

SUPER – Sustainable Urbanisation and Land Use Practices in European Regions

Applied Research

Annex 3.6: Case study ES-Valencia

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Abbreviations

CAP	Common Agriculture Policy
ESDP	European Spatial Development Perspective
ESPON	European Territorial Observatory Network
ESPON EGTC	ESPON European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
LAU	Local Administrative Units
LOTUP	<i>Ley de Ordenación del Territorio, Urbanismo y Paisaje</i> (Valencian Law of Urbanism and Spatial Planning)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PAI	<i>Programa de Actuación Integrada</i> (Integrated Action Program)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SUPER	ESPON Sustainable Urbanization and Land Use Practices in European Regions
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

1 General introduction

In ESPON SUPER, the case studies contribute to the objective of unravelling how different interventions in diverse social, environmental and economic settings have transformed land-use development practices. In particular, the aim is to analyse, understand and learn from the successes and failures of practitioners and decision makers over the last three decades in their search for more sustainable land use. All case studies are based on close observation and direct contact with each territory and with the people involved in the design and implementation of each intervention. To this end, each case study was assigned to the project team with the greatest local knowledge of the territory, institutions and language.

The methodological framework used for all case studies consisted of three groups or basic sources of information and knowledge.

1. **Context:** each intervention addressed or influenced a particular land-use development practice which had emerged within a specific territorial and institutional context, which is crucial for understanding and interpreting the results. It was also important to know the objectives related to the sustainability of land use that had been set for each territory, albeit on paper, at the regulatory level. These tasks were based on desk research, even though, in some cases, local stakeholder support was valuable to locate the most relevant pieces of information.
2. **Developments:** the second source of data was the quantitative land use changes in the form of maps and graphs. This allowed each case study team to consider to what extent the underlying contextual factors and the studied interventions had transformed the territory and the rates of urbanization. This information was essential for evaluating the effects that each intervention had on land-use sustainability and, more indirectly, on culture and spatial planning practices.
3. **Stakeholder interviews:** each case study held over ten in-depth interviews with stakeholders involved in one way or another with the intervention. At these meetings, they were asked about the reasons for and the perceived urgency of the intervention, how its objectives were defined and by whom, the experience of implementing each intervention, the pitfalls encountered, as well as the benefits it had brought in terms of improving the three thematic dimensions of land-use sustainability: ecological, economic and social equity. In addition, stakeholder maps were produced that present the type and intensity of the relationships that some stakeholders had with the rest in a visual way.

This report on the case study of ES-Valencia presents a synthesis of all three outputs in order. It is structured as follows. This introductory section provides a summary of the main characteristics of the case study (Section 1.1), the scale of analysis (Section 1.2) and geographical scope (Section 1.3). Section 2 contextualizes how urbanization occurs in the case study area. It contains descriptions of typical urban developments, how this is regulated,

who promotes it, how it is implemented and emerging challenges regarding land-use development. Keeping with this contextual approach, Section 3 discusses how the studied intervention addresses the challenge of sustainability in its three thematic dimensions (Section 3.1) as well as in its temporal dimension (Section 3.2).

Section 4 presents the main results of the case study research in three parts. Section 4.1 analyses how the priorities of the intervention were configured based on information collected from the interviewed stakeholders. In particular, it seeks to know how a perceived problem was identified or constructed to justify the intervention, the extent to which land use sustainability was a consideration, and whether these elements tended to unite the community in favour of a collective interest or whether, on the contrary, they were a source of tension and conflict. Section 4.2 discusses in more detail how seven organizational and institutional aspects may have influenced the relative successes and failures of the intervention. Section 4.3 combines the analysis of land use changes, the opinions of the consulted stakeholders and, where relevant, the stakeholder maps, to make an assessment of the actual results of the intervention on the planning and development culture and the different thematic dimensions of sustainability. Finally, Section 4.5 explicitly answers questions posed to the ESPON SUPER team, thus reflecting the direct contribution of each case study to the project's objectives.

While each individual case study contributes to answering the questions posed, its true value lies in the possibility of combining and contrasting the outputs of the eleven cases. This choral work is presented in Annex 3.13. The triangulation of results allows for the formulation of generalizable conclusions and recommendations that can contribute to the design of new plans and policies better aligned with the objectives of sustainability and land take abatement at the European level. In this way, the case study presented in this report also contributes to this other broader objective.

1.1 Case study ES-Valencia

From the beginning of the 21st century until the global financial crisis and the burst of the real estate bubble in 2008, Spain experienced a boom in the construction sector. This phenomenon occurred more intensely in large cities and tourist areas. In the Mediterranean city of Valencia, high-value farmland was developed throughout the metropolitan area, often for speculative purposes, with little consideration for the provision of facilities or the conservation of natural and cultural values (Map 1.1). Faced with the rapid disappearance of the traditional orchard, several civic and political groups launched campaigns for the conservation of the vernacular landscape. After long years of struggle, political changes and a succession of approaches, the Huerta Plan was approved in 2018. Initially conceived as a plan for the protection of green infrastructure, it would gradually mutate to become an instrument closer to integrated spatial planning. The case study analyses this intervention and assesses its effects, from its inception to its first year of implementation.

Map 1.1: Location of case study “ES-Valencia”



1.2 Scale/s of analysis

Table 1.1: ES-Valencia scales

Scales	Main scale	Other scales
Supra/Trans-national		EU
NUTS 0		Spain
NUTS 1		
NUTS 2	Valencia Autonomous Community	
NUTS 3		
LAU1 – NUTS 4		Metropolitan Area of Valencia
LAU2- NUTS 5		40 municipalities ¹

¹ Alaquàs, Albal, Albalat dels Sorells, Alboraya, Albuixech, Aldaia, Alfafar, Alfara del Patriarca, Almàssera, Benetússer, Bonrepòs i Mirambell, Burjassot, Catarroja, Emperador, Foios, Godella, la Pobla de Farnals, Llocnou de la Corona, Manises, Massalfassar, Massamagrell, Massanassa, Meliana, Mislata, Moncada, Museros, Païporta, Paterna, Picanya, Puçol, el Puig de Santa Maria, Quart de Poblet, Rafelbunyol, Rocafort, Sedaví, Tavernes Blanques, Torrent, València, Vinalesa and Xirivella.

In Spain, since the democratic Constitution of 1978 was passed, most spatial planning decisions belong exclusively to the 'regional governments of the autonomous communities' (constitutional regions). In the Huerta de Valencia Spatial Plan case study, the Valencian Autonomous Government, the Generalitat Valenciana, was the leader of the intervention. It was approved by the Law 5/2018 of the Valencian Parliament and further developed by Decree 219/2018. Together with these two regulations, the heart of the intervention was composed of two instruments: the Huerta Action Plan and the Agrarian Development Plan. These are the four documents that will be analysed in the case study and all are connected to the autonomous community scale as represented by its regional government.

The Plan applies only to traditional commercial vegetable gardens (mainly of tiger nut, onion and potatoes, alongside artichoke, lettuce, tomatoes, etc.) that are preserved and cultivated in 40 municipalities in and around the city of Valencia. The municipal scale, with local councils responsible for each municipality urban plan, must also be taken into account, as the position of various local governments and the demands of their population contributed to shaping the final version of the plan. The Metropolitan Area of Valencia includes many of these municipalities, but the reason for including it as a relevant scale to consider is due to its role in making the inclusion of Green Infrastructure planning in all new municipal spatial plans.

On the upper scales, the Spanish national government is an important actor that manages many of the infrastructures that exist on the Huerta, as well as being the promoter of new initiatives that could threaten landscape integrity both in the shorter and longer term. Furthermore, it is an important stakeholder in configuring land property rights, ultimately influencing land development dynamics and trends in the real estate market.

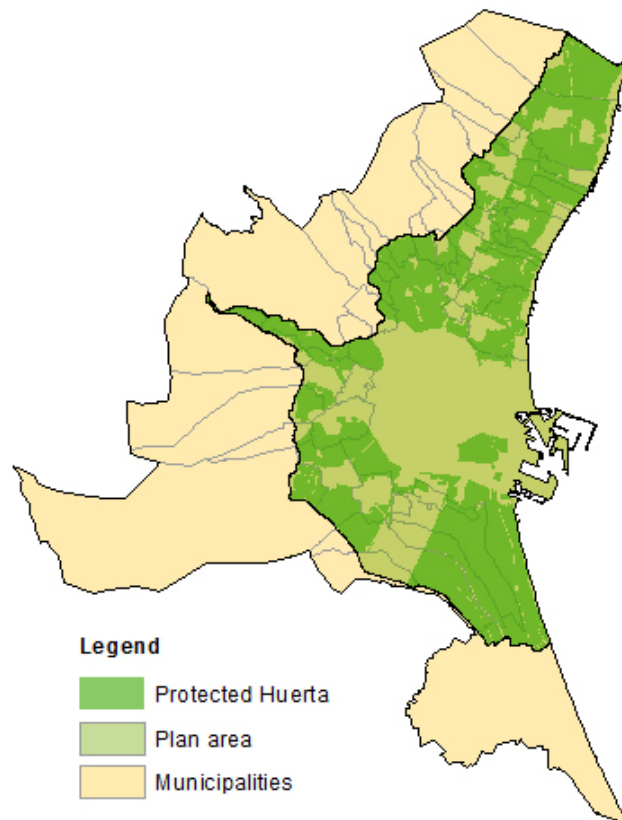
Finally, the European scale is not only introduced because EU planning rhetoric and directives influence territorial thinking and how spatial planning is implemented (e.g. through the European Spatial Development Perspective, ESDP, and subsequent documents based on its principles), but mostly because the Huerta is an active agricultural area. Therefore, the configuration and effects of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the inclusion of the area in the priority transnational axis for EU transport infrastructures are highly influential in shaping the socioeconomic dynamics and problems of the orchard, which help explain many of the goals and instruments introduced by the Huerta de Valencia Spatial Plan.

