perspective and that of the model's own designers carry greater weight in the analysis than the residents' perspective, which is precisely the most relevant for evaluating the actual effects of the project.

The second assumption is that the analysis's chronological scope is bounded by the temporal range of the available sources: the most recent sources consulted correspond to the beginning of 2021, which means that subsequent developments in the project — including the start of the 2021-2027 ERDF programming period and any evolution of the model in the Conexión Sur neighbourhoods — are not incorporated in this analysis and should be the object of future updates. The third assumption is that comparison with other analogous projects in

Spain or Europe is only partial and indicative: no systematic comparative analysis has been performed that would allow Urban DNA to be situated in relation to its reference field with the same precision with which Hylland et al. (2024) situate European pandemic cultural policies in the preceding book. The fourth and final assumption is that the judgement formulated in this chapter is, in the final analysis, provisional: the definitive evaluation of a public policy model such as Urban DNA requires long-term monitoring data that only the passage of time can provide.

5.1. Genuine innovation or a re-edition of known models?

The first question that a rigorous analysis of Urban DNA must raise is whether the model represents a genuine innovation in the landscape of neighbourhood regeneration policies in Spain, or whether it constitutes rather a new communicative label for a set of practices already known in the discipline.

The arguments in favour of the innovation designation are several and verifiable. First, the combination of a structured and replicable participatory



process — the four phases of Participation, Activation, Agitation and Projection — with the philosophy of urban acupuncture of small, rapid and heterogeneous interventions had not been systematised with this methodological precision in the context of Spanish municipal neighbourhood regeneration policy in the period analysed. Second, the incorporation of digital participation tools — the website platform allowing residents to indicate problems and propose improvements on an online map — represented, in 2017, an innovative form of citizen participation in the context of medium-sized Spanish cities, although more advanced digital participation experiences already existed in larger cities such as Madrid (the Decide Madrid platform) or Barcelona. Third, the explicit emphasis on the distinctive identity of each neighbourhood as the starting point for interventions — not a standard model imported from outside, but the recognition of each context's "identity patterns" (Nieto and Marcos Torró, 2021) — is a methodological principle that does not always appear with such clarity in other neighbourhood regeneration projects of the same period.

The arguments inviting caution

are equally solid. The urban acupuncture paradigm, as noted in chapter 2, is a reference already established in urban literature since at least the 1990s, and has been applied in countless European and Latin American urban contexts before Urban DNA. The process of participatory diagnosis through working groups, surveys and urban mappings is a standard tool in Spanish participatory planning, present in the citizen participation regulations of numerous municipalities since the 1990s. And the temporal concentration of actions in an intense "agitation" phase — though it has a strong visibility and collective enthusiasm-generating function — can also be criticised as a political visibility strategy rather than one of long-term institutional construction.

The most fitting assessment is probably that which considers Urban DNA an innovation of assembly rather than of components: it does not invent any of its elements separately, but combines them with a methodological coherence, a scale of intervention and a communication capacity that produce a result different from the mere sum of its parts. This same conclusion, which in the preceding book was formulated

regarding Cultural Testing Tubes in Murcia's Cultural Model, is applicable here in an analogous way: innovation does not always consist in inventing new concepts, but in effectively articulating existing elements into a coherent and transferable methodology.

5.2. Citizen participation in Urban DNA: representative and transformative?

The citizen participation dimension is simultaneously the most declared axis and the hardest to evaluate of Urban DNA. The available documentation describes in detail the formal participation mechanisms employed — working groups, surveys, citizen agendas, urban mappings, digital platform — but does not offer, as was also the case with Cultural Reactives and Cultural Testing Tubes in the preceding book, disaggregated data on the profile of participants: no public information is available on how many people participated in each process, what proportion of the neighbourhood's residents they represented, what was their distribution by age, gender, level of education or origin, or to what degree the participating sample was representative of the neighbourhood's social diversity.

This absence of participant profile data does not permit the conclusion that the programmes were inequitable or biased — nor the contrary — but it does permit noting a relevant methodological limitation: in the absence of impact evaluation reports with an equity perspective, any assessment of the inclusive or democratising character of the Urban DNA model must be formulated with due caution. The literature on citizen participation processes in urban regeneration is, at this point, uniformly cautious: the available empirical studies document consistently that participatory processes managed by local administrations tend to overrepresent the most organised collectives with the greatest available time, highest education levels and greatest familiarity with institutional processes, and to underrepresent groups with fewer resources and greater vulnerability — precisely those with the greatest need for representation in neighbourhood transformation processes (Arnstein, 1969; Fung, 2006; Hernández Aja, 2013).

