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BLACK NIGHT FOR PLANNING?

MARTIN WYNN

Conserving Madrid

Madrid's historic centre has suffered from confused and contradictory policies in the recent past. What is now being done to protect it, and what hope is there of success?

With the election of a predominantly socialist council for Madrid in April 1979 — in Spain's first democratic municipal elections for over 40 years — the public debate and political argument that surrounded the Conservation Plan for the city in the run-up to the elections looks like continuing. After decades of systematic renewal, increases in building densities, and drastic functional change in the city centre, planners, conservationists and the general public now await new initiatives from the socialist executive to ensure the conservation of what remains of the city's historical and architectural heritage.

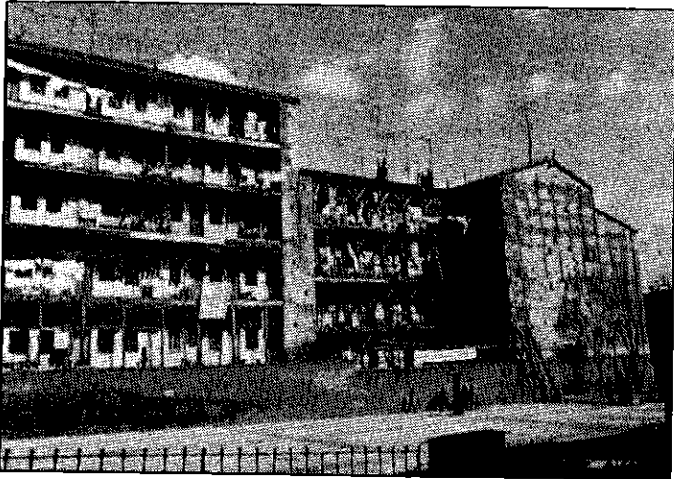
Historical

Madrid was largely confined within its mediaeval walls until the approval of the Plan Castro in 1860, after which it expanded outwards radiocentrically to fill the area covered by Castro's Plan. It is essentially these two areas — the old mediaeval city, and the 19th and 20th century expansion — that constitutes the focus of the conservationists' concern.

Over the past 20 years this historic core has been subjected to a series of private and publicly promoted Local Plans, Special Plans, and Plans of Interior Reform that have essentially involved reclassifying old residential and industrial zones for high-rise office, commercial, and up-market residential development. The urban landscape has consequently been radically changed, and whole barrios (neighbourhoods), including many buildings considered of architectural and historical value, have been destroyed.

This sad history is symptomatic of a general poverty in the conceptual development of inner city planning, in both Spanish planning philosophy and practice, this century. For

The Corrales in the Lavapiés district, to the south of the old quarter. These two buildings comprise 65 houses in which over 500 people live. Made of adobe brick and based on a wooden structure, these buildings were declared a ruin (thus facilitating demolition) by the owner in 1975 and only saved after a long campaign by residents and the Madrid College of Architects.



example, the emphasis in the City and Metropolitan Area Plans for Madrid has been on city expansion; this is true too, of the national Land and Urban Planning Act of 1956 which formed the framework for Spain's urban planning for the next 20 years. The city centre has been treated by a contradictory mix of blind destruction and extreme reverence for grandiose monuments, scenic views, and selected historic buildings. The early Bourbon Conde-Duque barracks, for example, were acquired by the Madrid municipality for conservation and cultural use, but the 16th century Vicalvaro town hall and the Olavide market, a splendid example of Second Republic Rationalist architecture, were dynamited, the latter to make way for an underground car park. In the old quarter, the Plaza Mayor, perhaps the country's most famous square, was not protected against demolition, not even listed as an Historic-Artistic Monument, a long-standing but little-used classification in Spanish planning law.

Next step

This inconsistency and misuse of resources, combined with the constant threat of expulsion to local residents, led to popular and professional protest culminating, in September 1977, in the approval by the Madrid Council of a Provisional Catalogue in which the city's historic buildings were listed and so protected against demolition. During the approval process for the Catalogue, 377 appeals were presented to the Council,



