

# LOCAL STRATEGIC PLANNING IN SPAIN. A CASE STUDY

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**Abstract**

In the early 1990s, large Spanish cities began to apply the first strategic plans to initiate transformation processes in their physical spaces and productive sectors. The second generation strategic plans launched in the following decade included more immaterial objectives associated with improving citizens' quality of life and involved key social actors from the city in their design and implementation.

The case of Móstoles, located in the metropolitan area of Madrid, is an example of a city that undertook a process of strategic planning, based on the active participation of its citizens, to develop the city in the long term. This planning process has become a tool for transforming the administrative culture of the City Hall and for government accountability to citizens regarding the degree to which the objectives of the plan are fulfilled and its political performance.

**Keywords:** strategic planning, citizen participation, local government, accountability, local governance, urban policies.



## 1. Introduction

Strategic planning is understood here as an instrument for intervention in a city territory, based on citizen participation and the public-private pact that makes it possible to formulate shared visions of the future and to design the necessary actions and projects required to achieve the anticipated objectives. Thus, it involves a considered and consensual response of the main actors of the city to the main urban challenges.

While it is true that strategic planning is an instrument that has traditionally been used by private enterprises, its application to the public sphere in Spain has been delayed, perhaps due to a great extent to the greater weightiness of administrative procedures and to the observance of strict normative legality, which made it difficult to apply forms of direction that involved actors, external to the bureaucratic organization, in decision-making about its future.

The fact is that strategic planning tries to integrate the interests and needs of the main actors in the city, and it tries to establish, in a single instrument, the objectives and actions that should be initiated to achieve a harmonic development of the city in the long term. To this end, it is essential to identify the main urban actors, to design and apply a methodology that makes consensual decision-making possible, and to involve local actors throughout the process (Fernández, 2006).

Based on this definition, this article analyzes the experiences of strategic planning in Spanish cities, and then goes on to present in greater detail the case of the city of Móstoles, the second most populated city in the Madrid region, with over 200,000 inhabitants, where strategic planning is being used as an instrument to design the city's future. The methodology used is the study of the academic bibliography on this subject and the analysis of strategic planning documents in the main Spanish cities and, specifically, in the city of Móstoles. In this last case, the document analysis (Ayuntamiento de Móstoles, 2011) has been completed with in-depth interviews with the people responsible for designing and implementing the strategic plan<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Experiences of local strategic planning in Spain

While the first strategic urban plans began to be applied in North American cities in the 1980s, as a way to deal with the effects of the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s on these cities, the first strategic plans for cities in Spain were designed and applied in the 1990s, mainly as tools for physical regeneration. This is partly due to the fact that the more traditional kind of planning for cities is urbanistic planning, linked to the approval of 'urban plans'. At any rate, the main objective of the municipal governments was to capture economic resources from the private sector

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1 I would particularly like to thank Manuel Arenilla Sáez (Director of the team from the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos in charge of the methodological design of the plan) and José Enrique Díez (from the General Directorate of Modernization and Quality of Móstoles City Hall).

to construct new infrastructures in order to stimulate economic development and to provide the cities with the equipment they lacked. However, the second generation of strategic plans launched from 2000 onward includes other strategic objectives related to citizens' quality of life and adopts a broader perspective of territory. This broader perspective is no longer restricted to the administrative limits of the city, but takes into account the cities' interactions with their environment. That is, it goes from a vision based on a main objective to a vision that contains multiple objectives, and from a strictly urban perspective to a focus on the city's territory as a metropolitan region, insofar as the solutions to the city's problems can be found in its relations with the metropolitan environment.

Thus, the first plans implemented in Spanish cities, such as in the cases of Bilbao and Barcelona, tried to transform old, declining industrial cities and alleviate the insufficiencies of basic infrastructures as a way to stimulate their productive sectors and promote their economic recovery, while at the same time regenerating the city physically. The main objective was to go from cities that were dependent on traditional industries on the decline (shipyards, the textile sector, heavy industry, the iron and steel industry) to cities based on more diversified productive sectors, with the service sector as a clear leader. However, the first plans of the 1990s were not clearly defined, nor were they based on any consensus, and they gave too much weight to individual physical transformation projects compared to other more immaterial objectives. As it can be seen in the following table, the first strategic urban plans applied in Spain in the 1990s focused mostly on investment in new infrastructures as a basis for economic development, while the second generation plans, applied from 2000 onward, give greater importance to social cohesion, sports, culture, research and development, education and to the quality of life in cities; as such, they try to make economic development compatible with integration and social cohesion.