One specific source of the project — the El Carmen neighbourhood diagnosis — offers, exceptionally, a relevant quantitative datum: more than 80 collectives and entities

participated in the participatory process, and more than 3,000 contributions made by residents were recorded (Murcia 2020 City Strategy, n.d.). This datum, though not disaggregated by sociodemographic profile, suggests a participatory mobilisation of some scale in that specific neighbourhood, and raises the question of whether it was possible to replicate that level of involvement in other intervention neighbourhoods. The available documentation does not permit a general answer to that question.

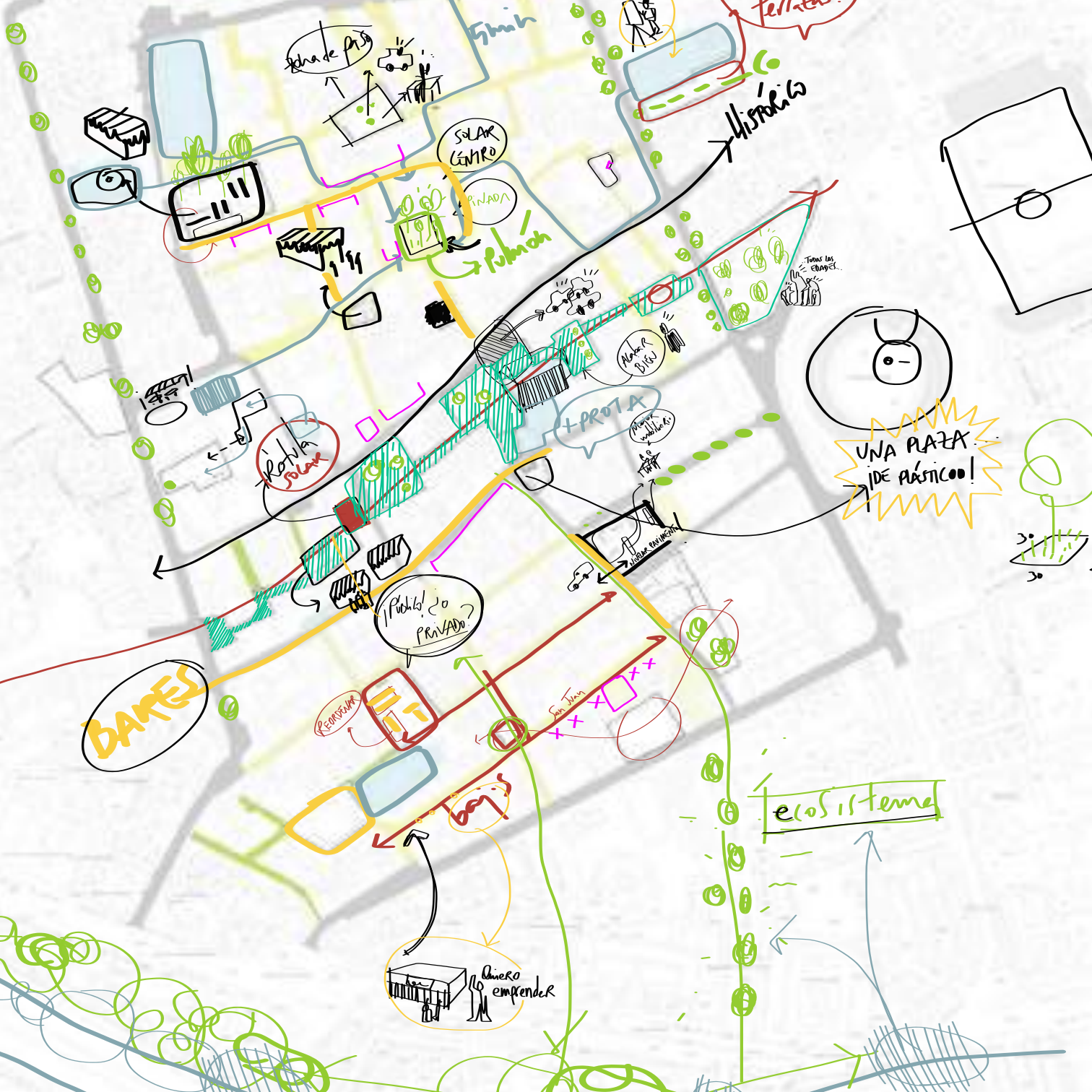
5.2b. The 3,000 contributions from El Carmen: what does that figure tell us?

The figure of more than 3,000 resident contributions collected in the El Carmen neighbourhood's participatory process (Murcia 2020 City Strategy, n.d.) deserves more careful analysis, because it concretely illustrates the limitations of the quantitative participation indicators typically used to evaluate these processes. The figure is, on first reading, impressive: 3,000 contributions from more than 80 collectives in a neighbourhood of tens of thousands of residents represents a participatory mobilisation of some scale.

