

Strategic urban planning in Spain: thematic trajectories and 2030 prospects

Planificación estratégica urbana en España:
trayectorias temáticas y prospectiva 2030

Planejamento estratégico urbano na Espanha:
trajetórias temáticas e perspectivas para 2030

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Abstract: Strategic urban planning in Spain has a trajectory of more than 30 years and has undergone remarkable changes in its aims and priorities, which reflects the country's socioeconomic, environmental and ideological changes. This longitudinal study analyzes this evolution since the first plans, in the late 20th century, to the most recent ones, with a 2030 horizon. More than 4,000 strategic goals classified into seven thematic fields were assessed through a systematized method, based on a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), namely: Territory; Urban Planning; Society; Economy, Knowledge and ICT; City Marketing, Tourism and Culture; Environmental Sustainability (and their respective subtopics). The methodology can be applied to other countries and regions, as it provides an analytical framework to approach future comparative studies. The study encompassed 84 strategic plans from Spanish cities, and it enabled comparing thematic structures across different city types and assessing how thematic trajectories and strategic priorities have varied depending on social, economic and political scenarios. According to the results, there was an evolution and it started from integrative territorial approaches, progressed through a more socially oriented focus, after the Great Recession, and reached a recent stage focused on urban sustainability and digitalization. Such a digitalization process was mostly influenced by both urban agendas and the European regulatory framework.

Keywords: strategic urban planning; urban strategies; cities; urban planning; qualitative content analysis.

Resumen: La planificación estratégica urbana en España, con más de 30 años de trayectoria, ha experimentado notables cambios en sus objetivos y prioridades, reflejo de las transformaciones socioeconómicas, ambientales e ideológicas del país. Este estudio longitudinal analiza esa evolución desde los primeros planes de finales del siglo XX hasta los más recientes, con horizonte 2030. De manera sistematizada y a través de un Análisis de Contenido Cualitativo (ACC), se han examinado más de 4.000 objetivos estratégicos clasificados en siete temáticas – Territorio; Urbanismo; Sociedad; Economía, Conocimiento y TIC; Citymarketing, Turismo y Cultura; y Sostenibilidad Ambiental – y sus respectivas subtemáticas. La metodología es replicable para otros países y regiones, ofreciendo un marco analítico para abordar futuros estudios comparativos. El estudio abarca 84 planes estratégicos de ciudades españolas, lo que permite comparar estructuras temáticas entre distintos tipos de ciudades y evaluar cómo han variado las trayectorias temáticas y prioridades estratégicas en función de los contextos sociales, económicos y políticos. Los resultados identifican una evolución desde enfoques integradores del territorio, pasando por una orientación más social tras la Gran Recesión, hasta una fase reciente centrada en la sostenibilidad y la digitalización urbana, influida esta última por las agendas urbanas y el marco normativo europeo.

Palabras clave: planificación estratégica urbana; estrategias urbanas; ciudades; planificación urbana; análisis de contenido cualitativo.

Resumo: O planejamento estratégico urbano na Espanha já tem mais de 30 anos de trajetória e vem experimentado mudanças notáveis em seus objetivos e em suas prioridades, fato que reflete as transformações socioeconômicas, ambientais e ideológicas do país. O presente estudo longitudinal é uma análise dessa evolução, desde os primeiros planos do final do século XX, até os mais recentes, tendo em vista o horizonte de 2030. Foram examinados mais de 4.000 objetivos estratégicos, classificados em sete temáticas: Território; Urbanismo; Sociedade; Economia, Conhecimento e TIC; Citymarketing, Turismo e Cultura; Sustentabilidade Ambiental (e seus respectivos sub-tópicos), de forma sistematizada, por meio de Análise de Conteúdo Qualitativo (ACQ). A metodologia é replicável para outros países e regiões, além de oferecer um marco analítico para abordar futuros estudos comparativos. O estudo abrangeu 84 planos estratégicos de cidades espanholas, o que permitiu comparar estruturas temáticas entre diferentes tipos de cidades e avaliar como as trajetórias temáticas e as prioridades estratégicas variaram, em função dos contextos sociais, econômicos e políticos. Os resultados identificaram uma evolução desde enfoques integradores do território, passando por uma orientação mais social, após a Grande Recessão, até uma fase recente, centrada na sustentabilidade e na digitalização urbana, as quais foram influenciadas pelas agendas urbanas e pelo marco normativo europeu.

Palavras-chave: planejamento estratégico urbano; estratégias urbanas; cidades; planejamento urbano; análise de conteúdo qualitativo.