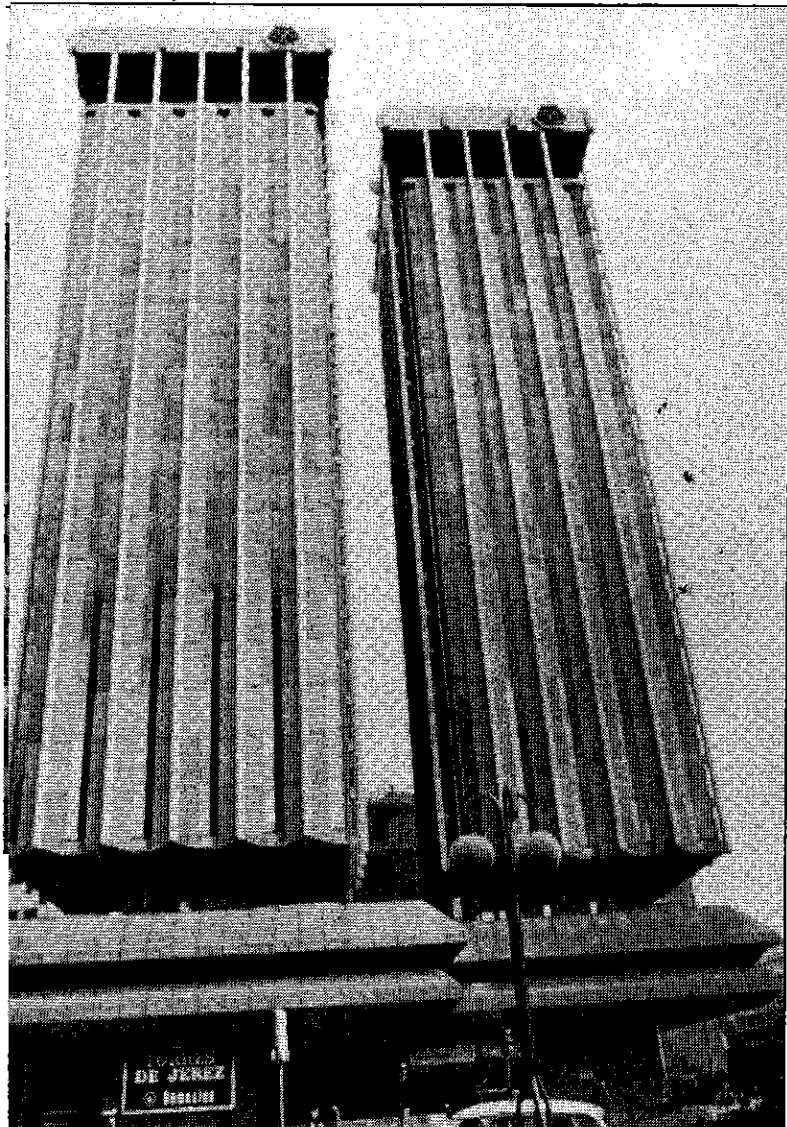
Plaza Mayor, in the heart of Madrid's old quarter.

194 in favour and 184 against, indicating the relative weight of the city's conservation and demolition-developer lobbies.

In Spring 1978, the Madrid Council commissioned consultant architect-planners, on the basis of the Catalogue of Listed Buildings, to draw up a broader-ranging Conservation Plan for the city centre in collaboration with resident associations, professional colleges, and a range of political parties. Such formal collaboration with interested parties never in fact took place, but press coverage of the consultants' proposals accompanied the public and political debate and ensured a form of indirect popular participation.

The consultants' Madrid Conservation Plan (PEPCUM) was based on new planning regulations to protect those buildings considered to be of architectural, historical or functional value. It also sub-divided the central area into homogeneous sub-units on the basis of buildings typology and functional use, strictly limiting the nature and extent of demolition and redevelopment. Legal-economic measures were introduced to protect residents against indiscriminate eviction and facilitate house improvement where necessary.

Photographs by Martin Wynn



Above: The Colon Building. Office Development Proposals in the Local Plan of Interior Reform of the Old City Expansion resulted in high rise development like this one which overlooks Plaza Colon. Below: Corredera Baja Street, in the Malasana neighbourhood in The Old City, showing typical mid-19th century architecture.



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The present outlook

In October 1978, the Madrid Council — led by Conservative Jose Luiz Alvarez, the city's last government-appointed Mayor — rejected this plan, but two weeks later approved a watered-down version. This was a partial victory for the residents and conservationists over the developers, who subsequently threw all their political weight and influence into blocking the plan's administrative course. The Plan approved by the Madrid Council includes milder restrictions on demolition and development and omits the legal-financial-administrative proposals for house rehabilitation and resident participation in such schemes. The protection of individual buildings remains, but private initiative rather than public administration is emphasised. The Municipal Conservation Fund of the original plan was scrapped.

These concessions to the property developers, however, were not enough for their professional bodies, the Urban Property Association and College of Property Developers' Agents, who attacked the plan with all available legal sanctions. At the same time, and rather paradoxically given their usual pro-conservation attitude, the Architects' College of Madrid warned against a mass suspension of building permits in the city; residents' associations generally supported the plan, and so did the political parties of the left in the run-up to the elections last April although with the reservation that it would need reviewing by the new democratic Council.

Now, almost a year after the election, the bitter battle among residents, developers, landowners and local politicians continues. The freeze on demolition and building permits remains while the new Socialist mayor Tierno Galvan and his councillors reconsider the plan. The situation, to some extent, remains in the balance. As one of the authors of the original conservation plan has recently observed: "After this experience, one thing remains clear: a plan of this type which, without trying to get rid of private gain — impossible in a society like ours — attempts to keep it within reasonable bounds, is up against a multitude of opposing forces, which can be counterbalanced only through the continuous participation and pressure of the consumer public." (Moya-Gonzalez et al, 1979). One must hope, with political liberalisation and a democratically elected local council, that the modest objectives of the approved Madrid Conservation Plan, at least, can now be implemented.

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