However, this figure only acquires full analytical meaning when contextualised with additional information that the available sources do not provide.

To begin with, there is no indication of what proportion of the 3,000 contributions came from the 80 already-organised collectives and how many from unorganised individual residents: if the majority came from already-organised collectives — neighbourhood, cultural, commercial associations — the process would have had a profile of “representative” participation rather than “base” participation, which is legitimate but methodologically distinct. Nor is there an indication of how many of the 3,000 contributions collected were translated into actually executed actions, nor what the selection and prioritisation process of those actions was: who made the selection decisions and on what criteria. Finally, there is also no information on whether participants in the process represented residents of different socioeconomic profiles, ages and origins, or whether the process was dominated by groups with greater social capital and greater familiarity with institutional participatory processes.

These questions do not seek to



discredit the figure of 3,000 contributions, but to clarify its meaning: a participatory process that generates 3,000 contributions from 80 collectives is clearly more robust than one generating fifty contributions from five associations. But the difference between the two, if the 3,000 contributions are not accompanied by information on their origin and implementation rate, is a difference of quantity, not necessarily of quality or depth of citizen empowerment. This distinction — which the citizen participation evaluation literature formulates systematically but institutional communication documents rarely incorporate — is precisely what enables rigorous formulation of the questions this book leaves open about the real quality of participation in Urban DNA.

5.3. The scope of European recognition: method validation, not results certification

As documented in chapter 4, Urban DNA's European recognition combines three instruments of different natures: participation in the URBACT Interactive Cities network (collective learning), URBACT's Good Practices Label (methodological excellence

and replicability recognition) and ERDF co-financing (direct funding of actions). Unlike the Cultural Model of Murcia case in the preceding book — where the European component was fundamentally one of governance and methodology without direct funding — in Urban DNA the European financial component is substantial and quantitatively dominant.

However, here too the central methodological principle of this book should be applied: distinguishing between the verifiable technical content of the European recognition and the divulgative narrative that the institution constructs about that content. In the case of Urban DNA, this principle has a specific application in relation to URBACT's Good Practices Label: as explained in chapter 4, this label validates the methodology and the potential for replicability of the model, not verifies that the project has achieved its objectives of social transformation of the intervened neighbourhoods. In other words, URBACT certifies that Urban DNA is a model worth knowing and considering by other European cities, not that it has demonstrated producing measurable and lasting changes in the social cohesion of the intervened

neighbourhoods.

This distinction is relevant because the Municipality's institutional communication tends to present URBACT's label and prizes received as confirmations of the project's results, when in reality they are recognitions of the method's potential. The Gobierno Abierto Prize of the First Edition of the Good Governance and Administrative Modernisation Prizes of the Autonomous Community of the Region of Murcia, obtained in 2020 (Ayuntamiento de Murcia, 2021), has a similar nature: it recognises innovation in the citizen participation mechanism, not necessarily its verified long-term impacts.

5.3b. The transferability question: can Urban DNA be replicated in other cities?

An aspect of the critical analysis that deserves specific additional treatment, beyond what is already noted in the preceding section on European recognition, is that of the real transferability of the Urban DNA model to other European cities. URBACT's Good Practices Label certifies that the model has replicability potential: but what conditions does a city need to replicate it with reasonable

chances of success?

From the documentary analysis carried out in this book, at least four conditions can be identified that appear necessary for effective model transferability. The first is the existence of an active neighbourhood associative fabric: Urban DNA works better when there are already-organised collectives and neighbourhood associations that can act as interlocutors in the participatory phase working groups. In neighbourhoods with a very weak or practically non-existent associative fabric, the participation phase can be very difficult to structure effectively, and the risk that the participatory process will be dominated by a few highly-organised actors — who do not necessarily represent the totality of residents — is greater. The second condition is the availability of a technical team with a hybrid profile — architects with social sensitivity, urban managers with communication capacity, participation technicians with community experience — who can accompany the process from design through to evaluation. This combination of profiles is not common in the technical teams of Spanish municipalities, and its absence can seriously compromise the quality of the



participatory process and of the resulting interventions.

The third condition is having a financing umbrella that allows the concentrated execution phase — the “agitation” — to be sustained with sufficient human and material resources. The simultaneous entry of hundreds of workers into the neighbourhood over two months is one of the model’s most visually and symbolically impactful elements, but also one of the most costly in terms of mobilising municipal resources: without that critical mass of concentrated investment, the “social effervescence” effect the model pursues is difficult to achieve. The fourth and final condition is political continuity: neighbourhood regeneration projects such as Urban DNA require at least two or three electoral cycles of continuity for their social transformation effects to consolidate, and this continuity cannot be guaranteed in the most politically unstable or most election-sensitive contexts.