Besides, from the point of view of the methodology used, the new plans are based on more flexible methodologies to achieve their goals and include more actors and interests to increase the coherence of the different strategic axes of intervention. Thus, while leadership and implementation fell almost exclusively on the city government in the 1990s, the role of urban actors, particularly business organizations and unions, gains importance in the second generation plans, as well as, on a second level, universities, neighborhood associations, financial entities, NGOs, and consumer associations. In the end, these plans' greater internal complexity reflects the very social complexity of the city, which is seen as a dense network of relations and interests with multiple actors who intervene simultaneously in a cooperative way (Ruano, 2010a).

We must keep in mind that, in the Spanish case, urban areas experienced one of the highest population growth rates in Europe, from the mid-1990s to the middle of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with yearly growth rates of over 2%. It is, then, in this context of rapid population increase, the result of economic growth and the arrival of immigrant population, when local governments begin to lead their cities'

transformation processes using second generation strategic plans that try to organize the provision of public goods and services, facilitating decision-making regarding the future by means of participatory processes that involve diverse social sectors, in order to anticipate the changes and demands of the environment. This policy-making exercise is based on the acknowledgement that all cities have physical and economic resources and possibilities for development, and that the interactions among the different actors who make up the city are a key element for carrying out the planning. Thus, from the 1990s onward, 60.85% of the Spanish cities with over 50,000 inhabitants (that is, 166 cities) have carried out some kind of exercise of strategic planning, although with different approaches and results (Prado and García Sánchez, 2006, p. 661).

**Table 1:** Main areas of interest of local strategic plans in Spain

Strategic Plans	Infrastructures	Environment	Economic Development	Quality of Life	Sports and Culture	R & D	Social Cohesion	Education
Bilbao I								
Bilbao II								
Saragossa I								
Saragossa II								
San Sebastian I								
San Sebastian II								
Malaga I								
Malaga II								
Seville I								
Seville II								
Valencia								
Barcelona I								
Barcelona II								

**Source:** Prepared by the author based on the information found in the strategic plans.

Therefore, the strategic plans implemented from 2000 moved on from the development of urban infrastructures to immaterial objectives meant to guarantee the competitiveness and future of the cities. As mentioned earlier, this was the case for Bilbao and Barcelona, and for the rest of the large cities: Zaragoza committed itself to linking territory, activities, and people in order to achieve a technological city, taking advantage of the momentum of the 2008 International Exposition. The first plan in

San Sebastian (2003) was developed along the axes of science and innovation, people and information society, as well as fomenting numerous social, cultural, and sports infrastructures. Malaga (2006) focused its second strategic plan on objectives related to social, economic, and environmental sustainability and on citizen participation. The 2010 Seville plan tried to define the city of the future from an urbanistic, cultural, and productive perspective, but it was also concerned about favoring the participation of citizens and of economic and social agents. With its 2007 plan, Valencia tried to create a network for managing knowledge in technological sectors, giving the university and its research centers a revitalizing role in the creation of a progressive city in the areas of information society and knowledge.

### **3. The case of the Móstoles Strategic Plan**

#### ***3.1. The economic and social context***

Móstoles is the city with the second largest population in the Madrid Autonomous Community, after the capital. It is located 17 kilometers outside of Madrid and is, therefore, part of the Madrid metropolitan area. It went from having 196,173 inhabitants in 1996 to 206,478 inhabitants when it began to prepare its strategic plan in 2009. The economic crisis that began in 2008 caused a slight reduction in its population, to 205,712 inhabitants in 2014 (INE, 2015). The city had undergone strong economic growth in the decade of 2000, until 2008 when the property bubble burst in Spain. In this year, the city government became aware that it was necessary to undertake a process of collective reflection regarding the model of the city in the next decades. The challenge was to define a model of the city that would contribute to the population's wellbeing by establishing the bases of a comprehensive development plan built upon a planning process that would include the citizens, individually and collectively.