1.3 Geographical scope

The 40 municipalities involved in the Huerta de Valencia Spatial Plan span a total area of 501 km². The Plan uses existing landscape features (such as historical irrigation canals and consolidated orchards) to delineate an area of application of the plan. This area covers a total area of 230 km². Within this area, however, built up areas exist that are beyond the scope of action for the plan. The areas identified as orchards for intervention extend over an area of

127 km². Figure 1.1 provides a simple map of the three possible levels of the geographical scope.

Figure 1.1: The geographical levels of the Huerta de Valencia Spatial Plan



Source: Cartographic Institute of Valencia and National Geographic Institute.

The vast majority of actions provided for by the Plan affect only the 127 km² of protected Huerta, with the remaining area of the Plan area and the 40 municipalities being considered surrounding area.

2 Contextual analysis

2.1 Typical urban development

The case study area is the Huerta de Valencia, roughly corresponding to the Valencian Metropolitan Area (LAU1 equivalent unit). Spatial planning and urban development, more often disseminated (urban sprawl) than concentrated (as it was historically in Mediterranean cities), has been very intense in the area since 1998. This has occurred in all municipalities (LAU2 level) and initially mainly concerned residential use. After the burst of the housing real-estate bubble in 2007, logistics and other business activities have taken up a greater share of the urban development. Moreover, there remains a large stock of open land with development permissions (yet undeveloped²), land with the basic facilities for urbanization (but not yet built), buildings under construction (not yet completed) and finished buildings (not yet occupied, sold or rented). In hindsight, the mismatch between offer and demand seems to be the result of a combination of factors grounded on the financialization of the economy and speculative investments by regional/national banks and foreign investors rather than relying on demographic growth or real market demand.

Figure 2.1: Urban evolution in the Huerta from 11th Century to 2035 “business-as-usual” scenario



Source: *Huerta de Valencia Spatial Plan*.

² These parcels lose associated development rights after 5 years since their classification as developable land if no transformation is made; even though there is a usual practice at administrative level in order to extra-ordinarily extend this deadline.

2.2 Basic institutional conditions

While illegal development had been an endemic problem in the Valencian and Spanish context for a long time, since 2005, urban development in the Valencian periurban area has occurred mainly in accordance with the planning system (i.e. the 2005 urbanism law, detailed regulation, till 2019 reform). The latest Valencian Law initiated procedures to legalize previously illegal constructions according to approved plans and current regulations. In addition, a new office was created in 2019 to detect any illegal building and ensure these sites are restored to open space.

Attempts at containing land uptake have been made (theoretically on paper) since the 2004 Spatial Planning and Landscape Law. In an attempt to curb uncontrolled urban development, a Landscape Protection Plan in line with the precepts of the European Spatial Convention, was twice submitted to public consultation (from 2008 to 2012). However, the pressures from local councils demanding (and being granted) greater development aborted the initiative.

The new Land Use and Spatial Planning Law of 2014 allowed for drawing up a Huerta Spatial Plan aimed at preserving the remaining open spaces by building on the concept of Green Infrastructure (conservation instead of protection) and thus distancing itself from the previous approach, grounded on the concept of landscape. In 2018, the Huerta Law was passed, including the Spatial Plan that proposed a new model of development based on local specificities and potentials (ecological services and smart specialization): agro-food production and tourism activities in the rural-urban landscape (Farinós *et al.*, 2018). Local zoning plans are binding, and must be in accordance with the Regional Plan and the subregional Huerta Plan (covering 40 municipalities). They dictate where development can or cannot occur and under what conditions.

2.3 Initiative

Between 1996 and 2008, developers were generally private businesses – often investors, speculators and big real-estate enterprises, including banks – that bought rural land from farmers or other owners. They sought cheap land removed from existing urban fringes, even if road access was poor. Typically, land changed hands several times before it was rezoned and built. Intermediaries called ‘urbanization agents’, who acted as professional lobbyists for large investing groups and property development companies, proposed the developments and public authorities (municipal or regional, if developments were at a supramunicipal level) were in charge of approval. In the case of supramunicipal projects, a flexible development procedure emerged for ‘projects of economic regional interest’. The result of land development during this period was the type of urban growth known as leapfrog sprawl, characterized by scattered urbanization. This represented a major departure from the compact mode of urbanization typical of Valencia and most other Mediterranean settlements.

2.4 Planning permission

The procedure and competencies to develop land are clear on paper. They include the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Participatory Plans. In practice, there are ways to pass new developments not envisaged within the Plan initially, for instance by extending the validity span of previous approvals and environmental impact assessments. Political powers have often exploited the quasi-legal use of particular amendments and regulations to circumvent the aforementioned procedures in order to introduce legal changes (for instance in protected areas) without consulting or even informing the public.

If this process is successful, the municipal council officially adopts the Plan and – pending any legal appeals – zoning becomes legally binding, granting development rights to land owners and/or urbanization agents. Afterwards, when land is prepared for development, an urbanization agent (mainly a private party, but under more public scrutiny since a February 2019 amendment on Valencian Spatial Planning Law) prepares a detailed urbanization program or PAI (*Programa de Actuación Integrada*). In the last step, the city hall grants a building permit (for a fee) and construction can begin.

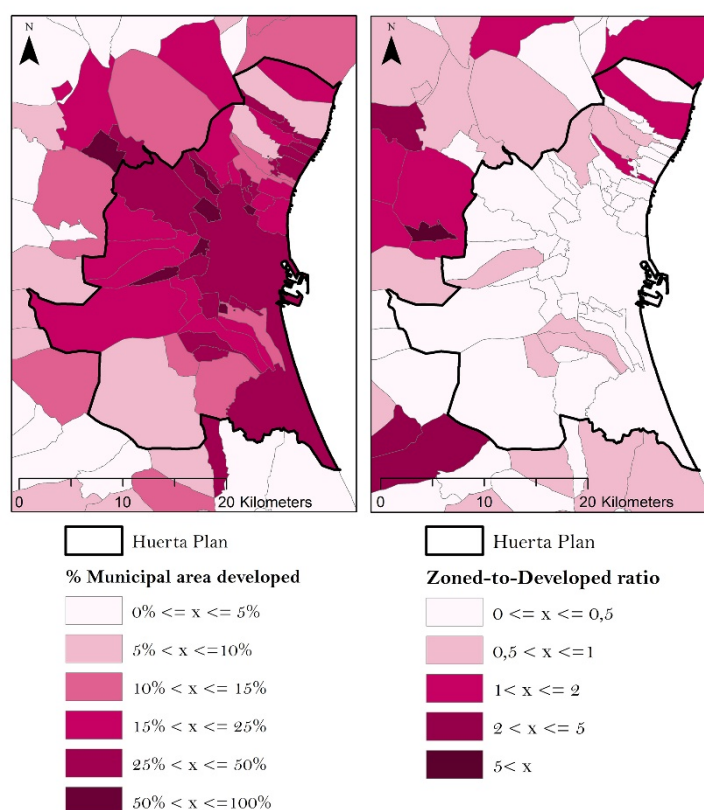
2.5 Development process

Together with the coastal areas, one of the hotspots for urban development in the Valencian region is the Huerta de Valencia. The municipalities of Burjassot, Mislata, Tavernes Blanques, Rocafort, Benetússer or Alaquàs, located in the surroundings of the city of Valencia, contain over 50% urbanized area. This has notably reduced the area traditionally dedicated to the orchard, the agricultural use. As stated, this growth is characterized by a high level of dispersion, compared to the traditional model of compact city (Figure 2.2).

In the past, the public administration, usually local governments, were responsible for providing basic facilities, services and infrastructure (e.g. water, sewage, electricity, roads). Since 1995, the initiator of the project, a private party, is responsible for this. The costs are ultimately added to the price of each square meter of housing, and thus passed on to homeowners. In addition, it is now the private sector that assumes the risk for providing infrastructure.

The municipality has the legal right to 10% of the amount of land developed in order to guarantee public utilities and common open spaces. However, up to 2008, this reserve was usually sold off to increase the liquidity of local governments, leaving only 10% of the initial 10% (1% of the initial extent) for public use as public space. After the reform of the Spanish Soil Law of 2007, each notarial act of purchase-sale must check that the operation takes place in official developable zoning, and that all other legal requirements are fulfilled.

Figure 2.2: Urban density and unutilized zoning rights



Left map: share of developed urban land, per municipality.

Right map: ratio between extent of land zoned for development and existing extent of urban land use. A ratio of 1 indicates municipalities where the extent of zoned land is equivalent to the current urban extent. In some municipalities, urban growth could legally increase the extent of urban area fivefold and above. Within the borders of the Huerta Plan, the ratio is significantly lower than outside, indicating that very limited growth is allowed in the affected municipalities

Source: Farinós, Peiró and Zornoza (2019).

As for the core city Valencia, since the year of approval of the last Urban Plan of the city in 1998, its growth has followed an 'organic' model driven by large projects. The projects (infrastructures, museum complexes, sports stadiums, malls, etc.) were supported by public funds (either with the administration acting as the main developer or offering a public guarantee in case of private developer failure), but benefitted private housing developers that developed the spaces surrounding them. This policy, based on land use conversion, seems to have changed after electoral changes in the City Council and at the regional Government. Currently, a functional approach does not address the conversion of undeveloped land (of which there is an overstock), but it rather focuses on improving the quality of life of its citizens by coupling residential functions with commercial and services ones, rehabilitating older residential buildings, regulating mobility, provision of new communitarian equipment, etc. On the fringes, it relies on a model of friendly transition between the city and the Huerta. It remains to be seen whether the necessary coordination between the different administrations with concurrent competencies over the same space takes place.