5.4. The model’s limits: acupuncture without integral diagnosis

The most important limit of the

Urban DNA model — and the one most directly derivable from the very metaphor that gives the paradigm its name — is the one that acupuncture as a medical practice itself implicitly signals: acupuncture treats symptoms and can contribute to the patient’s general wellbeing, but does not substitute an integral medical diagnosis or treatment of the deep causes of a chronic disease. Applied to urbanism, this limitation translates into the following question: can public space improvement interventions, however well designed and participatory, structurally transform a neighbourhood with problems of social exclusion, chronic unemployment, educational segregation and severe deterioration of the housing stock?

The honest answer is that very probably not, at least on their own. The urban degradation of vulnerable neighbourhoods has structural causes — socio-spatial segregation, accumulated public disinvestment, labour and housing market dynamics — that acupuncture interventions, however much they improve the quality of public space and reinforce neighbourhood identity and pride, are not positioned to reverse directly. The Urban DNA technical team itself is conscious

of this limit: the academic article by Nieto and Marcos Torró (2021) explicitly acknowledges that Santa Eulalia was “very useful both for defining the model itself and for glimpsing its limitations and its scope”.

The available documentation on the different intervention neighbourhoods confirms that Urban DNA actions concentrate clearly on improving the quality and appearance of public space, activating cultural events and activities, and improving pedestrian accessibility, but barely address directly the problems of housing (rehabilitation of the private housing stock), employment (creation of stable employment in the neighbourhood) or education (improvement of the educational quality of the neighbourhood’s schools). These are precisely the most difficult vulnerability factors to address with urban acupuncture instruments, and those that the integrated urban regeneration literature systematically identifies as the most determinant for the durable overcoming of social exclusion situations in degraded neighbourhoods.

This does not mean that Urban DNA is irrelevant or ineffective: public space improvement has effects on collective self-

esteem, commercial activity, perceived safety and neighbourhood cohesion that are real and should not be minimised. But it does suggest that the model, on its own, is insufficient to face the challenge of the integral regeneration of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods, and that its greatest effectiveness is produced when it functions as one of the components of a broader strategy that also includes interventions in housing, employment, education and social services. Precisely this is the logic of the EDUSI strategies — the Strategies for Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development — within which Urban DNA is formally inscribed: the multi-sectoral integration requirement that the ERDF imposes on EDUSI projects is, in a sense, an institutional corrective to the temptation to limit urban regeneration to its most visible and politically rewarding components.

5.5. The model’s sustainability: what remains when the funding ends?

The fifth and final question of the critical analysis is that concerning the sustainability of the model beyond the ERDF funding period:

what remains in the neighbourhood when the construction work, the media attention and the European funds flow end?

The documentation available on the already-intervened neighbourhoods offers some indicators, though not systematic data, on the permanence of the changes generated by Urban DNA. In the case of Santa Eulalia, Mayor José Ballesta described in November 2020 — three years after the start of the interventions — concrete and lasting physical results: the completion of the city wall trace, the recovery of the Medieval Souk, the new paving of several streets and squares. These results have guaranteed physical permanence, insofar as they are built or rehabilitated elements. Less certain is the permanence of changes in social dynamics and neighbourhood associative fabric: have the neighbourhood collectives that participated in the process maintained their activity?; have initiatives such as the El Carmen Artistic Laboratory continued as autonomous activities beyond Urban DNA's initial impetus?; has the Mixtura market consolidated as an autonomous and self-sustaining activity beyond Urban DNA's initial drive?

In the case of El Carmen, the docu-

mentation records at least one positive permanence signal: the Mixtura market consolidated, according to the sources consulted, as a monthly neighbourhood fixture — with the exception of January, July and August — that continues to attract both neighbourhood residents and people from the wider city (Murcia 2020 City Strategy, n.d.). If this datum is verified and maintained over time, Mixtura would constitute one of the best examples of urban acupuncture action with lasting multiplier effect: not only improving the neighbourhood punctually during the intervention period, but generating a new social and economic dynamic that continues functioning autonomously after the institutional project has formally concluded.

The sustainability question also connects, inevitably, with the structural dependence of the model on the ERDF funds noted in chapter 4. If 80% of the actions' funding comes from European funds, and if those funds are structured through multi-year programming periods with fixed closure dates, the continuity of the project at the same scale in the new 2021-2027 ERDF programming period depends on the Municipality's success in designing and



approving an equivalent new EDUSI strategy. This institutional and budgetary dependence on European programming cycles is a risk factor for the model's sustainability that institutional communication does not always make sufficiently visible.