1. Introduction

Strategic Urban Planning (SUP) started being effectively implemented in the 1980s and 1990s, and it was a turning point in urban development management. Pioneering cities like San Francisco and Barcelona developed long-term strategic plans that became benchmarks for many other cities interested in designing shared urban futures and in adopting business management approaches aimed at encouraging growth and guiding urban changes. The aim of such forward-looking perspective, or urban *Imagining*, as described by Ratcliffe and Krawczyk (2011), lies in guiding current urban actions toward more sustainable and desirable scenarios.

Noteworthy plans among the first urban strategies include those of Barcelona, Bilbao, Málaga, Seville, Valencia, San Sebastián, Zaragoza and Lisbon, in the Iberian Peninsula; of Bogotá, Medellín, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, Montevideo and Rosario, in Latin America (Fernández Güell, 2006; Merinero Rodríguez, 2010); of Genoa and Turin, in Italy; and of leading European capitals such as Paris, Amsterdam and Berlin (Merinero Rodríguez, 2010). These initiatives are paradigmatic, given their ability to change cities' economic and social reality through strategic urban planning processes (Steinberg, 2005; Pascual Esteve & Tarragona Gorgorio, 2009) capable of ensuring successful trajectories.

Strategic models have coexisted with regulatory urban planning instruments, and it led to academic debates on conceptual and methodological differences (Albrechts, 2010; Pascual Esteve, 2001; Lindgren & Bandhold, 2003; Folch, 2004; Farinós, 2005; Steinberg, 2005; Fernández Güell, 2006; Watson, 2009; Schwedler, 2011; González Medina, 2012). Although they have different origins and objectives, the literature identifies convergence and complementary features in them (Romero Aloy & Vidal Climent, 2018). According to this framework, the strategic plan, which is indicative, com-

prehensive and based on participatory governance and socio-territorial innovation, is seen as a core axis for a consensual view of social, economic and environmental needs. Normative planning, on the other hand, territorializes this view (Folch, 2004) through concrete interventions in urban spaces.

The relevance of strategic and comprehensive approaches lies on their aim at urban planning, which has been supported by international frameworks, such as the New Urban Agenda, the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the European Union's Cohesion Policy, and they have promoted Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (ISUDS). These instruments and the new urban agendas are closely related to the most recent SUP instruments (González Medina, 2023) as they address urban challenges like climate change, urban economy changes, social inclusion and demographic aging.

The renewed national and international interest in the role of the strategic approach in planning, and the proliferation of these instruments, justify the need for in-depth thematic analyses of their priorities and orientations. Accordingly, the scientific literature provides some previous studies in this field, but most of them have focused on partial approaches due to their geographical scope (Ruano, 2015; Espino Hidalgo & Navas Carrillo, 2018; Hersperger et al., 2019; Vegas Sandoval et al., 2024) or for addressing specific sectoral topics (Ataman & Tuncer, 2022; Sharifi, 2022; La Haye et al., 2024). The study by Precedo Ledo et al. (2010) stands out among other remarkable references given its thematic and temporal analysis of 37 cities, including 16 Spanish ones. However, from a comprehensive and longitudinal perspective, there is no thematic and systematic study focused on analyzing more than three SUP decades in Spain.

The Analysis of urban strategic plans' thematic content is a key tool to better understand the main components of highly context-dependent urban strategic plans (Hersperger et al., 2019), as well as the problems and solutions in place for their future changes, in a structured way (Merinero Rodríguez, 2010). Thus, the present article provides an evolutionary analysis of SUP in Spain by identifying their strategic principles and priorities, thematic structures, evolutionary trajectories, emerging trends and common urban challenges, from their origins to the present day.

2. Methodology

This research conducts a longitudinal and thematic analysis of Spanish urban strategic plans approved from the 1990s, in the 20th century, to this day. The methodological procedure followed four stages (Figure 1).