2.6 Current issues

- The burst of the real estate bubble in 2007 facilitated a transition towards more sustainable urbanisation procedures. The 2014 Valencian Law of Urbanism and Spatial Planning (LOTUP), and its successive reforms after 2015 is an example of this.
- A progressive regional government in 2015 has increased controls and promoted sustainable urbanization processes by reversing de-regulation and ad-hoc decisions to facilitate urbanization projects. The most recent change has been the modification, in 2019, of the previous 2014 LOTUP Law.
- EU ideas and concepts (e.g. Green Infrastructure, Ecological Services, Agri-food short circuits, Smart Specialisation Strategies, Landscape, open spaces) are now part of 'official' discourse that seeks to reverse excessive urbanization.

3 Sustainability of objectives

3.1 Thematic dimensions

“The main objective of the Huerta de Valencia Spatial Plan is the protection, restoration and dynamization of the land of the Huerta, its agrarian activity and the elements that make this system a landscape that is productive, culturally singular and unique. The Plan harmonizes the protection of agrarian, natural, cultural, landscape and productive values with sustainable urban and socioeconomic development”

Decree 219/2018. Article 4. Objectives

The three thematic dimensions of sustainability are widely recognized and generally pursued in the different documents that sustain the Huerta de Valencia Spatial Plan, from the law and decree that define its general goals and character to the specific reports, analyses and catalogues that develop them in greater detail. In just the Law 5/2018 alone, the term sustainability and its derivatives are mentioned no less than 25 times. Nevertheless, the visibility and weight that each instrument gives to sustainability and its dimensions is uneven and seems uncoordinated. Arguably, this might be the result of the lengthy process and the many leadership changes that the project underwent between its launch in 2001 and its approval in 2018, 17 years later.

The documents that rely the most on material generated during the initial stages of the Plan put a strong focus on the ecological dimension of sustainability. In fact, the architecture of the whole Spatial Plan relies on the identification of green infrastructure, its mapping, characterisation, categorisation and the development of different norms and regulations according to the needs of each category. According to this vision, the preservation of habitats, corridors, biodiversity and the character of the landscape are priorities of the plan. The first sections of the Plan report explicitly mention the importance of ecological functionality in the Huerta, a priority that is further reinforced by contents in the goals, strategies and actions document (see goal 1, strategies 1 and 2, actions 1A, 2A, 2B and 4B) and in the environmental sustainability report (see goals 1 to 9, out of 15). Most of the indicators to be used in the monitoring program of the Plan also address the environmental dimension of the intervention (soils, biodiversity, water use, waste, etc.). The law and the decree that gave birth to the Plan also recognize the need to protect and restore ecological functionality and visual landscape quality. See, for instance:

Law 5/2018	Decree 219/2018
Preamble	Preamble
Art. 3.3 Extent of the intervention	Art 14. Goals
Art. 5.2.i Public administration duties	Art 20.2. Areas of Natural Value
Art. 9. High productivity soils	Art 22.2. Areas of Connectivity
Art. 13. Natural heritage	Art 24.3. Ecological Corridors
Art. 18.1. Spatial Plan of the Huerta de	Art 29.1. Habitat restoration

Valencia

Art. 19.1. Green Infrastructure in the Huerta de Valencia

Art. 21.1-2. Environmental protection

Art. 23.3. Sustainable public use

Art 30.1. Climate change adaptation

Art 34.1. Water management

Art 53. Environmental and landscape integration

Art 59. Integration goals

On the other hand, the legislation includes some dispositions that, it may be argued, have the potential to negatively affect ecological sustainability and general landscape quality: articles 30 and 33 of Law 5/2018 open the door to new constructions in some parcels under certain conditions, while articles 39, 44 and 45 in the Decree 219/2018 allow the implementation of greenhouses, equestrian activities and commercial animal husbandry.

These latter regulations may be considered concessions to economic development goals, which are also present in the Plan and its regulatory framework. The intimate link between the conservation of the Huerta and the continuity of professional agricultural activity is insistently recognized in the Plan and its documents:

“... besides the structural and morphological elements or the huerta heritage, it is the people that work in agriculture the central element of this territorial system and they are the responsible of its preservation. [...] The feasibility of the huerta is not possible without a proper quality of life for farmers”

Law 5/2018, preamble.

“It is very important to consider that, without farmers, there is no huerta, but without huerta, there are no farmers, and that is why the presence of this space is so important”

Huerta de Valencia Spatial Plan - Project Report, p.189

Therefore, it is natural that many of the goals, strategies and actions of the intervention seek to bolster productive activities, supporting farmers economically and financially, and promoting the introduction of new activities as a complementary source of income. Goals 2, 3 and 4, strategies 4 and 6, and several actions (3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C and 4D) can be directly related to these priorities.

Whereas some of the documents drafted earlier in the process of the Plan focus on ecological and social aspects of the Huerta, the Law and the Decree that legally cover the approved version put the onus on the agrarian sector (see, for instance, articles 6, 9, 32.1, 33.1, 41 and 46.1 of Law 5/2018). According to the public participation report of the Plan, this shift might have come as a response to pressures from the public and farming unions. Article 45 of the law envisages the preparation of a Plan for Agrarian Development, to be developed in parallel to the Huerta Spatial Plan:

“The Plan for Agrarian Development is the strategic instrument that targets the enhancement of incomes for agrarian professionals and businesses, guaranteeing the economic profit of the agrarian sector and the survival of the Huerta. The Plan must include an estimation of available resource, needs and agrarian deficits, the priorities, their concretion and the role of the Huerta of Valencia Council.”

The preamble of Law 5/2018 acknowledges the role of people in the agricultural sector as the fundamental element for the Huerta to be a productive, environmental and cultural integrated system. Coherent with this perception, many of the social goals of the Plan target the farming sector, to guarantee its wellbeing, promote its training in sustainable production methods and facilitate the incorporation of young professionals as well of women.

Most of the socially-oriented measures of the Huerta legislation and Spatial Plan pursue a greater knowledge and recognition of the values of the space among the population that benefits from its existence. Objective 5 of the Plan explicitly targets the public use of the Huerta, a goal that is developed by strategies 1, 5 and 6, and actions 1A, 1B, 4A, 5A, 5B, 6A, 6B and 6C. While the creation of green itineraries, panoramic points, live museums, gastronomic networks and schools are designed as actions to be developed, the Plan already incorporates an extensive catalogue of protected heritage (and a note that this will be further expanded in the near future). The environmental report of the Plan incorporates 4 objectives related to public health, social justice and wellbeing.

In addition to public meetings and workshops, over 2,000 written comments were received during the public participation and consultation stages of the Plan. The law, the decree and the Plan allege that there was a wide-ranging consensus around the need to protect and enhance the Huerta, and that many of the inputs from the participation processes were introduced into the final version.

3.2 Temporal balance

The Plan and the legislation supporting it do not explicitly mention temporal sustainability, but there are indications that the short-, mid- and long-term effects of the intervention were considered. The preamble of the Law and the Decree recognize the need to pursue long-term sustainability objectives set in the regional 2011 spatial strategy, UN's Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). References are made to future generations, resilience and climate change (with adaptation to the latter being recognized as objective #4 in the Environmental Sustainability Report of the Spatial Plan). The body of the legislation operationalizes all these principles with articles that introduce a monitoring program with indicators for assessment purposes (Law 5/2018, Art 18), the possibility of redistributing the right to use the land of abandoned parcels for a period between 10 and 30 years (Law 5/2018, Art 28) and the promotion of training programs for young people to ensure generational continuity in professional farming (Law 5/2018, Art 45). The Plan itself is

declared approved for an indefinite period (Decree 219/2018, Art 7), with the obligation to update it every 4 years (Decree 219/2018, Art 8), and revise it, at the latest, in 20 years' time (Decree 219/2018, Art 9).

Public participation reports in the Plan reveal that a variety of stakeholders suggested or demanded many of the temporal balance elements of the intervention. These include the recognition and reinforcement of the role played by the Huerta in fighting climate change, harmonization of the Plan's measures with the objectives set by Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, the need to ensure that generational succession will exist, the introduction of a monitoring plan and an economic sustainability report and, perhaps most importantly, the specification of deadlines and frequency for the execution of certain actions (e.g. Project Report. Sec. 5.3.2.j: closure of illegal dumping spots in a maximum of 8 years) and the update and revision of the Plan.

