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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPANISH URBAN AGENDA: ACTION PLANS

An Action Plan to implement the Spanish Urban Agenda requires, as does the Agenda itself, a diagnosis of the situation that identifies and analyses the main challenges posed by the policies, plans, programmes and actions that have an impact on urban models. But it must go a step further, because it is not enough to point out the problems; instead, it must propose actions conceived in light of the strategic goals that will allow for a suitable reorientation of current or future plans, programmes, policies and projects.

To this end, the Spanish Urban Agenda aims to identify a number of areas of action that can be selected and chosen by virtually all the stakeholders involved in the ultimate goal of achieving more sustainable urban development, from government agencies to the private sector, including universities and academia in general, the third sector, civil society, etc. It also incorporates a system of indicators to adequately monitor and critically and objectively evaluate whether or not those strategic goals are being achieved.

The participation process that inspired the preparation of this document and its final approval is one of the pillars that seeks to underpin its success, without forgetting the driving force that could be provided by allocating specific funds to satisfy its strategic objectives and implementing the actions it proposes, as the various action plans are approved.

By its nature, it is a long-term agenda, regardless of whether concrete actions can be taken in the short and medium term. The joint and sustained commitment of each and every stakeholder will be essential to all this.

This call for action shapes the Spanish Urban Agenda as a **strategic framework**, not exclusively dogmatic, that details the principles, goals, criteria and guidelines of action that will allow achieving the sustainable and integrated urban development of the towns and cities of Spain. And based on its goals, each of the stakeholders committed to implementing the Agenda will be able to draw up its own Action Plan, adding to it, if applicable, the timeline for prioritising activities, the possible financing for each of the actions and its own self-assessment and monitoring procedure.

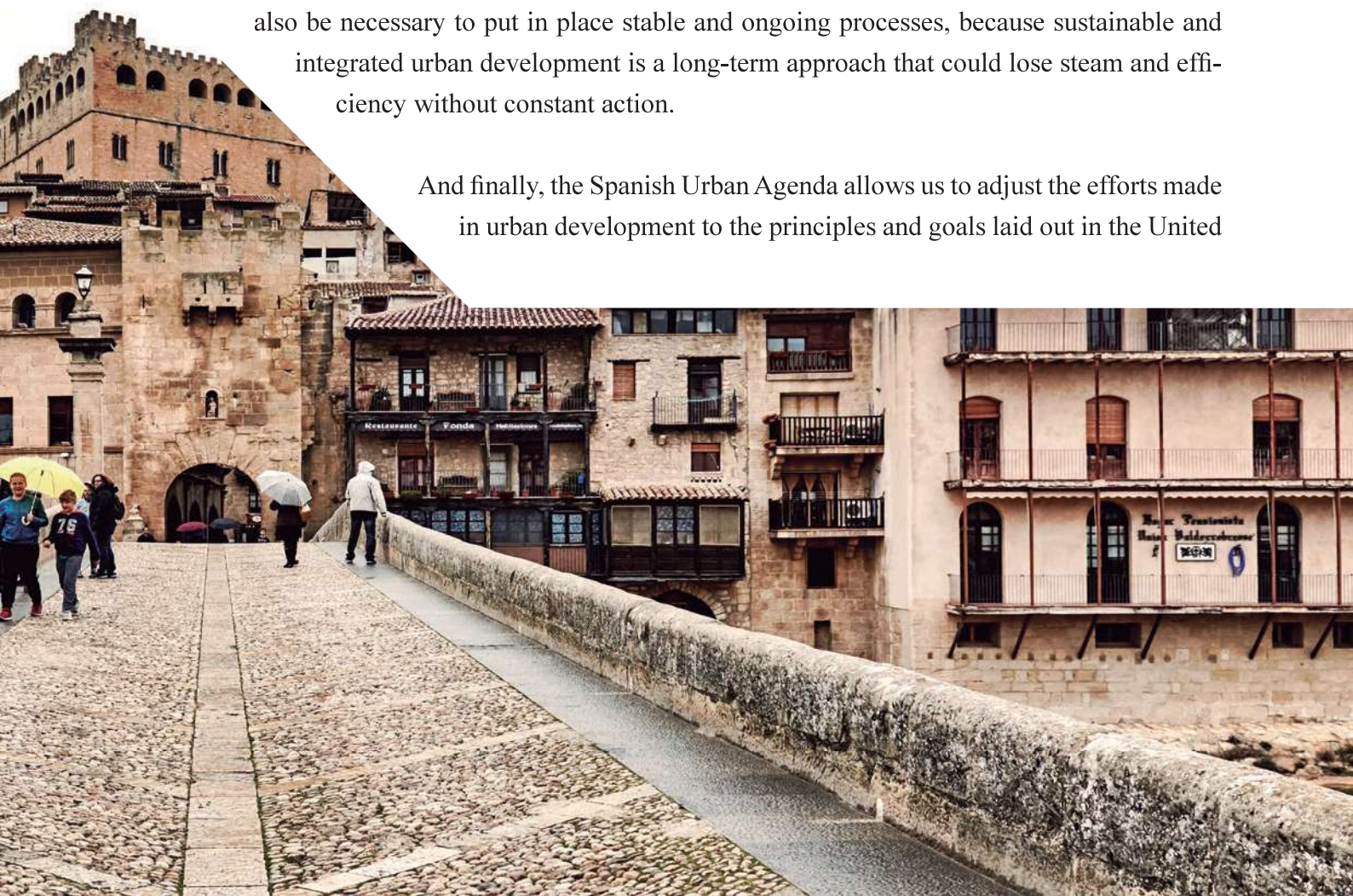
It is true that **City Councils** occupy a privileged position among the stakeholders to which the Agenda is directed, because they make the key decisions that design, order, manage, conceive and re-conceive urban models, and they are also the main protagonists in the development of a more sustainable framework for urban policies in general. Which is why the implementation of the Agenda requires a special commitment on their part, which should materialise not only in a formal or institutional commitment to join, but also in the preparation of a corresponding Action Plan.