5.6. The Urban DNA model as an exportable model: real transfer versus reputational positioning

One of the arguments that the Municipality of Murcia's institutional communication employs most frequently to support the value of the Urban DNA model is its exportable and transferable character for other European cities, endorsed by URBACT's Good Practices Label and by the participation of representatives of more than twenty cities in the exchange gathering held in Murcia. This argument deserves examination with the same analytical distinction applied, in the preceding book, to the European projection of the Cultural Model of Murcia: the distinction between the function of genuine technical transfer and the function of institutional and reputational positioning.

The genuine technical transfer of the

Urban DNA model occurs, in a verifiable way, through the formal mechanism of the URBACT Good Practices Label: once the label is obtained, the model becomes available in URBACT's good practices bank to be consulted and possibly adopted — with the necessary adaptations — by other European cities seeking methodological references in participatory urban regeneration. This availability is real, though it does not guarantee that the model is effectively adopted or successfully applied in other contexts. The difference between being available as a reference and being effectively transferred to another city in a systematic and documented way is substantial, and the sources consulted for this book do not permit determination of how many European cities have effectively adopted the Urban DNA methodology as a reference for their own neighbourhood regeneration policies.

The reputational positioning component, for its part, is clearly perceptible in the institutional communication of the project: the repeated mention of the participation of cities from sixteen countries in Murcia's gathering, the reference to the URBACT Good Practices Label obtained in

Tallinn during the Estonian presidency, or the Gobierno Abierto Prize of the Region of Murcia, fulfil a project legitimization and Murcia's image projection function as an innovative city that goes beyond mere technical knowledge transfer. This positioning function is not in itself negative — it is legitimate and usual in any public policy project with an aspiration to supramunicipal projection — but it is worth distinguishing analytically from knowledge transfer proper, to avoid interpreting the volume of institutional communication on the project's international projection as an indicator of the real scope of that transfer.

5.7. Synthesis: five tensions of the Urban DNA model

The preceding sections can be summarised into a synthesis of five tensions that run, with varying intensity, through each of the components and phases of the Urban DNA project, offering the reader a map of open questions to guide future research.

The first tension is that between assembly innovation and component innovation: Urban DNA is innovative in the methodological combination of pre-

existing elements (citizen participation, urban acupuncture, institutional communication centred on neighbourhood identity), but not in any of these elements separately, which requires any claim of radical innovation or absolute originality of the model to be nuanced. The second tension is that between participation as method and participation as empowerment: the available documentation describes in detail the formal participation mechanisms employed, but offers insufficient evidence to determine whether that participation has produced lasting changes in the capacity of neighbourhood organisation and self-management — what the literature calls citizen empowerment — beyond the improvement of public space during the intervention phase.

The third tension is that between urban acupuncture as a solution and as a symptom: public space improvement interventions have real effects on neighbourhoods' quality of life and self-esteem, but do not address the structural causes of their vulnerability, which raises the question of whether the model can be considered a complete solution or only part of the necessary response. The fourth tension is that between the sustainability of



physical results — which have guaranteed permanence by virtue of their built nature — and the sustainability of the social dynamics generated by the participatory process, whose continuity once the institutional intervention phase is formally concluded cannot be guaranteed without monitoring data that the available sources do not offer. The fifth and final tension, developed in the preceding section, is that between genuine technical knowledge transfer of the model to other cities — which is real but whose effective scope is difficult to determine without specific

research — and its reputational positioning function for the Municipality of Murcia in the European space of urban innovation, which is equally real and possibly more visible in the short term.

5.8. Applying this chapter's matrix in academic work

Since this book is also conceived as support material for urban management students preparing their own academic work, it is useful to close this chapter with explicit



guidance on how to apply the matrix of five tensions presented in section 5.7 to the analysis of any other local urban policy case, beyond that of Murcia.

The first step involves identifying, for the chosen case, what documentation corresponds to each of the three source levels proposed in this book: the institutional narrative of the actor being analysed (press releases, official websites, programme presentations), independent third-party evaluation documents (reports from supra-municipal bodies that have evaluated the programme), and comparative academic literature offering an external reference framework. The absence of any of these three levels — for example, if there is no independent third-party evaluation document, as is the case for Urban DNA's Integrated Action Plan from the URBACT network — must be explicitly declared as a methodological limitation, rather than filling the documentary gap with unverified inferences.

The second step involves disaggregating the object of study into its differentiated components, avoiding treating the programme as a homogeneous whole, as

has been done in this book by systematically separating the analysis of the Santa Eulalia, El Carmen and La Paz experiences within Urban DNA, and distinguishing between the URBACT Good Practices Label, the ERDF co-financing and the knowledge transfer to other cities as three different manifestations of the 'European recognition' of the model. The third step involves applying, to each component separately, the five questions of the matrix: is it genuine innovation or assembly innovation?; is the participation representative and empowering or merely consultative?; is the European recognition a validation of method or certification of results?; do the interventions address structural causes or only symptoms?; and what sustainability mechanisms exist beyond the institutional and financial support period? The fourth and final step involves formulating conclusions in terms of tensions and unresolved questions, avoiding both the uncritical laudatory assessment typical of institutional communication and the equally uncritical dismissive critique that lacks empirical grounding.