The economic and population growth of the city was a challenge for the municipality's environmental sustainability and affected land use, water management, air quality, waste management, and energy efficiency. On the other hand, the previous economic growth turned the city into a magnet for foreign population, which went from 5.32% of the population in 2002 (10,586 people) to 13.99% in 2009 (28,889 people), that is, a positive variation rate of 162.96%. The integration of the foreign population was, thus, an important challenge for local government.

Its proximity to Spain's capital was seen as an opportunity to take advantage of investment flows and the concentration of resources in the city of Madrid. However, these opportunities also presented challenges to Móstoles' public transportation and infrastructures.

Finally, local government's capacity to lead this process of change, whether it would be capable of reinforcing its power to drive collective action, was unknown. To achieve this, Móstoles had an important network of associations: 286 associations registered in the municipal registry, 1.39 for every 1,000 inhabitants, which was higher than the average of nearby cities, including Madrid (with 0.44 associations per 1,000 inhabitants). Out of this total number of associations, the most important ones

were the parents' associations (19.6%), sports associations (19.3%), and neighborhood associations (13.6%). Less numerous were the political associations (0.4%), youth associations (0.7%), immigrant associations (0.7%), and associations against drug addiction (0.7%).

### **3.2. The Plan's organizational structure**

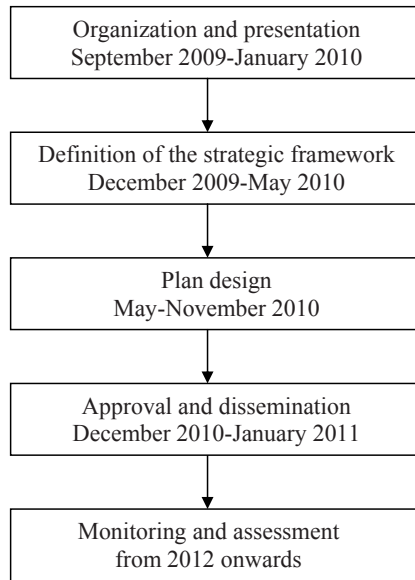
In order to launch the strategic plan, an organizational structure that would guarantee the success of the planning process, which intended to involve public and private actors in the city, was necessary. To this effect, the first intangible resource was the political will of the mayor as a key factor for involving key actors. The second step was to decide which part of the organization would be in charge of directing the process, that is, the issue of defining the management structure upon which the plan would rest. This decision was important because, in order to gain the support and participation of all of the political groups represented on the municipal council and the support of social agents, it was essential to integrate them into the decision structure of the plan, meaning that the characteristics of the organism responsible for directing the plan could encourage or discourage their participation. The possibility of assigning the process to one of the City Hall's already-existing general directorates could be perceived as just another policy of the city government, with the risk of distancing citizens and political and social actors. This risk explains the creation of a specific entity to manage the planning process, providing it with the human and financial resources to function properly.

As a result, the Directive Committee of the Strategic Plan ('Comité de Dirección del Plan Estratégico' in Spanish) was created as an organism of coordination and deliberation, presided over by the mayor and made up of the political groups with representation on the municipal council, neighborhood associations, business associations, unions, and the university. In addition to this political organism, a Coordination Committee was created as a technical support agency responsible for carrying out operational tasks. In short, the creation of an *ad hoc* organism made it possible to avoid the symbolic risk of the plan being associated with a monopolizing policy of the municipal government.

### **3.3. Methodology**

The methodology was based on the five classic planning steps, as it can be seen in the Figure 1.

For the organization and presentation step, six work groups (one for each of the following dimensions: economic, social, transport and mobility, urbanism and town and country planning, culture and sports, and environmental sustainability) were created in the Coordination Committee and put in charge of preparing studies on the characteristics of the municipality and its national and international context, according to the dimensions chosen. In addition, the committee tried to articulate the available technical information with citizens' ideas and proposals, by means of



**Figure 1:** Steps of the plan

**Source:** Arenilla Sáez, 2012, pp. 71-101

participatory mechanisms. In this information-gathering phase, the City Hall areas of government played an important role for obtaining and exchanging information with the actors involved.

In addition, key actors were identified and they participated actively in the formulation of the plan, contributing with ideas and relevant information on the city's problems. The actors were identified based on the work dimensions selected and their capacity for action. To present the plan, a communication strategy that had been specially designed to promote the strategic plan among the inhabitants of the municipality was launched. Media coverage was employed, informative materials were produced, citizens and key actors in the city were summoned, and alliances were created with some of the local institutions (merchants' associations, neighborhood associations, youth associations, etc.).