F1. Data Collection and Prioritization: The sample comprised 217 strategic instruments from Spanish cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants that

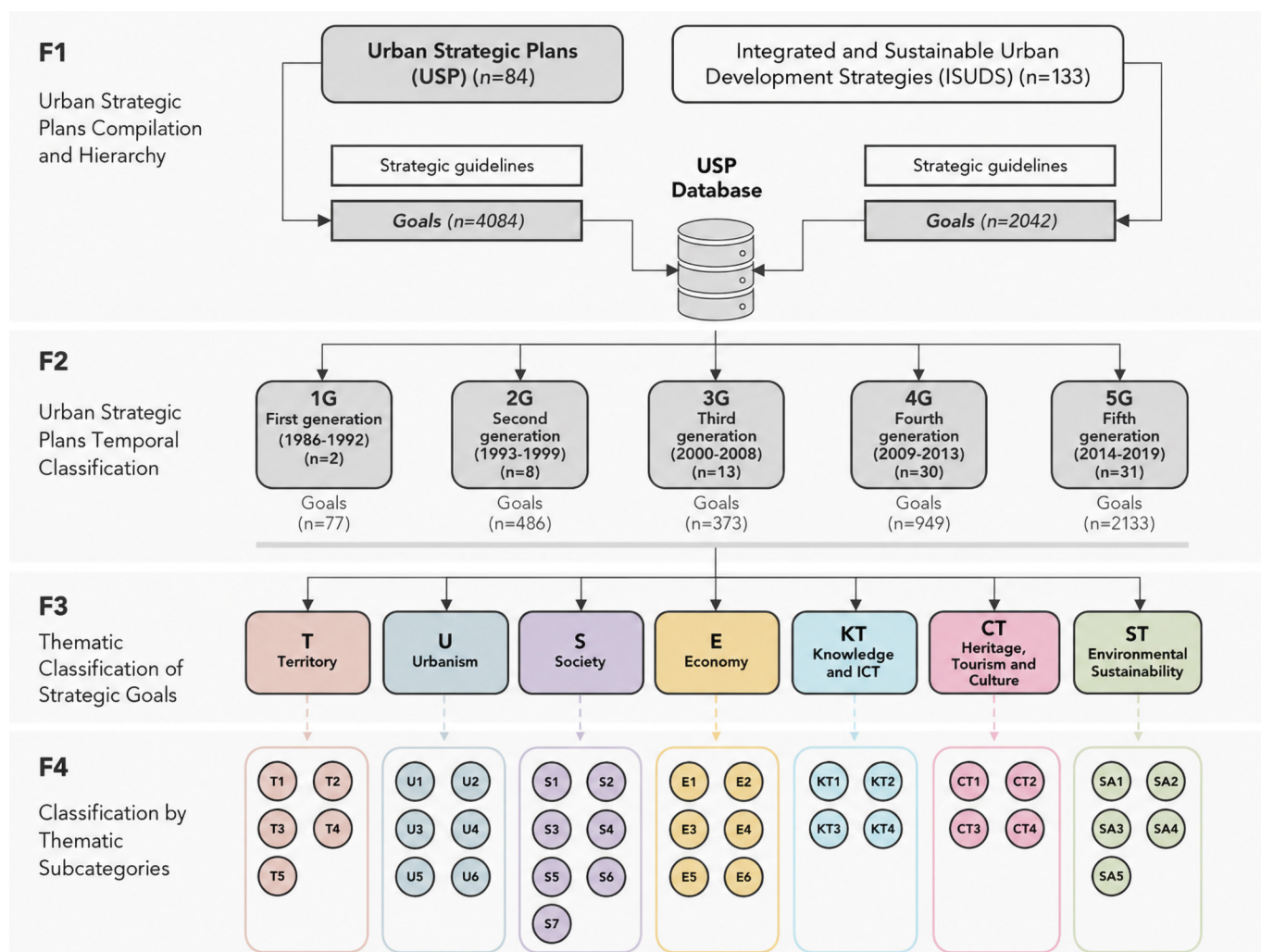
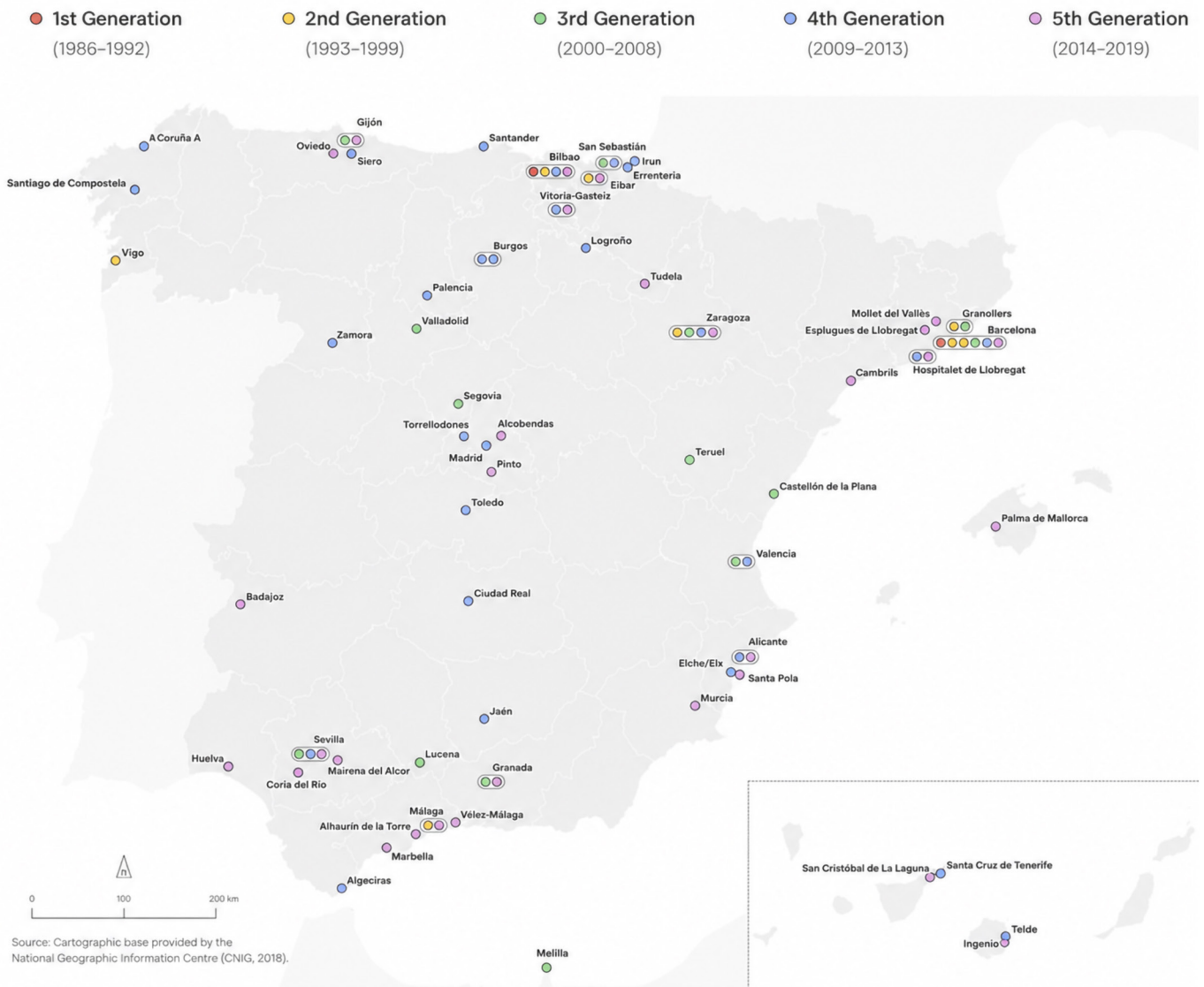


