

EVA

SOMETHING WONDERFUL IS HAPPENING IN MADRID, IN SPITE OF MADRID

In the neighbourhood of Arganzuela, Madrid, a building of more than 30,000 m² located in one of the best access points to the capital and beside El Matadero (important centre for contemporary creation) has survived undervalued and hijacked by the City Council for over three decades and with no use for at least eight years. Thousands of neighbours associated in what is now known in the city of Madrid as EVA (Espacio Vecinal de Arganzuela¹ – Arganzuela’s Neighbourhood Space) have an ambitious projects programme to free the building and turn it into a space for citizens, suitable and necessary for satisfying numerous urgent social demands and artistic and cultural initiatives.

A brief history of three hijackings

Where does this situation originate? The Fruit and Vegetable Market of Legazpi (Mercado de Frutas y Verduras de Legazpi) has suffered – and is suffering – the aggression of three chronic problems found in the recent history of our city.

Urban hijacking. Since it lost its original use², the building (an extremely interesting example of architectural rationalism in Madrid³) seems to have become a dead and awkward – at times attractive – weight for the municipal authorities. Arganzuela is a failed ‘paradigmatic case of industrial clear-out’⁴ whose deindustrialisation programmes suffer from deficient planning (minimum green spaces and scarce social resources), denying the neighbourhood a fertile and dynamic social fabric. The Fruit and Vegetable Market of Legazpi is thus a symbol

¹ <http://evarganzuela.org/eva/> [SPA]

² A summary of the origins and activity of the building can be found at: <http://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/AGUC/article/viewFile/AGUC8181110267A/32184> [SPA]

³ See <https://artedemadrid.wordpress.com/tag/racionalismo/> [SPA]

⁴ See <https://urbancidades.wordpress.com/2008/04/21/desindustrializacion-y-transformacion-urbana-en-madrid/> [SPA]

of a timeless heritage that, when able to survive, drags with it urban planning burdens so heavy that they end up turning it into a great 'beached' whale⁵.

It's logical to suspect that under this indifferent institutional guardianship, as the building loses its usefulness it also loses its spirit and its meaning; it ends up paralysed by two opposing forces. On the one hand, it is gripped by the excruciating legislative conservatism that blocks public assets in the capital; and, on the other hand, it is assaulted by the no less antiquated practices of a real estate sector eager for a 'feast today' and ignorant of the real profitability of public space in the era of the 'knowledge society'.

Thus, for many years the building was a kind of 'jack of all trades'⁶, such that its architectural essence was distorted and its social function warped.

However, it's worth asking: is this story of foretold abandonment due only to poor urban planning practice? It seems clear that this is not the case. In fact, nonsensical urban planning has been justified and endorsed by more ambitious and harmful economic speculation. In other words: technical blockage is no more than the direct consequence of commercial ambition and **economic hijacking**, both of which are treacherous and continuous. It's interesting to confirm in this sense how the economic management of the politicians in power has limited itself to placing in the old Market the same expectations generated by a soufflé: in the best of cases, that is, in times of inflation and economic bubbles, it shows its ostentatious and appetising appearance (despite being a listed building catalogued as urban heritage) to dazzle the guests at the banquet – the table of real estate speculators is demanding. However, when the lean season comes around, the sweet item is pricked and the neighbours – who fight to preserve it as legitimate heritage – are told there is no availability; while soufflé is the favourite dessert of many, its main ingredient is air. Thus, the people of Madrid have had to pay for several not exactly modest architectural projects⁷ whose lavishness, as was expected, has ended up being diminished by time and negligence. The last one is still underway.

⁵ Vid. Santiago Fajardo, <http://blog.santiagofajardo.com/2015/02/el-mercado-de-legazpi-o-el-patrimonio-varado/> [SPA]

⁶ A collection of these different uses can be seen, for example, in: http://elpais.com/diario/2000/12/07/madrid/976191858_850215.html [SPA]

⁷ Tür, the last project to win the tender, from the Ulargui-Pesquera architects practice, was expected to complete works in 2010.

It's difficult to believe, despite everything, that the reason for this failure lies simply in the power of those that govern spurious interests and leave the use of public assets in private hands. We are dealing more so with political incompetence, a **political hijacking**. In fact, blind to what happens in many European countries (the Netherlands is a very significant example), our politicians don't even realise that the institutional transfer of these buildings to citizen initiatives would mean turning them into 'generators of long-term social, cultural, and economic values.'⁸ What in other European countries is now a consolidated tradition, in Madrid is the fight against windmills (or giants) that, precisely, would be more interested than anyone in an economic upturn. It is difficult to understand the deafness of the institutions when it comes to citizen proposals, but even more so their bloody-mindedness in relation to something that could be for their own benefit. But of course, there will always be public asset availability when it benefits business or when it is done in honour of the blessed gentrification.

EVA, a bottom-up approach

Espacio Vecinal Arganzuela is a project⁹ in which more than thirty collectives and thousands of Madrid's citizens are involved, mobilised by the real need for a citizen's space in this area, for which we demand the partial transfer of the abandoned Market of Legazpi to manage non-profit activities open to the public. To achieve this we have worked hard and efficiently for months: projects have been designed and published; neighbours and small businesses in the area have been called upon to populate the shared space with their interests, exchanging knowledge and wisdom. Because this is how the neighbourhood can preserve its memory and its identity, protecting itself against gentrification and the threat of those who only want to cash in on the commons.

