



CONVERSATIONS IN PLANNING THEORY AND PRACTICE BOOKLET PROJECT

IN THE MIRROR OF URBAN LANDSCAPES: SHARING EXPERIENCES AND GROUNDING

JUAN LUIS DE LAS RIVAS, IN CONVERSATION WITH ANA RUIZ-VARONA
AND FEDERICO CAMERIN



Master Plan for the "City of Youth" new urban development in Ponferrada (León, Spain). Source: Juan Luis de las Rivas & Planz SLP, 2006



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Juan Luis de las Rivas, Ana Ruiz-Varona and Federico Camerin

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the grid as a mental structure and as a settlement pattern. His first guideline was to read everything that had been published about the grid and reflect on it. The progress of the research was the result of these reflections and the daily conversations I had with him. In the context of a thesis with a strong essayistic bias, the aspects he emphasised the most were bibliography (incorporating authors from diverse approaches and disciplines: Kostof, Corominas, Galantay, Reps, Norberg-Schulz, Pérez-Gómez, Choay, Piaget, Sennett, Koyré, Gombrich and Gibson) or the weak points of the argumentation. In his supervisory capacity, Juan Luis adopted a laissez-faire approach, affording me considerable autonomy, an aspect of his mentorship that I deeply appreciated.

I spent almost three and a half years in Valladolid and returned to Argentina in mid-2003 with the thesis practically finished, defending it in 2005 ('Grid, culture, and city. The various expressions of orthogonal layout as a principle of order', 2005).

Today, my professional development focuses on the academic field, and completing the thesis has been important not only as a progression in my career but also for the knowledge I acquired regarding a classic issue of contemporary planning.

From Planning Practice to PhD, by Mario Paris

When Federico and Ana asked me for an interview about Juan Luis, I was both thrilled and scared. For me, he represents several figures at the same time. He is my mentor, my severe but stimulating thesis supervisor, my demanding but kind boss when I worked in IUU-Lab, an expert and solid colleague and, of course, a friend.

I met him in 2008 in Milan when he presented the 10th issue of *Ciudades*. Suddenly, he proposed to me an international stay in Valladolid, where I started my PhD under his supervision. At that time, I had the opportunity to work with him, developing several analyses on the territorial and metropolitan scales. Since 2009, he pushed me to read an endless number of books and articles, to focus on several topics (i.e. the role of rural spaces, the landscape in the urban edges and the role of public spaces in the everyday life of a neighbourhood), and authors (Sorkin, Bergmann, Arendt and Putnam, among others), even though they were not mainstream yet—pushing me to become a more solid researcher and professional. Over the years, we worked together, we took part in several conferences and international events, we wrote many scientific articles, and we chatted a lot.

Based on these experiences, there are some qualities of Juan Luis' profile that I would stress. He is curious, and his curiosity emerges when you realise that he is a fervent reader with an exceptional memory. He is 'sciencey' and one of the most cultured people I have ever met. It is interesting to see how his learning process moves feverishly, often involved in his reasonings important authors in the field of urban planning and architecture mixed with historical biographies, novels, philosophers and historians. Thanks to his voracity, he developed a strong disciplinary knowledge that he uses in his academic, professional and social life. He is really talkative, and thanks to his innate empathy, he connected with several professionals, technicians and colleagues around the world. His

network includes the US, Latin America, Europe and Africa. Over the years, he explored different research hubs, not because he was attracted by their brand, but because he was looking for colleagues and experts, intrigued by their roles of excellence in their research fields. For him, every stay, exchange or conference is an opportunity to observe what is new in academia or in practice and to gain skills and competences. At the same time, he likes to live the cities he visits, strolling around, sketching and comparing the reality with the descriptions found in books and papers. I remember our walks in London, Belgrade, Bratislava and Milan, but also the journeys in Valladolid, learning something new, listening to his remarks, memories or a story about every corner. With his sagacious commentaries, he put in evidence how



Fig. 05 - Mario Paris, Researcher at Università degli Studi di Bergamo, Italy

the city evolves and the role of architects and urban planners in these processes, as well as civil servants and administrators. In this light, Juan Luis complements the reflective practitioners described by Donald Schön. He is an academic who has always practised and worked in the field of urban and territorial planning—moving from teaching, researching and supporting public bodies and institutions, conscious of the bottlenecks, frictions and mediations wherein the transposition of ideas and innovations must face off when switching from theory to reality.

Therefore, Juan Luis is a generous teacher and colleague, always ready to share ideas, to hear different opinions and, when needed, able to leave people to find their own solution, not imposing his opinion. He is a convincing and a good speaker because he thrills the audience with his words and reflections. In the middle of one of his conferences or during a meeting, you can feel disoriented because he is not simplifying complex reasoning just to indulge the viewers. He is pushing students, PhD candidates, collaborators and clients to open their minds, face challenging problems and work with attention and creativity. With his work, always supported by his example, engagement and passion, he is able to train the interlocutor to discuss critically the borders of the planning process and re-frame the questions in order to define new realities with a positive perspective.

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Juan Luis de las Rivas, Ana Ruiz-Varona and Federico Camerin

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Juan Luis de las Rivas Sanz is Full Professor of Urban Planning and Design and Director of the School of Architecture at the University of Valladolid (Spain). He frequently collaborates with regional and local authorities as a planning consultant and currently leads the IUU_Lab, a research group specializing in spatial planning and urban design. The group has carried out projects for various cities and urban regions—including Burgos, Ponferrada, and Zamora—as well as for several Spanish autonomous communities such as Castilla y León, Asturias, and Extremadura. Additionally, IUU_Lab has been involved in initiatives commissioned by Spanish ministries and regional governments, with a focus on innovation in sustainable urban and regional planning.

Professor de las Rivas is the author or co-author of over ten monographs in the fields of regional planning, urban design, and architecture. He is also the Spanish translator of Ian McHarg's seminal work *Design with Nature* (Barcelona, 2000). He has served as a visiting professor at numerous universities across Europe, the United States, and Latin America, participating in undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs.

His research explores the interplay between nature and urban design, grounded in the architectural foundations of planning. In 2002, his project *Directrices de Ordenación Territorial de Valladolid y Entorno*—urban guidelines for the metropolitan area—received the Fourth European Urban and Regional Planning Award from the European Council of Town Planners (ECTP). Another of his projects, involving the regeneration of two postwar neighborhoods, received an honorable mention in the 2003 Gubbio International Prize.

This booklet emerges from a series of discussions held over the past two years between the authors and Professor de las Rivas. At the early stages of their academic careers, the authors had the opportunity to engage with him on critical topics such as the dialectic between place and landscape, the contradictions inherent in planning practices and urban culture, and the renewed vision of urban planning as a creative and interpretive discipline.

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