Figure 1
Temporal and thematic analysis
of SUP's methodological stages.

have their data available for open access: 84 urban strategic plans (the core target of the study) and 133 Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (ISUDS). These ISUDS were adopted as contextual reference to identify thematic alignment between the plans and the European urban policy, as well as to anticipate 2030 trends. A database of information about plans' temporal, geographical and thematic features was designed for systematization purpose. The thematic content was standardized based on SUP's common hierarchy (strategic lines and goals). It was done by adopting strategic goals as analysis unit given their appropriate narrative-detailing level and comparative ability.

F2. Time classification: Plans were grouped based on their time frame and it allowed the evolutionary reading of more than three SUP decades in Spain. Therefore, the specialized literature acknowledges two major generations of plans (Pascual Esteve, 2001; Fernández Güell, 2006; Albrechts, 2010; Farinós, 2010; González Medina, 2012): the first one has a more business-oriented approach, and the second, shows integrative and relational orientation. The present study broadened this classification to five generations linked to the country's main socioeconomic periods (Figure 2):



- First generation (1986–1992): entry into EEC and major 1992 events.
- Second generation (1993–1999): economic crisis and its subsequent recovery.
- Third generation (2000–2008): economic expansion and the real estate bubble.
- Fourth generation (2009–2013): Great Recession and its subsequent financial crisis.
- Fifth generation (2014–2019): economic recovery and the 2030 Agenda.

Figure 2

SUP instrument generations distribution in Spain.

Source: Urban Strategic Plans in Spain published from 1986 to 2020.