But this does not mean ignoring **the other government agencies**, which also have important responsibilities in very diverse areas given special consideration under this Agenda, nor the international scenarios in which current trends and decisions related to urban phenomena play out. The **private sector, the third sector, professionals and academia, associations and organisations representing various interests and citizens themselves**, that is, **civil society**, are also the recipients and potential users of this Agenda because they are also part of the city or population where they live. Everyone makes a city and everyone should be able to contribute to its development, safe in the knowledge of the virtue that is associated with working with a clear conscience that is committed to sustainability and to improving the quality of life.

The Operational Programme for Sustainable Growth of the Europe 2020 Strategy shows that the **EU itself** will be yet another ally in this shared task that starts now. Not surprisingly, in addition to **the Urban Agenda for the EU**, approved in June 2016, the EU has included one of the four priority areas of the aforementioned Operational Program No. 12, on “Integrated and sustainable urban development”. Through it and with funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), many municipalities are developing their Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development Strategies (EDUSIS) with unprecedented ambition. The integrated approach that characterises them, participation and cooperation, support for strategies and not directly for operations or actions, are novel elements that should not only be conserved, but consolidated.

The Action Plans adapted to the new Spanish Urban Agenda will serve that function, with actions such as those proposed by the Urban Agenda to achieve a specific strategic goal. And it will also be necessary to put in place stable and ongoing processes, because sustainable and integrated urban development is a long-term approach that could lose steam and efficiency without constant action.

And finally, the Spanish Urban Agenda allows us to adjust the efforts made in urban development to the principles and goals laid out in the United



Nations Urban Agenda (approved at the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development-HABITAT III in October 2016), for which it constitutes a necessary guide. This Agenda, which follows in the wake of 2030 Agenda on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has created a mutually reinforcing link between urbanisation and development, and includes a specific SDG 11 to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”.