CHAPTER 6 | CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This final chapter fulfils a dual function. First, it synthesises the main findings of the book, organising them into a set of numbered conclusions that can be cited and discussed independently by any reader using this text as a reference for their own academic work. Second, it proposes a future research agenda that, far from presenting the Urban DNA case as a closed matter, frames it as an open object of study, susceptible to being expanded with data, interviews and documentary sources that exceed the scope and resources available for the preparation of this book.

6.1. Synthesis of findings

The analysis developed in the five preceding chapters permits the formulation of the following main conclusions, ordered by

the chapters in which they are developed in greatest detail. In relation to the conceptual framework (chapter 1):

> **First:** Urban DNA is inscribed in a well-consolidated intellectual tradition in contemporary urbanism that brings together at least three converging currents: the Jacobsian critique of large-scale urbanism and its vindication of neighbourhood vitality; the urban acupuncture paradigm formulated by Jaime Lerner; and the European approach to integrated urban regeneration that has oriented the URBAN and URBACT programmes since the 1990s. The Murcia model does not invent any of these components, but combines them with a methodological coherence and a communication capacity that produce a



recognisable and transferable result.

> **Second:** the Lefebvrian category of the right to the city, though not explicitly employed in Urban DNA's documentation, offers the most useful critical framework for formulating questions about the representativeness and real power of neighbourhood participation in the project, which the available documentation does not answer on its own.

In relation to the documentary reconstruction of the case (chapter 3):

> **Third:** the direct and verified antecedent of Urban DNA is the integrated urban regeneration experience of the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood (2007-2013), recognised by URBACT as a Good Practice under the title "Integrated and participative urban regeneration", and not — as the most recent institutional communication would tend to suggest — the Santa Eulalia pilot experience (2017). The 2017 Good Practices Label recognises the methodology originally developed in the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood, of which Santa Eulalia

was the first "pilot laboratory" of a stylised and accelerated version.

> **Fourth:** the four-phase methodology — Participation, Activation, Agitation and Projection — is the most transferable element of the Murcia model, precisely because it allows replication with adaptations in different urban contexts without requiring identical starting conditions. The available evidence on the different intervention neighbourhoods confirms that the methodology has been applied with sufficient coherence to merit the designation of model, and not merely a set of ad hoc actions.

In relation to the European framework (chapter 4):

> **Fifth:** unlike the Partnership on Culture and Cultural Heritage (analysed in the preceding book on Murcia's Cultural Model), which does not involve direct funding of local programmes but only institutional and methodological recognition, the European framework of Urban DNA includes real direct co-financing by the ERDF at 80% of the cost of the actions. This difference is

substantial and makes Urban DNA a case of European financial dependence much more direct and quantitative than the cultural programmes analysed in the preceding book.

> **Sixth:** Urban DNA's European recognition combines three instruments of different natures (URBACT network participation, Good Practices Label, ERDF co-financing) with different implications in terms of funding, knowledge transfer and institutional validation. The Municipality's institutional communication tends to present these three instruments in an undifferentiated way under the generic umbrella of 'European recognition', when in reality they represent three different dimensions of the project's European framework that deserve to be analysed separately.

In relation to the critical analysis of the model (chapter 5):

> **Seventh:** the Urban DNA model is more innovative in methodological combination than in its individual components. Its specific added value lies

in the coherent articulation of structured citizen participation, urban acupuncture and institutional communication centred on neighbourhood identity, rather than in any of these elements separately. This is the innovation that URBACT's Good Practices Label implicitly validates.

> **Eighth:** the most important question about Urban DNA that the available documentation leaves unanswered is whether the neighbourhood participation the project articulates has produced lasting changes in the capacity of residents to organise and self-manage — what the literature calls citizen empowerment — beyond the improvement of public space during the intervention phase. This question, central from the right-to-the-city perspective, requires specific empirical research exceeding the documentary scope of this book.

6.2. Methodological contribution of this book

Beyond the specific case, this book

aspires to illustrate a working method transferable to any analysis of local urban policy with a citizen participation component and European projection. The central methodological principle is the same as guided the preceding book on Murcia's Cultural Model: to systematically distinguish between three source levels—the institutional narrative of the actor being analysed, official third-party evaluation documents, and peer-reviewed comparative academic literature offering an independent comparative framework.