F3. Strategic goals general thematic classification: Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) methodology was applied to address the strategic plans' thematic analysis. This technique is widely used in social sciences to identify elements found in written documents (keywords, phrases, concepts, topics, among others), in a straight forward, systematic and quantifiable way. This protocol allows classifying content units based on standardized variables, codes or thematic categories.

In total, 4,018 strategic goals were coded and split across seven thematic categories, namely: Territory (T), Urban Planning (U), Society (S), Economy (E), Knowledge and ICT (KT), City Marketing, Tourism and Culture (CT), and Environmental Sustainability (ES). Furthermore, each thematic category was coded by an identifying letter and a specific color in order to optimize the statistical analysis and the results' graphical visualization (graphs, comparative tables, among others).

F4. Reclassification by thematic subcategories: A more specific thematic reclassification was applied to allow a deeper dive into the QCA, as it allowed identifying differences and similarities between the proposed urban models, in a more accurate manner, as well as the complementarity connections or territorial competition between cities (Pascual Esteve, 2001). This more refined classification of benchmarking capacities and inter-city comparisons made the identification of disruptive innovation goals, or of those related to structural continuity, easier. It also allowed visualizing emerging trends by distinguishing hard goals (linked to physical capital) from the soft ones, which have qualitative or intangible nature (Boixader & Xalabarder, 2012). Absolute data were turned into relative values in order to ensure comparability by forming a thematic specialization matrix (Figure 3) seen as key to assess the strategic orientation of each city and to detect common or divergent patterns.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Evolutionary analysis based on generations of plans and on major themes

First generation (1986–1992): The first SUP in Spain was developed in Barcelona (1990). It introduced a new metropolitan planning culture based on institutional leadership, social participation and international vision as part of preparations for the 1992 Olympic Games.

This plan helped consolidating the so-called “Barcelona Model”, which was later acknowledged as international benchmark given its ability to combine strategic planning, public management efficiency and urban renewal processes (Monclús Fraga, 2003). In parallel, Bilbao approved its plan in 1991 and it focused on urban revitalization after the industrial crisis (Font, 2002).

Despite their business focus, which included large-scale projects and city branding strategies, both plans reflected a metropolitan vision heading toward economic recovery and the completion of major transport and communication infrastructures. This desire was part of a new window of opportunities stemming from Spain's entry into EEC.