HOW TO FORMULATE AN ACTION PLAN UNDER THE SPANISH URBAN AGENDA

As previous experience has shown, such as Local Agendas 21 or the EDULIS itself that has just been referred to, each Action Plan that is formulated with the aim of implementing the Urban Agenda must constitute, in whole or in part, a true long-term strategy. It is not, therefore, a question of adding specific, short-term projects and actions, although these can complement it. Nor is it a matter of approving mere declarations of intent, but of strategies whose ultimate goal is an action.

The integrated approach that the agenda pursues and its various aspects (horizontal, territorial, vertical, etc.) and the orchestration of highly diverse actions (mobility, urban planning, environmental management, etc.) make this a complex process in which the necessary development of plans, actions and resources with a strategic vision will be essential to achieving sustainable development in the city as a whole.

Action plans must allow all the stakeholders who are committed to the Urban Agenda to carry out implementation, evaluation and monitoring processes. Given their diversity, both potential membership agreements and action plans will be very different, but all of them should identify which decisions and actions can be implemented to contribute to the sustainable urban development of cities of the future. In the specific case of city councils, they could join the Agenda by means of a plenary agreement that already includes a clear commitment, with its corresponding timeline, to draw up, approve and present their action plan.

The documents contained in the Spanish Urban Agenda make it easy to prepare the Action Plans and, as demanded by the international Agendas (both the 2030 Agenda and the EU and UN Urban Agendas), propose the use of descriptive data to draft a situation survey, they identify a strategic framework that helps to order and prioritise the goals to be achieved, highlight the actions that would allow said goals to be achieved and assign a battery of indicators that can be used to evaluate the implementation process.

The Ministry of Development has a specific website for the Spanish Urban Agenda that is available to all interested parties. It can be used to see each and every document that makes up the Agenda, as

well as to draw up the corresponding Action Plan using a set of sample forms that will help in this effort. City Councils and other local agencies can also ask the Ministry for the descriptive data that it might have on each of the Strategic Goals to be achieved.

Sheet no. 1, included at the end of this section, provides a simple outline of questions, as does the Urban Agenda for the European Union, that can be used by each and every agent involved to build the Action Plan. These questions are as follows:

1 | WHAT PROBLEM(S) HAVE YOU IDENTIFIED?

The goal is to diagnose the situation by using the descriptive data available to each agent. As indicated, the Ministry of Development will provide all City Councils and other public agencies that request it with all the descriptive data they have (the request can be made through the website of the Spanish Urban Agenda). These agencies could use as a baseline the diagnoses already drawn up for Local Agendas 21, the updated Reports contained in the general planning instruments, the EDUSIS, or other strategic documents that are related to the areas to be measured. Logically, they must be complemented in keeping with the strategic goals contained in the Agenda and that, after all, incorporate the sustainability commitments reached in the international Urban Agendas.

And, in case they are useful, the Annex that follows this section contains, as sheet no. 2, the SWOTs that, in the opinion of the Spanish cities that have been awarded European funds to develop Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development Strategies (EDUSI), identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that are related to each of those goals. As the broad participatory process has shown, this document is interesting and useful, so much so that it has ended up incorporating not only the items identified in the EDUSI, but others that were contributed by other groups and organisations interested in the Spanish Urban Agenda. The end result is a document that also contributes to the development of the SWOTs that the implementation of the Spanish Urban Agenda could require, since each actor should identify their own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in each of the strategic areas, though they are free to add other items.

For the remaining actors, any data from official sources or their own information systems will be used to carry out this work. And the use of SWOT tools can be very useful as well.

2 | WHAT IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE ABOUT THIS PROBLEM OR CHALLENGE? AND WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT TO DO OR THINK THAT COULD BE DONE TO SOLVE IT?

By means of this question, any stakeholder can assess all the actions that have been or are being carried out to address any of the goals that the Agenda seeks to achieve. These actions can be designed

as policies, as programmes or as specific projects and might cover areas of regulation, planning, financing, dissemination and sharing of knowledge, participation and transparency and governance.

And within these actions, those that the United Nations calls “accelerators”, or those that the Spanish Action Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda calls “driver policies”, must be particularly relevant. It is those actions that generally deal with certain problems that constitute bottlenecks and that can comprise horizontal measures that are essential to achieving the goals in the long term.