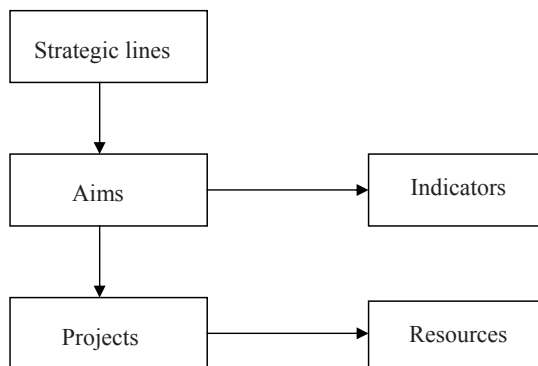
The second step consisted of an intense exercise of reflection regarding the data obtained in the internal and external analyses. The purpose was to define a series of scenarios regarding the present situation and the future situation of the city, to analyze the viability of the proposals, and to construct a general framework for action on specific issues (Francés, 2001, p. 57). It is important to indicate that, in this second step, it was necessary to consider the existence of strategic resources (the use of new technologies, communication strategies, citizen participation, and alliances among actors) to ensure the final objectives. That is, it was a matter of ensuring the elements necessary to make the experience successful, elements such as institutional capability, indispensable for guaranteeing any initiative by any government (Van den Meer, Braun and Van den Berg, 1999).

In this step, the external factors affecting the city and its internal characteristics (economic, social, environmental, institutional, etc.) were identified in order to design scenarios and strategies. The point was to identify Móstoles' differential features compared to other commuter towns and the 'vision' of the municipality was created, as a portrait of the desired future to be achieved.

Afterwards, initiatives (norms, policies, and plans) undertaken by other administrations which had had an effect on the city were identified. Finally, the external analysis also included global and national (demographic, economic, social, and ecological) tendencies that had an impact on the environment and the internal functioning of the municipality.

In the internal analysis, reference was made to the characteristics of the locality and to citizens' main problems, in order to determine the strengths of the city and the threats to it, using a SWOT analysis. Citizen participation, the participation of neighborhood associations, and that of other actors who shape the city were decisive in this analysis, and were carried out through the habitual organisms of participation and thematic forums. The information provided by the SWOT matrix served to fix the strategic lines that guided the plan's design and which, in turn, marked the trajectory of the actions needed to guide the achievement of the plan's objectives.

The third stage consisted of defining objectives, describing concrete actions to achieve them, and designing a set of indicators that would be needed in the assessment phase. Specifically, and first of all, objectives derived from the strategies that the government hoped to reach over the duration of the plan were set, linking indicators for assessing them. Actions were derived from this set of objectives and translated into specific projects assigned their corresponding resources (see Figure 2). In the end, the plan included 27 strategic lines, 75 objectives, and 223 indicators.



**Figure 2:** Relations between Strategic Lines, Aims and Projects

The approval and diffusion of the plan underwent an important debate within the Municipal Council, and activities to disseminate its contents throughout the city were approved. However, we must remember that the incorporation of city actors throughout the process continued during the dissemination step of the plan, too.



The participatory methodology was decisive, allowing all the social actors to give their opinions on the contents and to contribute to improve the plan in the discussion forums created especially for the plan and through the citizen participation structures that already existed in the city. Naturally, the opinions received were analyzed by the members of the working groups, following criteria of power, technical, and financial feasibility, which conditioned, in the end, their inclusion in or exclusion from the plan.

Finally, the strategic plan was understood as a continuous process of reflection which did not end once the final document was approved; it was considered necessary to establish activities that would make it possible to update it by including relevant information, produced after the document was finished, that was important for making decisions and assigning resources according to the needs of the strategic lines (Bonneyoy and Armijo, 2005, p. 66).