In the case of Urban DNA, the application of this principle reveals a significant asymmetry between the three levels: the institutional documentation of the Municipality is abundant and accessible; the European evaluation documents (especially the URBACT good practice sheet) offer complementary valuable information but are not exhaustive; and the academic literature specifically on the case is scarce — practically limited to the article by Nieto and Marcos Torró (2021) in Planur-e — and produced largely by the model's own designers, which makes it a privileged source of information on the conceptual design, but not an independent

analysis of its results.

This scarcity of external academic literature on Urban DNA is not only a documentary limitation of this book, but also an indicator of the state of research on the case: unlike the cultural programmes of Murcia's Cultural Model, which have at least an official evaluation booklet from the European Urban Initiative providing a verifiable external perspective, Urban DNA lacks an equivalent external evaluation of similar rigour and public access. This gap represents, in itself, a priority future research direction.

6.3. Future research directions

From the preceding findings there derive at least the following research directions that exceed the documentary scope of this book but constitute a reasonable agenda for future academic work on the case:

1. A medium and long-term social impact evaluation study in the neighbourhoods intervened by Urban DNA, measuring systematically the changes in social cohesion, associative activity, employment, residential satisfaction indices and perceived quality of life

before and after the interventions, and including disaggregated data by sociodemographic profile of the participants in the participatory process.

2. Specific research on the representativeness and real decision-making power of neighbourhood participation in each of the intervened neighbourhoods, employing qualitative methodologies — in-depth interviews with participants and non-participants — that allow the institutional narrative of the participatory process to be contrasted with the experience of the residents themselves.

3. A systematic comparative analysis of Urban DNA with other Spanish and European participatory urban regeneration projects of the same period, to establish the extent to which the Murcia model is genuinely singular or is inscribed in a broader pattern of urban innovation in medium-sized European cities that have bet on citizen participation and urban acupuncture as a neighbourhood regeneration strategy.

4. An evaluation of the financial sustainability of the model in the new

2021-2027 ERDF programming period: has the Municipality of Murcia managed to integrate Urban DNA into a new EDUSI strategy for 2021-2027?, and if so, at what scale, in which neighbourhoods and with what methodology?

5. A thorough documentary analysis of the Integrated Action Plan produced by Murcia within the URBACT Interactive Cities network — whose reference exists on the URBACT website (n.d.-c) but whose content could not be verified in open sources for this book — to contrast the commitments formally assumed by the Municipality within the European framework with the results documented in the project's subsequent phases.

6.4. Practical recommendations for urban managers

The analysis of Urban DNA also permits the formulation of practical recommendations directed at urban managers and participatory urbanism professionals who may be designing or reviewing analogous projects.

1. Systematically document the profile of participants in citizen participation



processes (age, gender, origin, level of education, length of residence in the neighbourhood), not only the number of participants or contributions collected, so as to be able in the future to address the representativeness questions that this book has identified as the principal gap in the Urban DNA case.

2. Design, alongside digital participation mechanisms, specific outreach mechanisms for groups with less access to digital technologies or less familiarity with administrative processes — home visits, participation at already-existing association premises, collaboration with neighbourhood social workers — that allow the representation gap inherent to digital participation to be mitigated.

3. Establish from the project's outset a monitoring system of social impact indicators that allows assessment, over a three-to-five-year horizon after the interventions, of whether the changes generated in public space have translated into measurable changes in social cohesion, economic activity and neighbourhood organisational capacity.

4. Plan the model's sustainability

beyond the ERDF co-financing period, identifying from the project's design which components have potential for partial self-financing (events, markets, cultural activities) and which require necessarily continuous public funding to be maintained.

5. Communicate with precision the nature and scope of the different European recognitions obtained, distinguishing between methodological validation (URBACT Good Practices Label), direct funding (ERDF co-financing) and knowledge transfer (participation in thematic networks), to avoid institutional communication building on these recognitions expectations that do not faithfully reflect what each European instrument certifies.

6.5. How to use this book in academic work

Since this book is also conceived as support material for urban management students preparing their own academic work, it is useful to close this section with explicit guidance on how to use this text — and the Urban DNA case — in formal academic work

(undergraduate dissertation, master's thesis, research articles).

The first step is that of source verification: any academic work citing this book should directly cross-check the primary sources it cites — the URBACT sheet on the Espíritu Santo neighbourhood, the Murcia 2020 City Strategy documentation, the Nieto and Marcos Torró article in Planur-e, the Municipality of Murcia's press releases — before reproducing the assertions of this book as if they were first-hand data. This book is a synthesis and analysis of secondary and primary sources; citing this book instead of the primary sources it employs is a practice that reduces the traceability and verifiability of the argument.