To answer this question, together with the following two, sheet no. 3 is included in this section (the complete file can be downloaded from the Urban Agenda website). This document includes, for explanatory purposes, the sheet corresponding exclusively to strategic goal 1.

3 | HOW SHOULD THIS ACTION BE IMPLEMENTED AND WHAT WOULD BE THE IDEAL OR AGREED PERIOD?

Sheet no. 3 shows that the Spanish Urban Agenda proposes a comprehensive list of possible lines of action that contribute to the achievement of each of its goals. Consulting this list can be of help in drawing up the Action Plan for each of the stakeholders, all within the scope of their respective interests and powers. This file also includes, both in relation to the previous question and to this one, a box that allows each of the actions to be included in some of the areas that are identified in the two International Urban Agendas. The aim is to identify each action for possible inclusion in:

- **The regulatory arena:** These are actions of the public agencies, including the local government itself, whose Ordinances and other municipal regulations can be key to addressing the goals of the Spanish Urban Agenda.
- **The scope of the planning, whether territorial, urban (horizontal planning) and sectoral (vertical).** Included here are all the actions that originate in previous planning instruments (plans and guidelines for land planning, urban plans, mobility plans, energy efficiency plans, etc.).
- **In the area of governance:** Actions involving multi-level coordination and collaboration, again of a horizontal and vertical nature, would be included here. Actions involving public-private cooperation, and all those that have to do with transparency and active and effective participation, would also fall into this category.
- **In the field of financing:** The mere identification of all existing aid programmes involving actions that allow addressing any goal of the Spanish Urban Agenda will be relevant in and of itself, regardless of how difficult or easy it is to access them. If, furthermore, the internal resources specifically made available for the planned actions can be identified, so much the better.

In the field of training, and the dissemination and exchange of knowledge: It is not only possible to acknowledge the existing networks and instruments that are maintained or promoted in order to satisfy the goals, but formulas should be considered to highlight success stories that can be used to learn about examples in which similar problems were solved. Training and the dissemination and sharing of knowledge on urban issues contributes to improved awareness and participation and to draw attention to urban issues.