4 Impact assessment

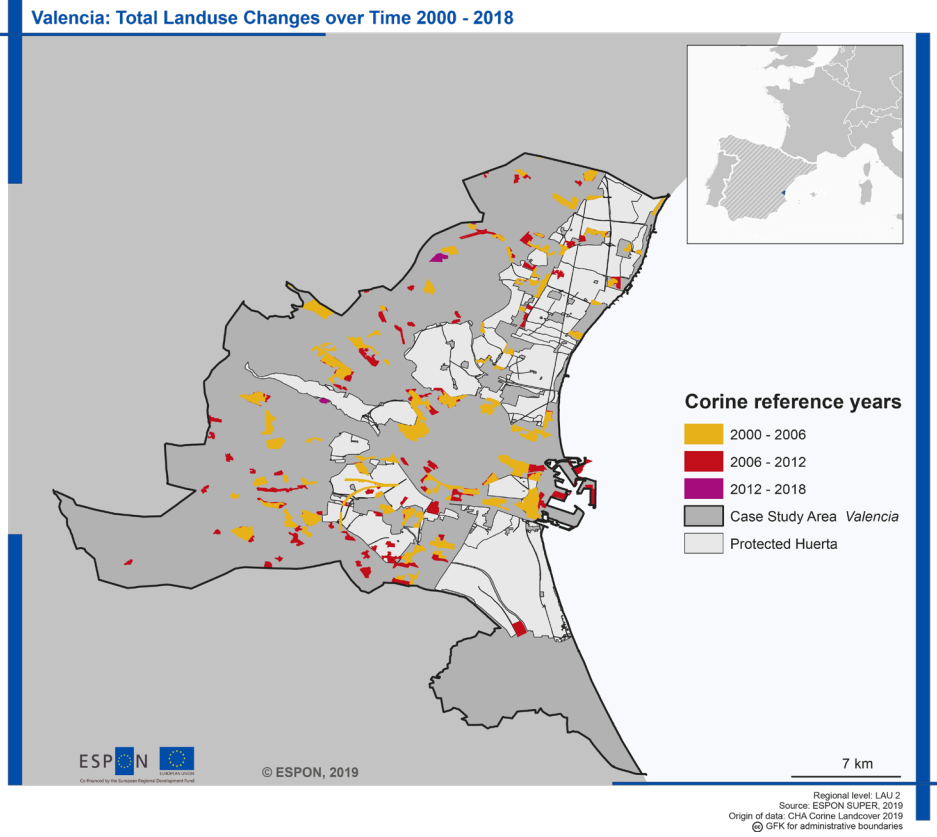
4.1 Pre-intervention

4.1.1 Identification of the problem

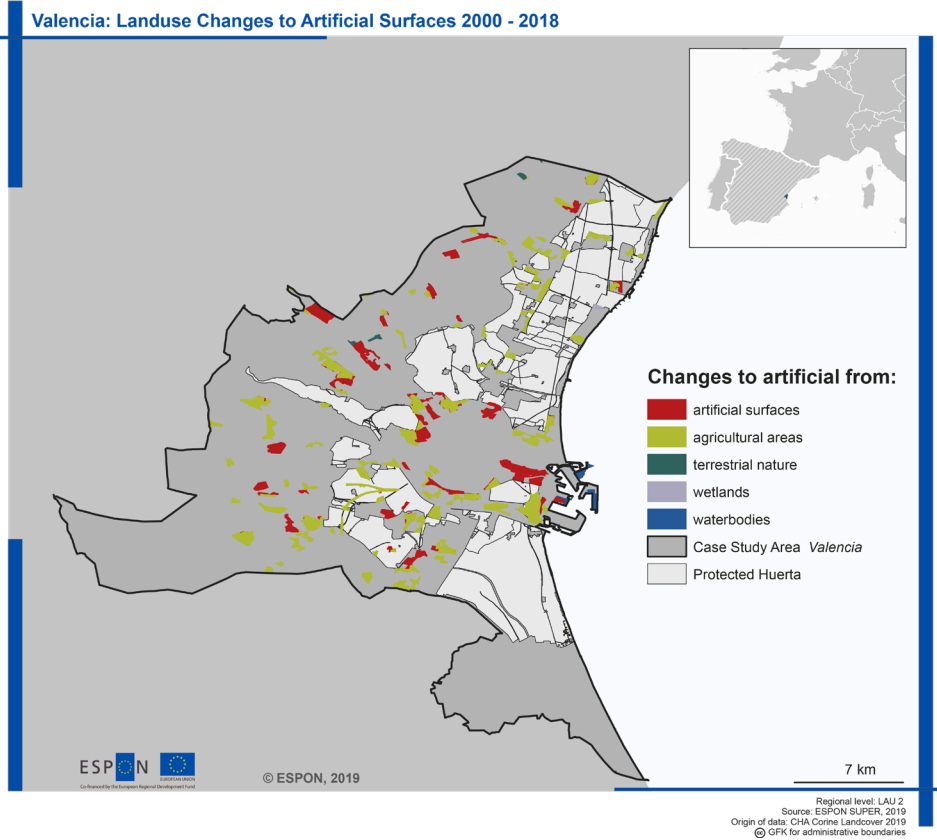
The Huerta of Valencia occupies the fertile coastal plain around the city of Valencia. It is a traditional agricultural landscape composed of a mosaic of small parcels, professionally managed to produce tiger nut, potatoes and onions -alongside many other vegetables- to satisfy local and regional markets. It is estimated that its origins go back to Roman times, with the development of a capillary irrigation network deriving its waters from local rivers, a system that was greatly expanded and perfected by the Moors between the 8th and 15th Centuries with the development of dams, ditches and mills. The Huerta is an inalienable component of the local identity and, in addition to having productive functions, it has become a recreational resource to many citizens: some grow their own food in tiny parcels, most enjoy the kilometres of paths and canals to exercise. The Huerta Plan addresses some of the mounting pressures that endangered this space.

Most stakeholders feel that the most important driver that triggered the intervention is the acknowledgment of a rapid urbanization of the Huerta area. This change can be easily observed in the cartography and land use data produced for ESPON SUPER. As shown in Map 4.1, most of the recent land use changes occurred between the years 2000 and 2006. Strikingly, around 3000 ha out of the 3974 ha that were transformed between 2000 and 2018 saw their land use changed during the earlier half of the period. Furthermore, maps indicate that agricultural soils in the metropolitan area of Valencia provided most of the surface for development (Map 4.2). Out of 3652 ha that became artificial land over the 18-year period, nearly 2200 ha (60%) had previously been in cultivation. For reference, brownfield and urban redevelopment accounted for less than 1400 ha.

Map 4.1: Total land use changes (2000-2018).



Map 4.2: Previous land use of areas that converted to artificial surfaces between 2000 and 2018.



Findings suggest that attention for the shrinking Huerta landscape brought a range of associated issues to the fore. For example, the decaying environmental and aesthetic quality of the area called for the incorporation of landscape enhancement goals in the plan. Towards the later stages of drafting the Huerta Plan, it was also recognized that an ageing demographic among farmers, the lack of generational succession and, in general, its low profitability in comparison to urban development, were at the root of the problem. A quantitative summary of how the interviewed stakeholders perceive the focal issues of the Plan reveals all of these perspectives, albeit with different degrees of reiteration.

Table 4.1: The main focal issues according to interviewed stakeholders.

Focal issue	# instances
Urban development consuming Huerta soil	8
Landscape enhancement	8
Land use planning	3
Integrated planning	3
Guarantee farming activity	2
Protect agroecological value	1

While the initial draft of the Plan seemed to be predominantly protective of land and landscape values, its goals covered economic and social dimensions as well, mainly in connection to agricultural activity. Most stakeholders recognize that at least some of the multiple issues addressed by the intervention were pressing and necessary.

There was a great consensus that support for the Plan largely came from the regional government, organized civil society and professional farmers who were not landowners. The greatest opposition found under landowners (who lost development prospects), some local municipal councils (that saw areas poised for development become de-zoned) and the property development and real-estate sectors. On balance, we have found that societal perceptions and desires regarding the Huerta increasingly supported a protective approach and opposed further speculative land use transformations.

4.1.2 Inception of goals/action

In general, the goals and actions geared towards the regulation and restriction of further land development on Huerta soil are applauded by most stakeholders. A member of the regional parliament and the representative of an NGO did however express their disappointment that the Plan did not go far enough and introduce a total moratorium on urban development. On the other hand, a building company representative argued that the economic impacts of the plan's goals and actions had not been properly assessed.

The management of the farming activity seems to be the most contentious aspect of the Plan. The representative of the agricultural sector felt that the Plan does not address the most important issue for the long-term sustainability of the focal Huerta landscape: sustaining

farming. Two other stakeholders support this claim by criticizing that agrarian revitalization actions are being deployed too slowly. On the other hand, the NGO representative argued that the Plan defends a counterproductive strategy of agricultural intensification as its solution for rural development.

Some 17 years went by between the moment the intervention started to be discussed and its approval. This explains why most stakeholders consider that it took too long for the Plan to come to fruition, blaming political interests and struggles for the delay. The head of a consultancy who worked on the Plan reflects that this time lapse was necessary for the Plan to gather sufficient political support among the different parties and ideologies. On the other hand, the representative of a property development company felt that the Plan was approved without sufficient consultation and consensus, in a very clear top-down (technocratic and decision making oriented) way.

4.1.3 Pre-intervention conclusions

The intervention is essentially reactive in the sense that is a response to damaging practices of speculative land exchanges and development in the Huerta rather than a desire to achieve more sustainable land use. This has both advantages and disadvantages. Regarding the latter, it could be argued that reactive interventions can at most prevent further degradation only after substantive land fragmentation and landscape damage has already occurred. An anticipatory proactive intervention that foresees undesirable dynamics and sets goals and actions accordingly might be a better approach. On the other hand, a reactive approach may have an advantage that the negative impacts should already be evident to all groups of society. In the Huerta case, there was a great alignment in stakeholder perceptions and demands to react against unsustainable land uses. This is likely to have facilitated the adoption of a predominantly protective Plan of the Huerta. Its final shape, however, adopted a more integrative perspective, as greater focus on farming activities introduced actions geared towards economic and social viability.

While some disagreements about the provisions of the Plan have been identified among stakeholders, these do not explain the extraordinarily prolonged course of the Plan took from its inception to approval. Political struggles and electoral changes are mainly to blame. In this sense, political unity can be cited as an important precondition for the timely adoption and implementation of interventions. Social support for the intervention's goals is insufficient.