The second step is that of updating: the most recent sources consulted for this book date from early 2021, which means that the Urban DNA project has continued to evolve since then. Any researcher approaching this case in the near future should update the analysis with more recent sources, including information on the Conexión Sur interventions, the evolution of Urban DNA Connects in the pedanías, and the eventual integration of Urban DNA into the new 2021-

2027 ERDF-EDUSI strategy. The third step is that of triangulation: to go beyond what these pages offer, any research should complement the documentary analysis with in-depth interviews with residents, technicians and political officers, and potentially with participant observation studies in the intervened neighbourhoods.

6.6. Urban DNA and Murcia's Cultural Model: two strategies, one innovation ecosystem

This book on Urban DNA is the second in a series begun with the analysis of Murcia's Cultural Model (Cultural Reactives, Cultural Testing Tubes, Open Venues). The joint reading of both books enables the formulation of a synthesis observation that neither of them separately can make with the same clarity: the Municipality of Murcia has developed, in the 2017-2022 period, two strategic urban and cultural innovation projects — Urban DNA and the Cultural Model of Murcia — that share the same strategic orientation of positioning in the European space of urban governance, although they belong to clearly distinct institutional, thematic and funding



frameworks.

The similarities between the two projects are deeper than their belonging to the same municipal administration. First, both operate at the scale of local intervention — the neighbourhood, public space, the cultural creator — combined with an explicit projection towards the European public policy space — the Partnership on Culture and Cultural Heritage in the case of the Cultural Model, URBACT and ERDF funds in the case of Urban DNA. Second, both employ a language of innovation and pioneering — “first Spanish city to...”, “model recognised by Europe...” — that performs a reputational positioning function as much as a technical description of results. Third, both present the same documentary asymmetry already noted in this book and the preceding one: abundant in immediate quantitative results (number of projects, intervened neighbourhoods, square metres transformed), scarce in medium-term social impact evaluation.

The differences between the two projects are also relevant for comparative analysis. Urban DNA has direct ERDF co-financing at 80%, making it financially more sustainable in the short term than Murcia’s Cultural Mo-

del, whose budget allocation of one million euros comes exclusively from the Municipality’s own budget. Urban DNA has a longer institutional antecedent — the Espíritu Santo experience since 2007 — than Cultural Reactives, whose launch during the 2020 state of emergency gives it a more clearly circumstantial origin character. And Urban DNA has its own academic publication — the Nieto and Marcos Torró article in Planur-e — offering a verifiable external perspective, albeit from the model’s own designers, that none of the Cultural Model of Murcia’s components has to the same degree.

6.7. Closing reflection: the city as a laboratory

Jaime Lerner, the Brazilian urbanist whose work on urban acupuncture has been a constant reference throughout this book, described the city on one occasion as “a play on words and also a game of possibilities”. In this dual condition — as a text on which each generation inscribes its own writing, and as a space of possibilities that is never exhausted — resides the power of urbanism as a discipline and a practice. Urban DNA,



in its best version, is precisely that: a way of reading the text of the neighbourhood — its identity patterns, its critical points, its memories and its potential — and intervening in it with speed, precision and openness to the unexpected, in the same way that the acupuncturist reads the patient's body and acts on the points that can trigger the healing process.

If this book has achieved its purpose, the reader who reaches this point will have the conceptual tools — Lerner, Jacobs, Lefebvre, Arnstein, Nieto and Marcos Torró — and the documentary knowledge — the neighbourhoods, the phases, the ERDF funding, the URBACT label — needed to

form their own judgement on whether Urban DNA represents an adequate response to the challenge of regenerating Murcia's vulnerable neighbourhoods, and to what extent it can and should be transferred to other urban contexts. The questions this book leaves open — about the representativeness of participation, about long-term social impact, about sustainability without ERDF — are not weaknesses of the model but signals that there is relevant research yet to be done. And that research, when carried out, will tell more about the city of Murcia and its residents than any European recognition or institutional press release.



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Glossary of terms

CARM — Autonomous Community of the Region of Murcia

EDUSI — Strategy for Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development (Spanish acronym)

ERDF — European Regional Development Fund

IAAC — Institut d'Arquitectura Avançada de



Co-funded by
the European Union



Catalunya (Advanced Architecture Institute of Catalonia)

URBACT — European territorial cooperation programme for sustainable urban development

IAP — Integrated Action Plan (URBACT)

LAC — Laboratorio Artístico de El Carmen (El Carmen Artistic Laboratory, Murcia)

NGO — Non-Governmental Organisation

PERI — Plan Especial de Reforma Interior (Special Interior Reform Plan, Spain)

RUA — Institutional Repository of the University of Alicante

SDGs — Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2030 Agenda)

SWOT — Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats analysis (equivalent to Spanish DAFO)

URBAN — EU community initiative for integrated urban regeneration (1994-2006)