However, these early plans embodied references to environmental sus-

G	PLAN	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	U1	U2	U3	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	U19	U20	U21	U22	U23	U24	U25	U26	U27	U28	U29	U30	U31	U32	U33	U34	U35	U36	U37	U38	U39	U40	U41	U42	U43	U44	U45	U46	U47	U48	U49	U50	U51	U52	U53	U54	U55	U56	U57	U58	U59	U60	U61	U62	U63	U64	U65	U66	U67	U68	U69	U70	U71	U72	U73	U74	U75	U76	U77	U78	U79	U80	U81	U82	U83	U84	U85	U86	U87	U88	U89	U90	U91	U92	U93	U94	U95	U96	U97	U98	U99	U100																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																					
10	Barcelona	5.9	7.8	9.8	11.8	13.8	15.8	17.8	19.8	21.8	23.8	25.8	27.8	29.8	31.8	33.8	35.8	37.8	39.8	41.8	43.8	45.8	47.8	49.8	51.8	53.8	55.8	57.8	59.8	61.8	63.8	65.8	67.8	69.8	71.8	73.8	75.8	77.8	79.8	81.8	83.8	85.8	87.8	89.8	91.8	93.8	95.8	97.8	99.8	101.8	103.8	105.8	107.8	109.8	111.8	113.8	115.8	117.8	119.8	121.8	123.8	125.8	127.8	129.8	131.8	133.8	135.8	137.8	139.8	141.8	143.8	145.8	147.8	149.8	151.8	153.8	155.8	157.8	159.8	161.8	163.8	165.8	167.8	169.8	171.8	173.8	175.8	177.8	179.8	181.8	183.8	185.8	187.8	189.8	191.8	193.8	195.8	197.8	199.8	201.8	203.8	205.8	207.8	209.8	211.8	213.8	215.8	217.8	219.8	221.8	223.8	225.8	227.8	229.8	231.8	233.8	235.8	237.8	239.8	241.8	243.8	245.8	247.8	249.8	251.8	253.8	255.8	257.8	259.8	261.8	263.8	265.8	267.8	269.8	271.8	273.8	275.8	277.8	279.8	281.8	283.8	285.8	287.8	289.8	291.8	293.8	295.8	297.8	299.8	301.8	303.8	305.8	307.8	309.8	311.8	313.8	315.8	317.8	319.8	321.8	323.8	325.8	327.8	329.8	331.8	333.8	335.8	337.8	339.8	341.8	343.8	345.8	347.8	349.8	351.8	353.8	355.8	357.8	359.8	361.8	363.8	365.8	367.8	369.8	371.8	373.8	375.8	377.8	379.8	381.8	383.8	385.8	387.8	389.8	391.8	393.8	395.8	397.8	399.8	401.8	403.8	405.8	407.8	409.8	411.8	413.8	415.8	417.8	419.8	421.8	423.8	425.8	427.8	429.8	431.8	433.8	435.8	437.8	439.8	441.8	443.8	445.8	447.8	449.8	451.8	453.8	455.8	457.8	459.8	461.8	463.8	465.8	467.8	469.8	471.8	473.8	475.8	477.8	479.8	481.8	483.8	485.8	487.8	489.8	491.8	493.8	495.8	497.8	499.8	501.8	503.8	505.8	507.8	509.8	511.8	513.8	515.8	517.8	519.8	521.8	523.8	525.8	527.8	529.8	531.8	533.8	535.8	537.8	539.8	541.8	543.8	545.8	547.8	549.8	551.8	553.8	555.8	557.8	559.8	561.8	563.8	565.8	567.8	569.8	571.8	573.8	575.8	577.8	579.8	581.8	583.8	585.8	587.8	589.8	591.8	593.8	595.8	597.8	599.8	601.8	603.8	605.8	607.8	609.8	611.8	613.8	615.8	617.8	619.8	621.8	623.8	625.8	627.8	629.8	631.8	633.8	635.8	637.8	639.8	641.8	643.8	645.8	647.8	649.8	651.8	653.8	655.8	657.8	659.8	661.8	663.8	665.8	667.8	669.8	671.8	673.8	675.8	677.8	679.8	681.8	683.8	685.8	687.8	689.8	691.8	693.8	695.8	697.8	699.8	701.8	703.8	705.8	707.8	709.8	711.8	713.8	715.8	717.8	719.8	721.8	723.8	725.8	727.8	729.8	731.8	733.8	735.8	737.8	739.8	741.8	743.8	745.8	747.8	749.8	751.8	753.8	755.8	757.8	759.8	761.8	763.8	765.8	767.8	769.8	771.8	773.8	775.8	777.8	779.8	781.8	783.8	785.8	787.8	789.8	791.8	793.8	795.8	797.8	799.8	801.8	803.8	805.8	807.8	809.8	811.8	813.8	815.8	817.8	819.8	821.8	823.8	825.8	827.8	829.8	831.8	833.8	835.8	837.8	839.8	841.8	843.8	845.8	847.8	849.8	851.8	853.8	855.8	857.8	859.8	861.8	863.8	865.8	867.8	869.8	871.8	873.8	875.8	877.8	879.8	881.8	883.8	885.8	887.8	889.8	891.8	893.8	895.8	897.8	899.8	901.8	903.8	905.8	907.8	909.8	911.8	913.8	915.8	917.8	919.8	921.8	923.8	925.8	927.8	929.8	931.8	933.8	935.8	937.8	939.8	941.8	943.8	945.8	947.8	949.8	951.8	953.8	955.8	957.8	959.8	961.8	963.8	965.8	967.8	969.8	971.8	973.8	975.8	977.8	979.8	981.8	983.8	985.8	987.8	989.8	991.8	993.8	995.8	997.8	999.8	1001.8	1003.8	1005.8	1007.8	1009.8	1011.8	1013.8	1015.8	1017.8	1019.8	1021.8	1023.8	1025.8	1027.8	1029.8	1031.8	1033.8	1035.8	1037.8	1039.8	1041.8	1043.8	1045.8	1047.8	1049.8	1051.8	1053.8	1055.8	1057.8	1059.8	1061.8	1063.8	1065.8	1067.8	1069.8	1071.8	1073.8	1075.8	1077.8	1079.8	1081.8	