4.2 Implementation

4.2.1 Technical capability

The Huerta Plan involved different specialists in many disciplines: spatial planning, law, architecture, landscape architecture, economic development, participation, etc. In general, stakeholders report a satisfactory assessment of their capabilities. Minor criticisms are mainly

targeted at the perceived disconnect between some public officials and reality on the ground. Some stakeholders would have liked to see less involvement from particular groups, such as architects and jurists, due to their approach to leading and designing spatial planning. The representative of the NGO notices that the complexity of some documents sometimes demands a high technical capacity from those wishing to actively participate in the design of the intervention. Complicated interventions affecting multiple dimensions of a territory benefit from the involvement of well-trained, skilled professionals in all relevant fields. This does not only improve the quality of the intervention, but increases its legitimacy among other stakeholders. Efforts need to be made to facilitate the understanding and discussion of highly technical issues by those directly affected by the intervention or interested in making a positive contribution.

4.2.2 Data and information

With the Huerta being an iconic historical landscape containing abundant historical heritage (some of it designated as UNESCO World Heritage and ongoing initiatives to expand international recognition) and an intense economic activity at the doorstep of a large city like Valencia (home to three large universities), abundant literature existed on the structure and functioning of the territory prior to the intervention. Most stakeholders recognize the richness in knowledge, adding that this was further expanded by a number of ex-ante studies supporting the Plan. A university expert on rural geography and the representative of the farming sector provided a dissenting view, arguing that some dynamics in the landscape-farming were understudied. Moreover, the representative of the property development sector complained about a lack of transparency in some of the proposals formulated in the studies (this claim must be taken with caution, as the interviewee did not attend any of the meetings and workshops where clarification may have been provided or could have been requested).

4.2.3 Participation

By Spanish standards, the two-stage participation process undertaken parallel to the definition of the intervention was unusually ambitious, with several presentations in multiple municipalities, exhibitions, a website, an online survey, workshops, debates, etc. The outputs of this strenuous effort were summarised in a 229-page document that accompanies the Plan. The most laudatory assessment of the participatory procedures came from the Director-General in charge of the Plan at the regional government and the private consultancy that coordinated the participation process. The latter however admitted that even offering a catering service was not enough to lure some stakeholders to the activities. A similar shortcoming regarding the fair representation of all points of view was mentioned by several other stakeholders.

Another common complaint is the fact that, for many, the administration designed the participation process as a validation of its own vision and provisions by: bringing excessively advanced documents to discussions, generally rejecting criticism and objections to the plan, and failing to incorporate most of the suggestions received as allegations. Overall 7 out of the 11 interviewed stakeholders assess that the participation process was a weakness rather than a strength of the intervention.

While it is commendable that the authorities responsible for an intervention design and financially support an ambitious participation process, this case study indicates that it can still fail if it is perceived as a tokenistic or propagandistic effort rather than an engaging strategy to share decision-making power with non-institutional local communities.

4.2.4 Strategic vision

Initially, the response to the demands from the public to stop Huerta land consumption was addressed through a protective strategy based on landscape enhancement objectives that would be realized through a Green Infrastructure spatial plan. However, the character of the intervention changed substantially during the long approval period. First, its scope was expanded from a remedial landscape architecture approach to a spatial planning one. It was acknowledged that land uses and activities needed to be addressed as well. The scope and ambitions of the Plan were expanded once again after receiving input from some farmers. They argued that a viable and profitable agriculture sector was the key to preserving a multifunctional landscape and preventing land exchanges and development ambitions. It was envisaged as a self-sustainable activity that does not depend on public funding in order to confront land use speculation. The final Huerta Plan incorporated an accompanying agrarian development plan to support this final, more integrative strategic vision.

Most of the interviewed stakeholders (8) support the vision of the Plan. Three respondents are (in different degrees) critical of the excessive focus on the protection of the aesthetic dimension of the landscape, alleging that the Plan overlooks the economic activities that take place in it, particularly farming.

Despite these criticisms, it is clear that, in comparison with the initial version of the intervention, the final one included more attention to all sustainability dimensions. While the ultimate goal of the Plan certainly is an enhancement of the Huerta, its focus on processes (farming, ecological functioning, etc.) in conjunction with structures (Green Infrastructure, viewsheds, etc.) has helped it gain broader support among stakeholders. This case study experience might hint at the need for land interventions to produce strategic visions that extol the benefits that communities will obtain from them, rather than prescribing a generic protection of environmental (or other) values.

4.2.5 Institutional coordination

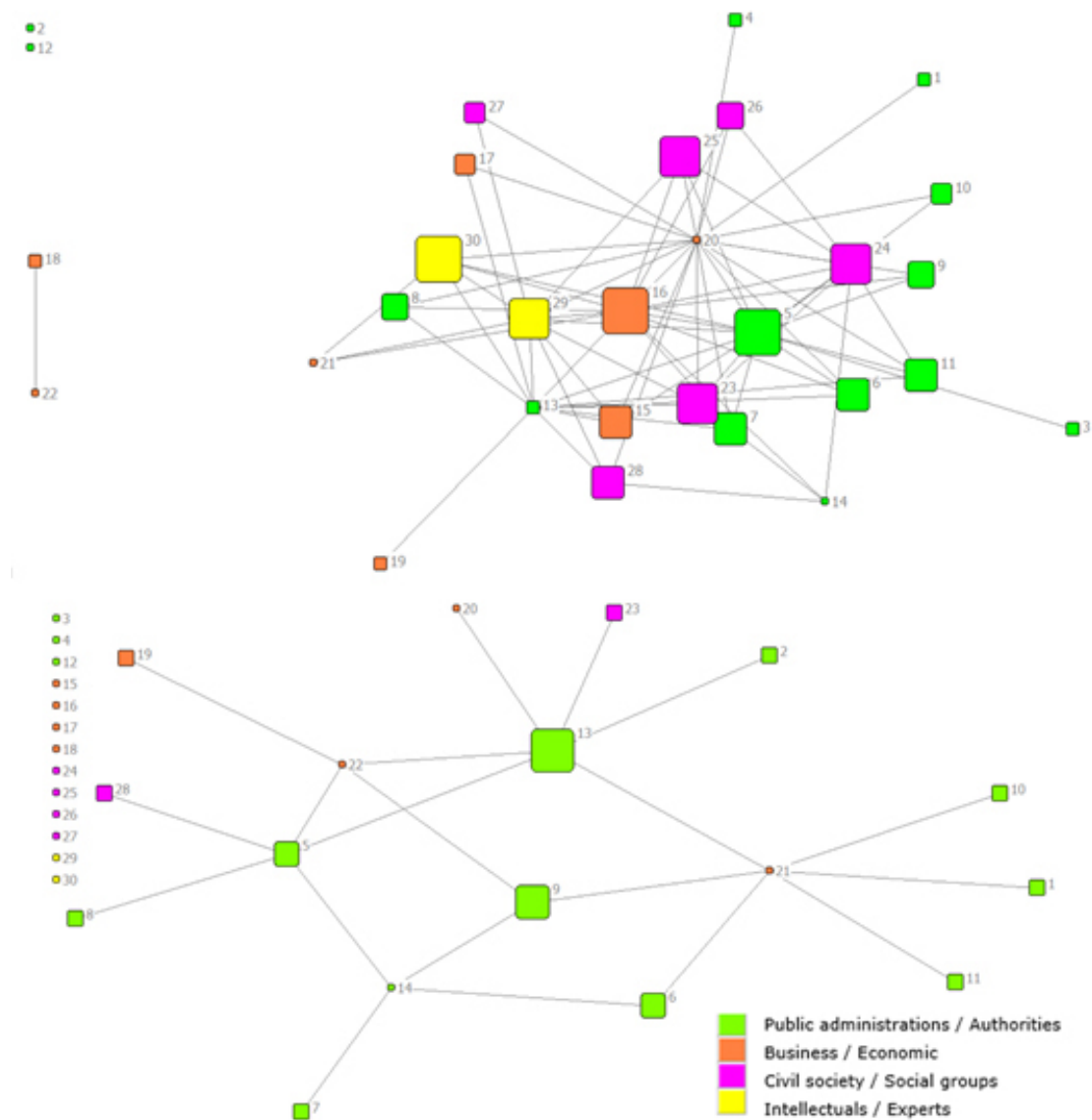
The many years that passed between the inception of the Plan and its approval in 2018 made coordination difficult. Not only did different administrations and areas of an administration need to harmonize their demands and actions, but changes in governing parties took place following elections. As a result, various senior officers from different ideological backgrounds were in charge of the Plan over this period. Only three of the stakeholders were positive about how institutional and stakeholder coordination worked for the intervention (incidentally, all three were at some point directly responsible for the contents of the Plan). All other respondents point at institutional disorder as a weakness of the intervention. A common complaint was the lack of involvement from the agricultural department in the regional government and the Spanish Ministry in charge of infrastructure development as both were considered key players in the goal of preserving the Huerta.

While lack of coordination contributed to the delays in the approval process, they did not prevent it from ultimately passing. Nevertheless, improved coordination will still be needed to implement particular actions, which heavily rely on institutions other than the leading department.

4.2.6 Institutional leadership

The idea of protecting the Huerta against development came from organised social movements. The department in charge of territorial planning soon took the lead and institutionalized the aim of protecting the Huerta. Most stakeholders were favourable about the leadership role exercised by the department, particularly the senior officials at the helm of the Directorate-General responsible for the Plan. Two different styles of exercising this leadership can be distinguished. In its initial stage, the Plan predominantly reflected the preferences and the vision of the Director-General, an expert trained as a landscape architect. In the second stage, the leadership was geared towards the involvement of more stakeholders and consensus building. The results of this second approach can be observed in two stakeholder social networks (Figure 4.1), one reflecting collaborative relationships and the second displaying negotiation links. Note the richness and diversity of stakeholder typologies that participated in the elaboration of the Huerta Plan, involving public administrations, the private sector, civil society and the academy.