#### *3.4. The Plan's contents and its internal coherence*

As mentioned earlier, the strategic plan set the foundations for city development by defining a set of collective objectives that were to guide the actions of the public and private actors who make up the city. To this end, six work groups were created, organized along six dimensions (economic, social, transport and mobility, urbanism and town and country planning, culture and sports, and environmental sustainability). This procedure was very useful for gathering information and distributing tasks, but during the planning process they turned into closed boxes that made it hard to integrate the contents of the plan. This made it necessary for the director of the technical team to undertake the integration of the contributions of each dimension and give them coherence. In effect, one of the risks of strategic planning in cities which should be avoided is incoherence among the objectives, actions, and expected results due to this lack of articulation of their contents. In order to avoid this, the strategic lines must be articulated and made coherent with the different objectives defined within the work groups. These strategic lines were: to turn Móstoles into a prosperous city, oriented toward the population's wellbeing, socially cohesive, connected, so that infrastructures and transport would favor development and reduce the differences among neighborhoods, with talent, where culture and sports would contribute to the population's wellbeing and foment its quality of life, and green, where economic development would not be incompatible with the best use of environmental resources.

However, as the planning process continued, the technical team realized that one of the central aspects for a city's progress that is not taken into account in other strategic plans is the political and institutional aspect. In fact, political-institutional factors had, in the past, a limited influence when it came to launching local development policies, but today these institutions are key actors for energizing their territories through cooperation with other public and private actors by means of interactions and relations that can be summarized in the concept of governance (Ruano, 2010a).

As a result of this reflection, the technical team decided to include the dimension of governance in order to strengthen the relations of public and private actors in the territory, orienting their particular interests to the achievement of the common interest. In order to define this dimension, the concepts of leadership, legitimacy, citizen participation, and institutional capacity were used. In effect, it was no use having a set of strategic lines for developing the city if the City Hall did not have sufficient institutional capacity to implement the actions and achieve the objectives set forth. At this time, the importance of having skills and resources to establish alliances with other actors, of the characteristics of the administrative structure, and of the competence of the City Hall staff, were acknowledged. Thus, the plan incorporated institutional strengthening as a strategic line to guarantee a proper implementation. This institutional strengthening included objectives such as reorganizing the administrative structure in order to make it more efficient, promoting the use of and fomenting IT, improving the quality of public services and the training and professional development of public employees. In addition, it was concluded that citizen participation was a valuable instrument to strengthen democracy in the municipality, but that it was necessary to manage the risk of citizens' expectations not corresponding to the objective results, which could seriously damage trust in the City Hall.

#### **4. Citizens' central role**

Once the advantages and risks of citizen participation in the planning process were acknowledged, the first option that the Office of Coordination of the Plan considered was to base the model of participation on the city's already-existing institutional resources, that is, on the traditional system of participation. Up to this time, the participatory model of Móstoles was based on the activities that the districts carried out as territorial subdivisions of the city (territorial participation) and on the contributions of the municipal associations and organizations in different deliberative spaces according to their specific interests (sectorial participation). In addition, a City Council Seat of Citizen Participation existed in the organic structure of the City Hall, which was responsible for implementing the initiatives of the local government resulting from the relations with civil society in the territorial and sectorial deliberative spaces.

However, the city government felt that it was necessary to differentiate the municipality's habitual participatory activities from the other participatory activities that the process of the strategic plan needed, while taking advantage of the structure of the City Council Seat of Citizen Participation and its members' experience. Thus, one of the first aspects taken into account was the reduction of costs of participation, in terms of time and individual effort. The city government felt it was important to reduce the barriers that tend to prevent some social segments from participating in decision-making. Thus, the model of participation adopted combined individual participation and the participation of associations. Similarly, it combined in-person

participation with electronic participation and, in order to involve the greatest number of citizens, flexible schedules were adopted for calling meetings and in-person activities with short schedules, using facilities that the inhabitants could access easily.

Thus, in order to involve citizens in the step of diagnosing the city, a telephone survey was carried out to find out inhabitants' needs, gather their suggestions for approaching the city's main problems, and assess the functioning of public services. A total of 810 people were interviewed over two months, a digital version of the survey was included in the City Hall webpage, and an 'idea bank' was created so that citizens could participate electronically, including proposals gathered by these means in the set of proposals analyzed during the preparation of the plan. The results of the telephone survey and the idea bank were used to prepare a report that the City Hall published and that was presented to the mass media and civil organizations of the city.

The information obtained by these means was complemented with a citizen consultation, with participation points installed in different parts of the city where citizens could pick up and fill out the questionnaires that had been prepared to identify the main problems of the city and possible solutions. Even though the City Hall carried out a strong promotion campaign in the media and mailed the questionnaire to all the homes in the municipality, only 506 complete questionnaires were collected.