1083.8	1085.8	1087.8	1089.8	1091.8	1093.8	1095.8	1097.8	1099.8	1101.8	1103.8	1105.8	1107.8	1109.8	1111.8	1113.8	1115.8	1117.8	1119.8	1121.8	1123.8	1125.8	1127.8	1129.8	1131.8	1133.8	1135.8	1137.8	1139.8	1141.8	1143.8	1145.8	1147.8	1149.8	1151.8	1153.8	1155.8	1157.8	1159.8	1161.8	1163.8	1165.8	1167.8	1169.8	1171.8	1173.8	1175.8	1177.8	1179.8	1181.8	1183.8	1185.8	1187.8	1189.8	1191.8	1193.8	1195.8	1197.8	1199.8	1201.8	1203.8	1205.8	1207.8	1209.8	1211.8	1213.8	1215.8	1217.8	1219.8	1221.8	1223.8	1225.8	1227.8	1229.8	1231.8	1233.8	1235.8	1237.8	1239.8	1241.8	1243.8	1245.8	1247.8	1249.8	1251.8	1253.8	1255.8	1257.8	1259.8	1261.8	1263.8	1265.8	1267.8	1269.8	1271.8	1273.8	1275.8	1277.8	1279.8	1281.8	1283.8	1285.8	1287.8	1289.8	1291.8	1293.8	1295.8	1297.8	1299.8	1301.8	1303.8	1305.8	1307.8	1309.8	1311.8	1313.8	1315.8	1317.8	1319.8	1321.8	1323.8	1325.8	1327.8	1329.8	1331.8	1333.8	1335.8	1337.8	1339.8	1341.8	1343.8	1345.8	1347.8	1349.8	1351.8	1353.8	1355.8	1357.8	1359.8	1361.8	1363.8	1365.8	1367.8	1369.8	1371.8	1373.8	1375.8	1377.8	1379.8	1381.8	1383.8	1385.8	1387.8	1389.8	1391.8	1393.8	1395.8	1397.8	1399.8	1401.8	1403.8	1405.8	1407.8	1409.8	1411.8	1413.8	1415.8	1417.8	1419.8	1421.8	1423.8	1425.8	1427.8	1429.8	1431.8	1433.8	1435.8	1437.8	1439.8	1441.8	1443.8	1445.8	1447.8	1449.8	1451.8	1453.8	1455.8	1457.8	1459.8	1461.8	1463.8	1465.8	1467.8	1469.8	1471.8	1473.8	1475.8	1477.8	1479.8	1481.8	1483.8	1485.8	1487.8	1489.8	1491.8	1493.8	1495.8	1497.8	1499.8	1501.8	1503.8	1505.8	1507.8	1509.8	1511.8	1513.8	1515.8	1517.8	1519.8	1521.8	1523.8	1525.8	1527.8	1529.8	1531.8	1533.8	1535.8	1537.8	1539.8	1541.8	1543.8	1545.8	1547.8	1549.8	1551.8	1553.8	1555.8	1557.8	1559.8	1561.8	1563.8	1565.8	1567.8	1569.8	1571.8	1573.8	1575.8	1577.8	1579.8	1581.8	1583.8	1585.8	1587.8	1589.8	1591.8	1593.8	1595.8	1597.8	1599.8	1601.8	1603.8	1605.8	1607.8	1609.8	1611.8	1613.8	1615.8	1617.8	1619.8	1621.8	1623.8	1625.8	1627.8	1629.8	1631.8	1633.8	1635.8	1637.8	1639.8	1641.8	1643.8	1645.8	1647.8	1649.8	1651.8	1653.8	1655.8	1657.8	1659.8	1661.8	1663.8	1665.8	1667.8	1669.8	1671.8	1673.8	1675.8	1677.8	1679.8	1681.8	1683.8	1685.8	1687.8	1689.8	1691.8	1693.8	1695.8	1697.8	1699.8	1701.8	1703.8	1705.8	1707.8	1709.8	1711.8	1713.8	1715.8	1717.8	1719.8	1721.8	1723.8	1725.8	1727.8	1729.8	1731.8	1733.8	1735.8	1737.8	1739.8	1741.8	1743.8	1745.8	1747.8	1749.8	1751.8	1753.8	1755.8	1757.8	1759.8	1761.8	1763.8	1765.8	1767.8	1769.8	1771.8	1773.8	1775.8	1777.8	1779.8	1781.8	1783.8	1785.8	1787.8	1789.8	1791.8	1793.8	1795.8	1797.8	1799.8	1801.8	1803.8	1805.8	1807.8	1809.8	1811.8	1813.8	1815.8	1817.8	1819.8	1821.8	1823.8	1825.8	1827.8	1829.8	1831.8	1833.8	1835.8	1837.8	1839.8	1841.8	1843.8	1845.8	1847.8	1849.8	1851.8	1853.8	1855.8	1857.8	1859.8	1861.8	1863.8	1865.8	1867.8	1869.8	1871.8	1873.8	1875.8	1877.8	1879.8	1881.8	1883.8	1885.8	1887.8	1889.8	1891.8	1893.8	1895.8	1897.8	1899.8	1901.8	1903.8	1905.8	1907.8	1909.8	1911.8	1913.8	1915.8	1917.8	1919.8	1921.8	1923.8	1925.8	1927.8	1929.8	1931.8	1933.8	1935.8	1937.8	1939.8	1941.8	1943.8	1945.8	1947.8	1949.8	1951.8	1953.8	1955.8	1957.8	1959.8	1961.8	1963.8	1965.8	1967.8	1969.8	1971.8	1973.8	1975.8	1977.8	1979.8	1981.8	1983.8	1985.8	1987.8	1989.8	1991.8	1993.8	1995.8	1997.8	1999.8	2001.8	2003.8	2005.8	2007.8	2009.8	2011.8	2013.8	2015.8	2017.8	2019.8	2021.8	2023.8	2025.8	2027.8	2029.8	2031.8	2033.8	2035.8	2037.8	2039.8	2041.8	2043.8	2045.8	2047.8	2049.8	2051.8	2053.8	2055.8	2057.8	2059.8	2061.8	2063.8	2065.8	2067.8	2069.8	2071.8	2073.8	2075.8	2077.8	2079.8	2081.8	2083.8	2085.8	2087.8	2089.8	2091.8	2093.8	2095.8	2097.8	2099.8	2101.8	2103.8	2105.8	2107.8	2109.8	2111.8	2113.8	2115.8	2117.8	2119.8	2121.8	2123.8	2125.8	2127.8	2129.8	2131.8	2133.8	2135.8	2137.8	2139.8	2141.8	2143.8	2145.8	2147.8	2149.8	2151.8	2153.8	2155.8	2157.8	2159.8	2161.8	2163.8	2165.8	2167.8	2169.8	2171.8	2173.8	2175.8	2177.8	2179.8