Figure 4.1: Stakeholder network on collaboration (top) and negotiation (bottom).



No clear preference was expressed for any of the two types of institutional leadership, but the generally positive opinions seem to point to the importance of a clearly identifiable leader that can act as institutional interlocutor. Therefore, the appointment of a leading institutional figure may be indispensable for the success of any intervention.

4.2.7 Political will

The political party that was in office during the first public demand to protect the Huerta is perceived as hostile to the intervention by all the interviewed stakeholders. Some cite the private interests of individual members of the initial governments as a factor contributing to the lack of progress. All interviewees mentioned that there was a constant struggle between the department responsible for the Plan and all other governmental departments. Only in recent years did this struggle subside allowing the impasse to be broken and the Plan

adopted. As some stakeholders point out, a significant proportion of political representatives are still sceptical about the Plan.

The two decisive elements for overcoming political reluctance were the emboldened leadership exercised by senior officials in the competent department and the steadfast demands from the civil organizations that originated the intervention in a new political and post-crisis economic context. In this regard, a valuable lesson can be extracted from the case study: in democratic societies that offer opportunities for community-based, bottom-up, initiatives, political/institutional opposition is an obstacle but not an unsurmountable one. The empowerment of local groups supporting sustainable land use may counterbalance political resistance and contribute to the successful implementation of the intervention; but this can be lengthy process.

4.2.8 Implementation conclusions

It is clear that the technical aspects and institutional conditions surrounding the implementation of an intervention are important factors in determining its degree of success or failure. Moreover, these factors are vital in determining the degree of support and legitimacy among stakeholders. In the case study, the technical capability of involved specialists, the availability of ex-ante studies and their quality (territorial information), the definition of a shared strategic vision and the identification of a clear institutional leader and interlocutor (territorial intelligence) have not only helped craft an intervention that enjoys government support, but also to gained support and credibility among most social groups. Conversely, the perceived lack of political will throughout the years, limited institutional coordination and, crucially, a participation process that had little influence on the final shape of the Plan can be considered hindering factors.

The fact that these weaknesses significantly delayed but did not prevent the adoption of an initiative that was born from civil society, points to a relevant change in the regional planning culture. The initial attempt of the regional administration to restrict the development of an initiative that had emerged from the civil society within the walls and corridors of the institution, narrowing it down to only address the spatial organization and protection of the Green Infrastructure and leaving its elaboration up to its own staff, failed. Instead, it has been observed how relentless pressure from various stakeholders has shaped the Plan by expanding its scope to embrace a more integrative approach to spatial planning and include farming as in important means to deflate land development pressures. Even though certain stakeholders express concerns and frustration regarding particular aspects, the majority of the local public seems supportive of the outcome of the implementation of the Huerta Plan.

Landscape scale interventions with potential effects on several sustainability dimensions and diverse stakeholders would probably always benefit from adopting an integrative approach at a very early in the process, as well as from giving proper consideration to stakeholder

interests and demands. Learning from the struggles experienced during the preparation of the Huerta Plan intervention, current decision-making processes affecting the Huerta and the wider territory seem to be more considerate of public opinion.

4.3 Sustainability assessment

4.3.1 Planning and development culture

Based on the opinions expressed by interviewed stakeholders, it may be argued that little has changed in the conventional planning and development culture of the local institutions and society in the case study area. This would be characterised by the following principles:

- Strong reliance on the strict regulation of land use to produce desirable results.
- Endemic lack of coordination between administrations and between closed administration compartments hindering integrative planning efforts and the effective implementation of plans.
- Traumatic political transitions when a new party or coalition gains access to government, frequently resulting in the cancellation of projects imitated by previous governments or their re-alignment to the ideological apparatus of the incumbent force.
- An urban-centric approach to spatial planning that reflects the disconnect between senior officials with issues like environmental quality and the farming sector (in their view: residual, secondary, outdated).
- Strong reliance on public officials to design planning instruments coupled with widespread scepticism on the benefits of public participation.

Nevertheless, the fact that more than half of the interviewed stakeholders mentioned one or several of these principles as weaknesses during the implementation of the studied intervention indicates that the disadvantages of this land-use development tradition are starting to be widely acknowledged. Under these conditions, it may be argued that interventions like the Huerta Plan have contributed to a transition towards more integrative planning approaches, greater intra- and inter-administrative coordination, and greater openness in terms of participation and diversity of expertise. Or, conversely, the widespread dissatisfaction with the traditional practices are providing room for governance innovations such as the Huerta Plan.

In fact, indications of this transition in governance can already be observed upon critical scrutiny of the intervention. As mentioned in earlier sections, the strategic vision of the Plan evolved from being a relatively narrowly-defined effort in landscape architecture to be inclusive of many other dimensions of the territorial reality. Subsequent sections will argue that this has had positive effects on sustainability. In addition, this step towards comprehensiveness forced the leading administration to coordinate and cooperate with other departments and administrations at the Spanish and municipal level. As discussed, this coordination was not without setbacks, but is illustrative of an emerging culture in planning and development in the region. The efforts and resources devoted to carrying out an ambitious participation process for the Plan testify to the desire to incorporate new voices and

perspectives into decision-making routines. While the impact of these activities on the actual design of the intervention was judged as rather underwhelming by most involved stakeholders, it signals a keenness on the part of the responsible authority to embrace openness and transparency. Finally, while most of the Plan and its supporting law focus on regulatory measures, some innovative tools were introduced that target the active management of land use and the diversification of the rural economy. The incorporation of these tools (which will be further discussed in section B4.1e) point to a departure from the conventional urbanism approach to spatial planning, bringing it closer to territorial governance models based on land use management and even integrated planning.

4.3.2 Economy

Initially, the intervention paid little attention to the local economic context and the potential impacts derived from its implementation on economic activities. This was partially ameliorated with the assignation of a prominent role to agrarian activity in the later stages of the Plan and the inclusion of an economic sustainability assessment. Albeit very brief and limited in scope, it now accompanies the Plan.

Two lines of action in the Plan focus on economic performance:

- A) The Huerta Plan, with its accompanying agrarian development plan, supports the viability and profitability of the farming sector by favouring the training and incorporation of young professionals, facilitating the diversification of activities coupling the cultivation of the land with rural accommodation or restauration offerings, yielding to demands and thus allowing a certain proportion of greenhouses, and by creating a land bank to ensure the cultivation of all available cropland.
- B) The Plan allows limited building activities, restricted to new structures to support diversification in the farming sector, the redevelopment of designated brownfield sites and sectors (only one third of their former size) and to soften the urban-rural fringe with green areas, playgrounds, picnic areas, etc. Promoted in the Plan as aesthetical enhancement and public use measures, they are identified by some stakeholders as a concession by the regional government to legalize irregular pre-existent developments and to gain the support of certain municipalities and sectoral interests for the intervention.

The economic impacts of the intervention may be characterised as negative in the short term and potentially positive in the long term. A certain degree of permissiveness and compensatory measures with local councils and the land development sector cannot compensate for their loss of income in comparison to the largely unrestricted development model prior to the plan. In spite of this, the representative of the property development sector

admits that an enhanced Huerta landscape can help the sector to market their products and will attract buyers with greater purchasing power.

While the measures targeted to the farming sector are generally assessed as economically positive, many express concerns at the slow pace at which they are being deployed and the sustainability of public budgets to finance them in the future. In addition, the academic and NGO respondents point out that the combination of small landowners losing development expectations and agricultural operations that need more land to guarantee their profitability through economies will have the side-effect of a consolidation of property.

In conclusion, the intervention is generally perceived as a positive step towards increasing the long-term economic sustainability of the communities living in the Huerta area and their activities. Nevertheless, it does not future-proof them against potentially dramatic changes in the global dynamics of the farming sector. To reduce this risk, two stakeholders suggest setting up a payment scheme to compensate farmers for the ecological services they provide, and even more express the urgency of (re)linking local produce with local consumption centres (markets, schools, restaurants, etc.).

4.3.3 Ecology

The general sentiment among stakeholders is that the intervention has had positive effects for environmental and landscape conservation, but did not resolve all challenges and threats.

There is an almost unanimous recognition that the Plan has been key in achieving a removal of development rights of some 1,500 ha of developable Huerta land, thus preventing its conversion from farmland to urban. In spite of this, some express uneasiness at the fact that the Plan still allows development in around 500 ha of brownfields and urban fringe areas. Another source of general approval is the focus of the intervention on protecting and improving the green infrastructure to guarantee the ecological functioning and connectivity of the Huerta and surrounding natural areas. In this case, however, some interviewees are worried that the beautiful cartographies and promising actions of the Plan are not being implemented as fast as they had hoped. The most common cause for concern is the fact that the Plan may not prevent future infrastructures from being built that could disrupt the integrity of the Huerta. This is due to a seminal lack of coordination between the regional government in charge of the Plan and the Spanish Government Ministries responsible for most large-scale infrastructures (port, high-speed rail lines, highways, etc.).

Concomitant to the environmental improvement of the Huerta, some stakeholders have already observed an increase in public use of the area and its cycling network. The representative of the regional government speculates that this, in turn, will increase support for organic farming practices among the urban population. The former councillor for urbanism at the city of Valencia points out another unexpected effect of the intervention: it has allowed

many municipalities to increase their ratio of green area per inhabitant, thus helping them comply with international standards and recommendations.