It's a model that doesn't feed on urban planning academicism but on the need of the citizens to take back decision-making power in relation to their surroundings. The idea is to 'stop delegating' in order to take the responsibility that corresponds to us as agents of change and to control the transformation of our environment.

http://212.145.146.10/ejercicio/concursos/concursos_ocam/070906_mdo_fyv/resultados/080402_fyv_1p_emio.html

⁸ Vid. Sergio Martín Blas, "Una emergente <<clase creativa>> ocupa los espacios urbanos sin uso", http://economia.elpais.com/economia/2013/10/15/vivienda/1381822988_915274.html [SPA]

⁹ <http://evarganzuela.org/eva/borrador-del-proyecto-de-ev-arganzuela/> [SPA]

This is far from the citizen indifference with which the political leaders of the city take great pains to label a mature, active, and demanding population. A population that woke up to discover with horror how those that it trusted with its environment have run out of creative capacity and show no talent beyond building shopping centres. Agents that abound in a defunct system based on generating scarcity as a means for progress. Experts at creating disposable spaces that contribute no benefit beyond a few fictitious promises of employment creation in the very midst of electoral campaigning.

EVA's proposal is not a local phenomenon. It's global. The opportunity to move from a city-model based on mercantilism to a city of knowledge, P2P exchange, and creativity. A proposal of practically no cost to the city that offers free solutions based on programmes such as *women's empowerment, specific work-life balance programmes, literacy and memory, cultural integration, school support, intergenerational programmes to combat the digital divide, neighbour and citizen empowerment, parenting networks, urban produce gardens, ethical consumption groups, solidarity networks, and specific programmes for support for small businesses, which abound in the neighbourhood.*

Institutions that don't listen and that deceive their citizens

Since EVA presented its project officially, the City Council's response has been abstruse: at first passive (a three-month wait), then distant (the documentation provided by EVA, a detailed project supported by prestigious experts, was ignored without even being read), and subsequently maliciously deceitful: the official response was that 'there is no public asset availability', and it was also publically stated that there was no specific plan, much less an immediate one, for the Market. The deceit didn't last long. In the end the City Council revealed its opaque intentions regarding the Market and officially announced the plans it has for it.¹⁰

In order to understand these plans we advise that you replace 'women's empowerment' with 'gourmet market' and 'intergenerational programmes' or 'support to small businesses' with 'shopping centre'.

Finally its response is more than clear: at least 80 per cent of the building is put in

¹⁰ <http://evarganzuela.org/eva/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/BOCM-20150219-25.pdf>
[SPA]

the hands of private real estate developers. The timing is not incidental since this announcement is made just a few months from the municipal elections. A new soufflé in this long and tiresome banquet?

A 'no' is not enough. In search of allies

In response to the City Council's refusal, we have set out with more strength than ever on the struggle to reach the three objectives which will lead to the liberation of the space's original use and identity in three ways:

- Returning architectural dignity to the building by restoring a functionality that is coherent with its original form and with the context in which it is rooted, this time as a store of assets (cultural, food, artistic, playful, social...) that are essential and free for the people, and not only for an idol and distant elite.
- Liberating the Fruit and Vegetable Market of Legazpi from speculative economic uncertainty through the installation of a stable model, immune to financial ups and downs, safeguarding the neighbourhood's memory and that of the building itself; and from which we can manage and promote the growth of the social fabric.
- Returning to the shared space its true political function as a place of meeting and activity to tackle the public issues of the citizens that really matter.

We've done a lot so far, but we also understand that our work has just begun. We are scrupulously analysing the information that we have from these plans and soon we will begin to make it public. We have called for an open day where we will explain our proposals and the projects that EVA will house and we have begun an international campaign to raise support. EVA is still growing and spreading its human network of shared interests and motivations in the streets and elsewhere, so that this already populated neighbourhood space may become unassailable, with or without walls.

The work is titanic and we need all the help we can get. We turn to you to ask for your support, in at least two ways:

- We need your communities to know about this wonderful process. We want the word to be spread on blogs and social networks. We want this to become news through the help of your contacts in the media. This is an international campaign. Only this way, from places of understanding, will we get our politicians to discover that there is a world on the other side of their office doors and that it is a world based on solidarity and intelligence.
- Through your knowledge and experience. Could you tell us about your experience, recommend strategies, offer us some advice...?

Very many thanks.

Images.

The place:

https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B3zVPJY9P257fnlaR1hrYIRyVjBuRG9obFRZ3lllUjhvNktHdzFpd1hZaG40UFl5RVBKVzQ&usp=sharing_

The People (outside the place):

https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B3zVPJY9P257eW1sOXdCVGpBSlk&usp=sharing_

EVA OPENDAY (outside the place):

https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B3zVPJY9P257fmY0V29VRFZMQ1FPd2JhQU9taUflLUZkRkw1NnBQajk4N0NjclpVeENxRmc&usp=sharing_

More information about EVA [SPA]:

www.evarganzuela.org

[@evArganzuela](https://twitter.com/evArganzuela)

<https://www.facebook.com/evarganzuela>

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