The incorporation of the city's social organizations was achieved by creating thematic forums on each of the plan's dimensions. The Office of Coordination of the Plan felt that it was essential to promote the participation of the city's organizations, as they had been convoked to work on a strategic plan at the beginning of the decade of 2000, but had never received information on the implementation and results of this strategic plan due to the change in city government. Because of this, it was understood that this negative precedent could discourage social organizations from participating. In addition, the 2011 local elections were coming up on this occasion, and the hope was to prevent the strategic plan from being perceived as an electoral initiative of the city government. As Manuel Arenilla Sáez, director of the technical team, commented:

'It was necessary to strengthen the associative network's trust in the local government and consolidate the idea that participation was the only possible way to promote a true transformation of the municipality. Trust was fundamental to advance in the construction of collaborative models that would favor the exchange of strategic resources among the actors involved in the planning process and manage to extend them to other initiatives of the local government. The leadership exercised by the mayor of the city was a key element. He made the commitment to include the viable proposals of the civil organizations into the Strategic Plan and to extend citizen participation to all the steps of the planning process, including the monitoring and assessment phases.'

For each forum, two rounds of deliberation were carried out, with the intervention of the university team. In the first round (the diagnosis), the participants presented and debated the problems of the municipality and their possible solutions. Thus, documents were created in a consensual way, summarizing the proposals made and agreed upon by the participants. The second round coincided with the step of preparing the plan and made it possible to present a draft of the objectives and strategies containing the model of the city to the representatives of the civil organizations. In the end, 93 city groups participated in the forum.

The challenge of the participatory process consisted of taking advantage of the endogenous potentials of the city using strategies that made it possible to coordinate the key actors of the municipality (Arenilla Sáez and Llorente, 2012, p. 47). Nevertheless, there are many risks that can result in participatory processes affecting the legitimacy of the plan as a whole (Ruano, 2010b). One of these is if individual citizens and civil organizations do not have the same chance to participate. Another is if the most powerful or influential organizations monopolize the participatory process in the name of the entire community. Yet another one refers to the lack of implication of a sufficient number of people in the participatory initiatives, reproducing the elitism of traditional politics. It is a fact that citizens generally do not participate very much in decision-making regarding public policy and that, when they do, it is in the implementation phase, respecting the hierarchy of organizations in the territorial and sectorial forums. Thus the importance given to transparency in all the steps of the process, as the city government was aware that any failure in the development of the plan or any participatory bias would have a high political and social cost.

The objective, therefore, was to include all the relevant economic and social agents of the city in the process, seeking maximum plurality, as the definition of a project for the future is only effective if all the public, private, and social actors are mobilized (Borja, 1997, p. 18). Because of this, the participatory model adopted in Móstoles included new initiatives such as consulting citizens and thematic forums, but it also favored deliberation by means of stable organisms of participation that already existed in the city. In addition, individual and association participation were combined, as well as territorial and sectorial logics (García Vegas, 2012, p. 95).

## **5. The monitoring and assessment of the plan**

Once the formulation of the plan was completed and after it had been approved by the Municipal Council in January 2011, the next step was to stimulate its implementation. Following the planned methodology, each area of government had to take on, according to its powers, the corresponding strategic objectives, and to develop a short-, middle-, and long-term program of actions. However, the citizens expected something more than a plan on paper: in order for the strategic plan to be a true tool for transforming the city, a monitoring and an assessment plan had to be designed properly, with the participation of civil organizations and citizens.

The mayor had made a commitment to the urban actors to extend the participatory process beyond the creation of the city model contained in the strategic plan. The

social agents themselves expected transparency and accountability to guide the results of public action. Because of this, the assessment was understood to be an exercise in political responsibility that intended to account for the achievement of local government's commitments to the citizens and social organizations. As such, it was necessary to develop tools for carrying out the monitoring and assessment. There were two alternatives: to create a specific system for the plan that included the indicators of each of the objectives, or to create a comprehensive system for measuring all municipal public action, including the strategic plan as well as the commitments included in the government plan. The option chosen was this last one.