While the nature of the Plan offers undeniable positive prospects for the ecological sustainability of the whole region, this potential has been so far largely unrealized, partly due to the short period of time elapsed since its approval. The beneficial effects that a good ecological condition has on dimensions beyond biodiversity conservation targets (e.g., public use, sustainable farming, etc.) may be key for gaining wider societal support for the intervention. This support may be regarded as a valuable asset to guarantee the long-term ecological sustainability of the Huerta, by helping to protect it against new land-development pressures signalled by some stakeholders.

4.3.4 Equity

Two groups embody the positive effects of the intervention on a measure of equity. Within the agricultural sector a distinction must be made between landowners, many of whom do not directly cultivate the land, and active farmers, many of whom do not own land but, through a myriad of small business relationships, rely on cultivating the land for a living. This latter group benefits from an intervention that prevents landowners from selling and developing the fields they cultivate, because it enables them to continue their activity. This also helps to maintain the rural character of many Huerta communities, so a second beneficiary is the wider society. In addition, most stakeholders recognize an improvement in the way in which some urban citizens perceive farmers and farming activities on the Huerta. Though far from being a generalized change of perception, the Plan is contributing to strengthen the local identity and greater rates of public use have already been reported.

Adding a critical note to generally favourable assessments from other stakeholders, the representative of the property development sector argues that this aspect of the intervention will be in constant peril as, according to him, political interests and power are still more influential than discourses focused on local identity and culture. The farming sector responded noted that the Plan cannot guarantee the succession of family operations, so that the concentration of land in larger businesses will continue, threatening the traditional social composition of the local communities.

It is difficult to foresee the evolution of the farming sector and its impact on local communities, but the effects of the Plan on the equity dimension of sustainability so far support two observations. First, restrictions on agricultural land development have helped protect small family businesses operating on very small tracts of land. Socially, this situation is preferable over the loss of local jobs and the erosion of the social fabric caused by the urbanization of the highly productive soils of the Huerta. Second, the intervention has accentuated a dynamic that is being recorded in the broader context of Western societies, namely the invigoration of societal demands for well-preserved traditional agricultural landscapes that bestow character

and strengthen the identity of territories in the face of the homogenizing effects of economic globalization.

4.3.5 Balance

Some of the most innovative aspects of the Huerta Plan are also the most controversial. These achieved varying degrees of success.

- A land bank was created as a meeting point for owners with land available for rent and professional farmers wanting to expand their operations. So far, the land managed by the bank has been negligible (1 ha), with stakeholders blaming a strong tradition of renting land only to trusted acquaintances.
- Owners of fallow parcels may be required to cultivate them. If they fail to do so, the administration may revoke their right to cultivation and grant it to a professional farmer through the land bank. Property rights would remain unaltered. So far, this option has not been used.
- Strategies focused on promoting farming viability, with an agrarian revitalization plan, training opportunities for young aspiring farmers and women, educational initiatives to promote the local produce, etc.
- Many of the strategies and actions are to be governed by a recently appointed Huerta council. While its creation was eagerly awaited by many stakeholders, its provisional composition only includes representatives from the administration and its statutes are provisional. Its effectiveness remains untested.

All these measures are predicated on the belief that by reinforcing the competitiveness of the farming sector, Huerta soils will be more protected against land development pressures. It is premature to assess the performance of these innovative aspects of the plan, but many stakeholders express concern at the fact that, even at such an early stage after approval, the deployment of measures is slow. This runs counter to the building of trust and confidence between the farming sector and the governance institutions that will be required to face growing pressures from individuals and local councils to grant exceptions to the restrictions. As stated in previous sections, the threat of future infrastructures disrupting the Huerta remains.

Farmers who do not own the land are identified, together with the wider society, as the clear winners of the intervention. In contrast, some landowners with development prospects and municipalities with expansive urban plans are broadly recognized as the ones that have sacrificed the most. Measures such as the designation of areas for brownfield redevelopment and the construction of public amenities are seen as compensatory arrangements. Support from reluctant groups and individuals in the farming sector was brokered by making concessions to agrarian intensification.

The Plan has met the expectations of most interviewed groups (8 out of 11), even if many urge an acceleration in the implementation of its tools and instruments. It is worth mentioning that the representative of the farming sector feels that the Plan still leaves small farmers exposed to the risks of liberalized markets. The representative of the property development

industry calls for the creation of an observatory of the Huerta that can mediate between economic powers and societal interests.

4.3.6 Multi-stakeholder assessment conclusions

With few exceptions, interviewed stakeholders do not perceive that the Huerta Plan has significantly impacted the existing planning and development culture in the case study area, which is strongly rooted in a public sector-led urbanism approach. Nevertheless, some indications suggest that the Plan has taken steps towards a more integrative practice of land-use management and a greater openness to heterogeneous interests in decision-making processes. While not entirely fruitful, these changes have favoured the inclusion of economic, ecological and social sustainability considerations and goals within the Plan. While some reservations are expressed by interviewees (mostly with regard to the pace and resources), a reasonably high degree of confidence about the success of the intervention in preventing land consumption is observed among stakeholders.

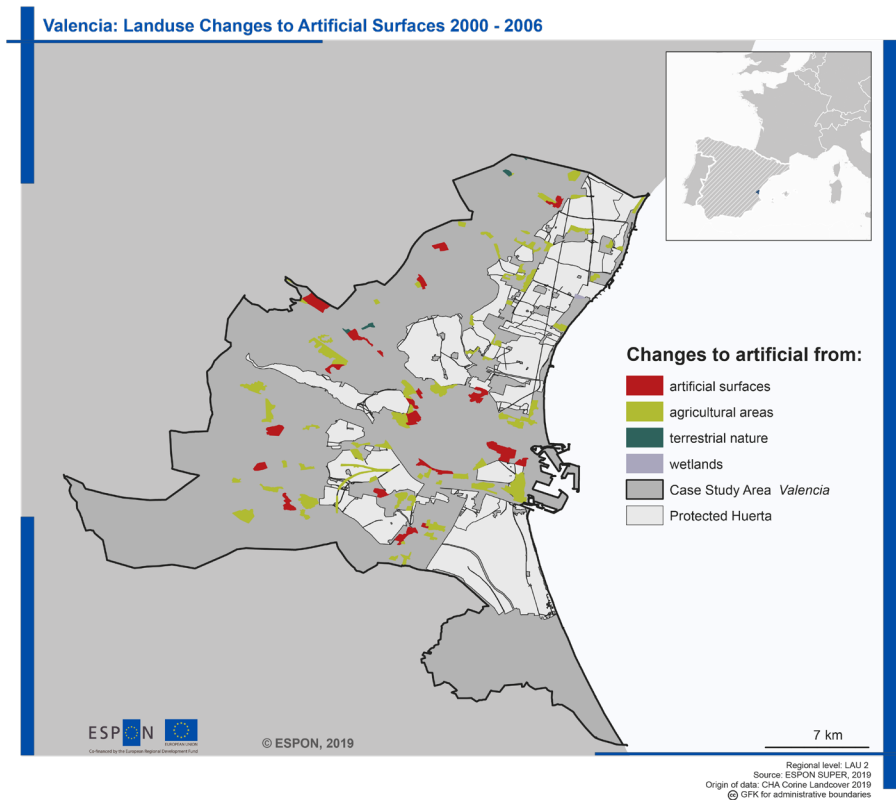
It is unlikely that the outcomes would have been the same under the initial vision of the Plan, which was focused on landscape protection. The level of protection against land consumption would have been considerably lower, because it would have been relatively easy to repeal the protective regulation at any point in time. Conversely, the introduction and execution of measures supporting the economic viability of the farming sector, a conception of Green Infrastructure that is inclusive of agrarian and cultural values, as well as other measures aimed at delivering social improvements have proved effective in reducing land transformation pressures. By garnering the support of many small farmers who see the long-term viability of their activity increased, and the sympathies from local communities that enjoy increased public use of an enhanced landscape, the intervention has added new layers of indirect protection against haphazard land consumption and it has gained allies for the cause. The fact that none of the 11 interviewed stakeholders foresees a reversal of the Huerta Plan in the mid- to long-term bears witness to the sustainability of the intervention in its temporal dimension.

4.4 Conclusions

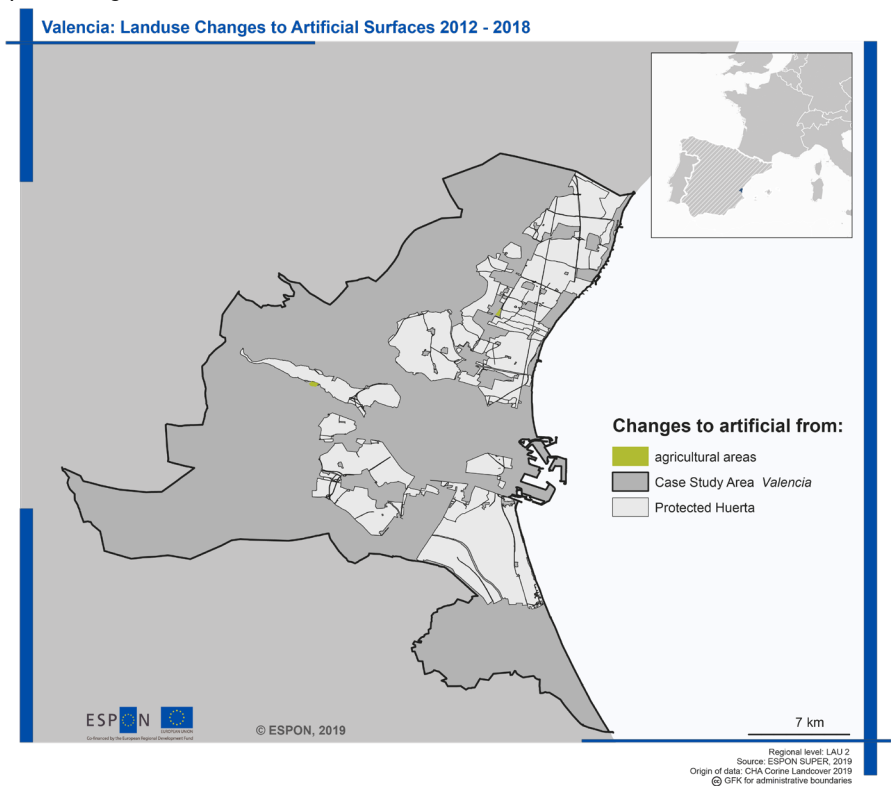
In this case study (i.e. the Huerta of Valencia Plan), sustainable land-use regards a combination of a patchwork of small cultivated parcels that are highly-productive, the necessary structures to support farming activities and a network of blue/green infrastructure that fulfils important environmental functions and delivers ecosystem services. Unsustainable land use in the Huerta is exemplified by the multitude of urban and industrial development projects that had been consuming Huerta soil and fragmenting the landscape in the decades prior to the housing bubble collapse in 2007. A comparison of Map 4.3 and Map 4.4

illustrates the stark difference of the pace of urbanization between 2000-2006 (housing bubble) and 2012-2018 (bubble collapse and, at the end of the period, Huerta Plan).