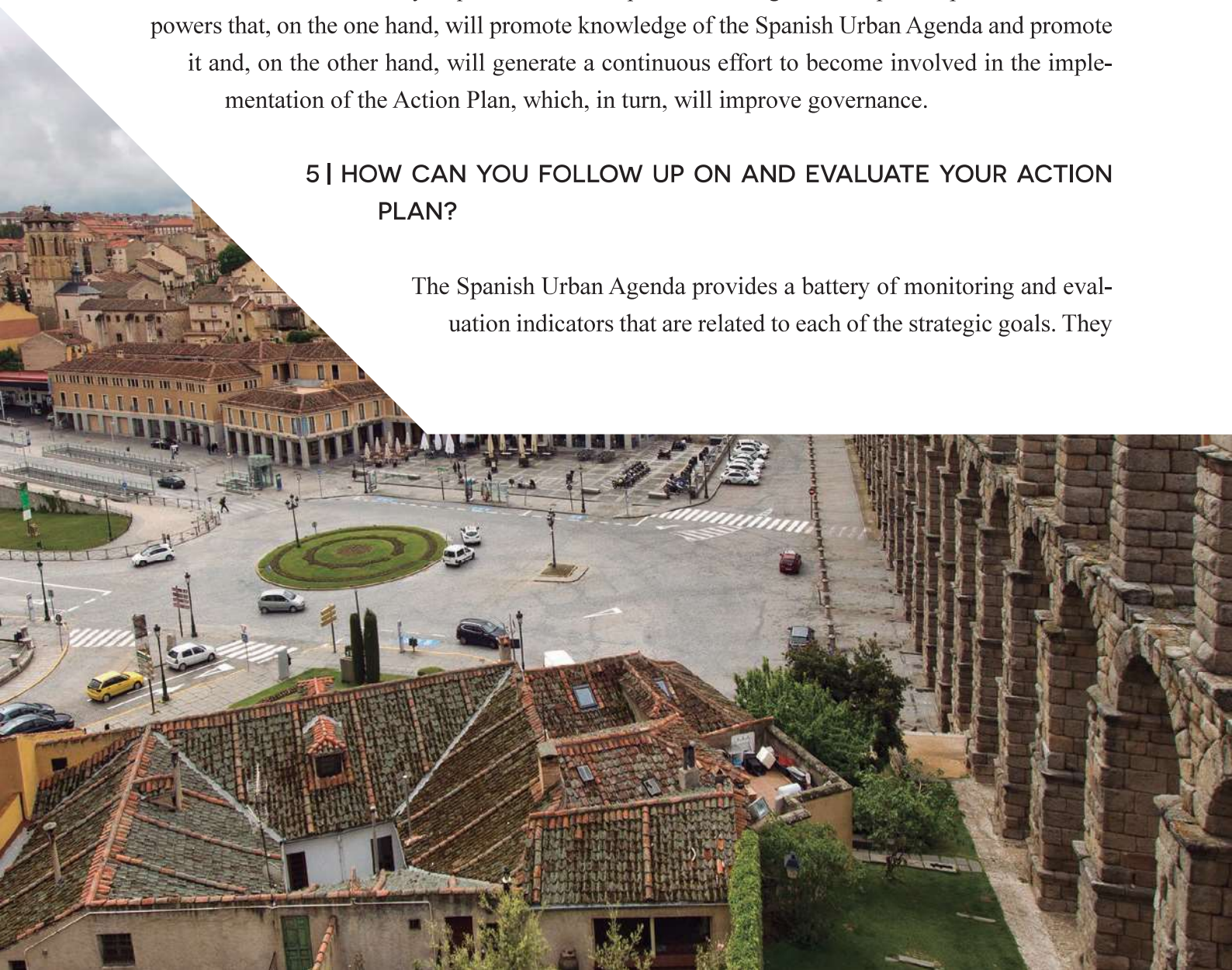
After the identification of the actions, it is necessary to set a clear implementation timeframe or schedule for each one of them, in order to set priorities in the short, medium and long term. In fact, the Action Plans should not be considered as a closed set of actions, but as a living and constantly updated document, capable of incorporating new actions, reviewing those already in progress and establishing new priorities and timeframes.

4 | WHAT AGENTS SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EACH ACTION?

Identifying the agents for each action selected will allow us to know how much involvement and external collaboration that they require. It would require something like a map of responsibilities and powers that, on the one hand, will promote knowledge of the Spanish Urban Agenda and promote it and, on the other hand, will generate a continuous effort to become involved in the implementation of the Action Plan, which, in turn, will improve governance.

5 | HOW CAN YOU FOLLOW UP ON AND EVALUATE YOUR ACTION PLAN?

The Spanish Urban Agenda provides a battery of monitoring and evaluation indicators that are related to each of the strategic goals. They



can be used to define the degree of improvement to be achieved with the planned measures and actions.

At the end of section 04 is a diagram that can be used to identify the compatibility and coordination between these indicators and those already used by other instruments and strategies. These include:

- the Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (DUSI Strategies) for the period 2014-2020 and the commitments assumed by local entities as part of other initiatives, such as on the issue of the low-carbon economy (Pact of Mayors), on sustainable mobility, on social issues and on equal opportunity.
- the set of indicators laid out by the United Nations to assess compliance with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 11, consisting of “Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. In fact, the indicator code related to it is included to facilitate the data analysis and reporting.
- the set of indicators that are necessary to satisfy the information requirements that the two international Agendas demand from Spain, as a signatory of the Pact of Amsterdam and the Quito Declaration, both from 2016.

With regard to the timeline for the indicators, two reference dates are specified for quantifying the results of the process: 2023 and 2030. Both cases coincide with the final year of the programme periods (2014-2020 and 2021-2027). In the latter case, it also coincides with the period defined by the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development itself.