The system for monitoring and assessment needed to allow the continuous supervision of the projects planned, the implementation of any adjustments necessary (if deviations from the plans occurred), and the incorporation of new objectives and actions. These measures were important for designing the measurement system because, on one hand, when the strategic plan was finished, the economic crisis was becoming acute in Spain and future scenarios were not optimistic. As Manuel Arenilla Sáez, director of the technical team, acknowledged: 'The will to promote a model of city like the one presented in the Strategic Plan clashed in an untimely fashion with the reality of a hostile economic environment where the government's capacity to maneuver was limited.'

On the other hand, for the local government, the implantation of the system of monitoring and assessment was a tool that would allow them to continuously review the strategic plan, as well as adapt its objectives and strategies to changes in the environment, especially any changes that might affect the stability of the budget. But this meant a new challenge. The implementation of tools for assessment in public administration requires a transformation of the bureaucratic-technical culture. Thus, José Enrique Díez, technician of the General Directorate of Modernization and Quality, explains the following: 'One of the main challenges was to involve the entire municipal organization in the tool for strategic planning, for all the parts of the organization to make it their own, understand it, and participate.' Measuring the results of public action in terms of efficacy, efficiency, and, mainly, effectiveness and impact would become a central element in the decision processes and meant a change in administrative culture.

The assessment system has a framework in which clear criteria are established, criteria which make it possible to interpret reality and the changes observed after a public intervention. This is the reason why the monitoring and assessment system was created following the same logic that had been used to systematize the strategic plan: it was constructed based on the dimensions selected in the work methodology, so that each strategic line contained a series of strategic objectives upon which concrete actions and intervention projects depended. Finally, indicators that made it possible to measure the degree of change operated upon reality were assigned to each of these projects. So the importance of a proper selection of indicators and of persons responsible for carrying them out can be understood: a good list of indicators can

register the true extent of public action and foment the decision-making process, while a bad selection of indicators can distort the knowledge of social reality and fail to provide relevant information to public managers. In this regard, indicators of efficacy and efficiency, economic indicators, indicators of time and quality, and, mainly, indicators of impact that made it possible to assess the degree of transformation of social reality were incorporated.

It is evident that the implementation phase of the plan as initially designed is highly important because the means necessary to achieve the strategic objectives must be specified, despite the fact that, as José Enrique Díez says: 'Determining the financial and human resources necessary in the implementation phase of the plan is difficult because, in addition to the need to coordinate different areas of government, it is hard to quantify ahead of time the means necessary to achieve the objectives.'

The mayor of Móstoles himself insisted that part of these indicators of the assessment system be obtained from citizen surveys. The objective was for the inhabitants themselves to be able to assess the rendering of municipal public services and express their degree of satisfaction with government action. In short, the assessment system was conceived as a tool for accountability. So much so that two assessment reports are prepared each year, with information on the degree to which the plan and the government's political commitments are fulfilled, and they are published on the City Hall webpage and sent to the civil associations. In addition, citizen forums are organized at the end of the legislature, in which the political officers of the different areas of government present their achievements and failures, as well as the indicators and the degree to which they have been fulfilled. Individual citizens, unions, business associations, NGOs, neighborhood associations, etc. participate in these forums and they can propose changes and improvements. This procedure reflects the fact that the strategic plan is not only a technical instrument for improving internal management, but has become an enormously valuable document for assessing the political performance of government action.

## **6. Conclusions**

The strategic plan of the city of Móstoles was imagined and implemented as a valuable instrument for social change based on the active participation of the city's key actors, in order to respond to citizens' demands and to the challenges of the next decades. The strategic plan has made it possible to orient the effort of all the public, private, and social agents of the city toward achieving collective objectives, thanks to its inclusion of individual perspectives and interests in the agenda of public action. The plan has been imagined as a learn-by-doing tool for organizing the City Hall insofar as all the areas of government have internalized the plan's philosophy and have learned to work using a long-term road map for achieving strategic objectives.

In addition, the strategic plan has been a tool of government accountability, as it includes the commitment to periodically present the results of the plan's implementation and the degree of fulfilment of the indicators associated with the

objectives to the citizens and to key municipal actors. Accordingly, one of the original aspects of the plan is the inclusion of a political-institutional dimension that includes factors of governability of the city and the government's institutional capacity to carry out the planned tasks.

This accountability process is only possible due to the political commitment to a transparent, participatory process in which citizens have access to all the information generated at every step of the process, from formulation to assessment. The use of the new technologies, the creation of strategic alliances with key actors in the city, and the design of a proper internal and external communication strategy were essential in this effort.

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