Map 4.3: Original land use of areas that transitioned to artificial between 2000 and 2006



Map 4.4: Original land use of areas that transitioned to artificial between 2012 and 2018



Virtually all changes contributed to expanding the artificial land use, testifying to intense development between 2000 and 2007, and a much reduced land consumption rate afterwards, due to a combined effect of the global financial crisis, the burst of the housing bubble and, in the very last period, the influence of the Huerta Plan.

Interestingly, the Huerta Plan addressed in this case study was unnecessary as an intervention to prevent unsustainable land use in the short and medium-term. As evidenced by our study of the land-use change trends, the housing bubble had left extensive urbanized areas waiting to be built, and the crisis brought demand down to almost zero. The area has enough empty housing stock and building plots to satisfy the foreseeable housing needs of the next decades. Instead, the central focus of the intervention is on mid- and long-term sustainability. Initially envisaged as a reaction to the threat of sprawling development, its evolution reflects a realization by (almost) all involved stakeholders that distant future pressures for development may be assuaged only by protecting the activities that take place in the area and increasing the social value of the Huerta landscape. In this sense, the introduction of economic and social goals and action strategies added to environmental protection measures. This also improved the Plan's coherence and the prospects for its successful implementation in the coming decades.

As shown in previous sections of this report, several weaknesses and setbacks hampered a rapid and smooth design and implementation of the plan: coordination shortages, poor incorporation of participatory outcomes, lack of full political commitment, etc. In addition, the performance of the most innovative instruments for land-use management in the Plan remains to be tested and formidable threats have been identified, such as new infrastructure (port enlargement, highways, railways, etc.). However, the overall balance that consulted stakeholders make of the Plan and our own analysis of the intervention indicate that it is a significant positive step towards land-use sustainability in the area.

In terms of territorial governance, some elements and consequences of the Huerta Plan represent a departure from the neoliberal doctrine that had characterized local urbanism projects in the study area in the preceding period. On one hand, the Plan may be seen as a rejection of planning practices geared towards the maximization of private economic profit, and the embracement of policies that prioritize the common good, and the identity of the landscape and its use by the broader community. In a similar vein, confronting the neoliberal preference for individual freedoms and the reign of unregulated markets, the Plan consolidates – with some concessions – a culture of public-private cooperation. This is particularly true of the relationship between regional authorities and the farming sector, which aims to strengthen the viability and profitability of the latter as a strategic tool to counter land development pressures.

The experience and lessons from the Huerta Plan case study could be useful in other contexts, although the interviewees identified very few other areas in Europe with similar characteristics that experience equivalent levels of development pressure. Nevertheless, the

promotion of the long-term viability of farming on productive soils alongside the public use and appreciation of the colligated landscape in order to divert urbanization towards more suitable areas could work in many other European peri-urban fringes.

4.5 Implications for sustainable urbanization and land use

This case study sought to illuminate the black box of development practices within a particular territory in Europe, focusing on a particular intervention which changed, or attempted to change, these practice to more sustainable ends. The primary source material was in-depth interviews with stakeholders directly involved in decision-making on spatial development, on crafting or applying the intervention, or both. Through their candid explanations, it was possible to provide a nuanced, and often critical, account of the origins, mechanisms and impacts of the intervention. As can be read above, the results show stakeholders in agreement on some issues and disagreeing on others.

The purpose of this final section is to give voice to the case study researchers by asking them to specifically reflect on the key questions posed to the project at its inception. The ideas and opinions expressed in this final section – printed in italics – are, therefore, solely those of the authors.

To what extent can the observed land-use changes in the case be considered sustainable?

Reverting the precedent trend, the Huerta area has not experienced significant land-use changes in the last decade, and therefore it could be considered sustainable. Nevertheless, the cause for this must be found in the general crisis and post-crisis context, and not as an effect of the intervention that was under discussion and not approved for most of the period.

To what extent did short-term thinking weigh up against concerns of long-term economic, ecological and social vitality?

While the initial scope of the Plan was a protective knee-jerk reaction against the environmental damage brought about by largely unregulated development, it evolved over time to become a long-term strategy that encompasses all dimensions of sustainability and is socio-ecological oriented

To what extent were trade-offs avoided between economic, ecological and social values (e.g. urban green spaces in densifying areas)?

Negative impacts of protective dispositions upheld in the Plan on the economic perspectives of some stakeholders were mitigated with compensatory measures such as the possibility of redeveloping brownfield sectors and intensifying agricultural activities.

Was there a tension between sustainability at different levels of scale (e.g. a locally sustainable development having unsustainable attributes at the regional level)?

Barely. The cessation of development in the Huerta may increase pressure elsewhere, but empty plots and suitable areas already exist in many municipalities to absorb an eventual spike in housing demand.

To what extent were financial, fiscal and economic mechanisms responsible?

The Huerta council has a budget of some 4 million euros/year, allocated by tax-payers through the general regional budget. These resources are used to finance public and public-private actions to support ecological restoration, economic diversification, the marketing of local produce and the public use of the Huerta landscape. These resources are an important pillar of the strategy. In addition, the Agrarian Development Plan includes measures to generate extra resources.

How sustainable are the measures themselves over time?

Two factors, one internal and the other external, may threaten the sustainability of the measures. First, austerity or an economic downturn and their impact on public budgets may compromise the allocation of resources. Second, global forces in the farming sector and markets may affect the viability of farming businesses, particularly the smaller and family-based ones. The Plan would not be able to be sustained under these unfavourable conditions.

Do they produce economic benefits?

They do, in the form of a strengthened and diversified rural economy. New links with the tourism sector, as designed in Valencia's Smart Specialisation Strategy, may further reinforce positive economic impacts.

To what extent do they enjoy popular support or consensus among stakeholders?

In general, the consulted stakeholders approve of the goals and actions of the Plan. The farming sector demands more dedicated support, whereas the property development representative calls for a better balance between private and public interests. The

majority of the society is scarcely interested and involved with the plan, but greater engagement with the area is starting to be observed among a growing number of citizens.

How can urban sprawl be contained and which instruments can be used to do that?

Urban sprawl on highly-productive croplands can be contained by boosting the farming economy that prospers on them. A Green Infrastructure blueprint defined from a socio-ecological perspective can also contribute to prevent sprawl and landscape fragmentation.

How can the impacts of land take/soil sealing be limited?

The Huerta Plan allows redevelopment of brownfield sectors and enclaves on one third or their total area only, the remaining two thirds must remain open for agriculture and/or Green Infrastructure.

How can green and open spaces in urban areas be maintained for the quality of life, despite the (laudable) effort to densify settlement areas?

In the case study, local councils value the provision of green areas as a measure to comply with set targets of 'green space per inhabitant' rates. Introducing and enforcing such standards can be an effective method to increase the opportunity costs of development for local councils and regional governments, thus diminishing the likelihood of transformation.

Evidence on the degree to which sustainable land-use is rewarding from an economic point of view, but also on possibilities for policy making to overcome the potential resistance of the private sector to sustainable land-use.

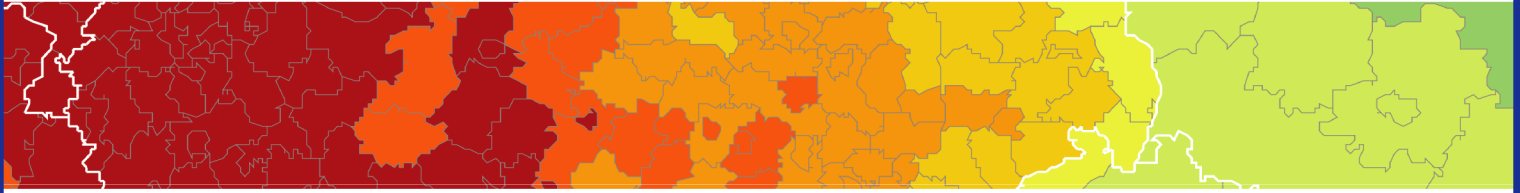
The relatively mild resistance of the private property development business sector to the Plan may be attributed to the recognition that the Huerta and its landscape have become more valued in recent times. This cultural change, partly induced by the Plan, is perceived as much more difficult to reverse than the Plan itself. Therefore, the sector had no alternative but to adapt to the new reality and make the most out of the opportunities it may offer, for instance, and as it has been observed, in terms of marketing to a more affluent clientele.

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