tainability in their early stages in order to be consistent with global approaches, such as those of the 1992 Rio Summit.

Second generation (1993–1999): At this stage, the plans adopted a more integrated and cross-sectional approach (Healey, 2006). However, despite the continuous ‘metropolitanization’ processes (Nel·lo, 2022), they mainly focused on local scales and paid less attention to the metropolitan ones (Cruz Gallach, 2008).

Improvements in communication infrastructures (high-speed rail, commuter rail networks, the motorway and dual carriageway network consolidation) boosted cities’ territorial expansion. At the same time, SUP evolved toward a significant inclusion of social, economic and environmental dimensions (Watson, 2009) and emerged as consolidated instrument for urban coordination and governance.

The economic crisis context led to the greatest commitment to economic development goals in the history of the Spanish SUP. These goals coexisted with social targets that became the fundamental axis of Spanish strategies at a time of growing demand for well-being, equality and high-quality public services. Thus, SUP did not abandon the competitive logic, but systematically embodied redistributive demands by anticipating the social shift was about to be consolidated after 2008.

Third generation (2000–2008): The explicit centrality of economic goals decreased during a time of economic growth and urban expansion due to the inertia of the expansionary cycle. This time was featured by large-scale urban projects, urban branding positioning and land liberation. Furthermore, it highlighted the capitalization of substantial land-value increase caused by urban redevelopment, infrastructural growth, increased intra- and inter-urban mobility, and land speculation, which often disregard basic territorial planning criteria (Calvo et al., 2011; Alonso et al., 2013).

This exponential growth was uneven and opened room for new exclusion forms and social vulnerability. Thus, in reaction to developmental policies focused on physical planning, SUP reinforced its social dimension by prioritizing cohesion, quality of life and public services (Pascual Esteve & Tarragona Gorgorio, 2009). This process took place against the backdrop of efforts aimed at advancing the multi-level governance model. It held consolidated public-private partnerships (Farinós, 2010) and institutionalized strategic planning as alternative to physical planning and space for symbolic compensation for structural imbalances observed in the dominant urban model.

Simultaneously, Spain consolidated its position as leading tourist destination. Many cities embodied goals aimed at cultural and tourism revitalization and boosted “creative cities” (Herrera-Medina et al., 2013) by linking urban development to innovation and the knowledge economy.

Fourth generation (2009–2013): The Great Recession was an unprecedented turning point. The socioeconomic model collapse led to mass un-

employment, social exclusion, urban marginalization, besides weakening the Welfare State (Pueyo & Hernández, 2013). Although the normative planning did not break with the neoliberal paradigm (Roy, 2015), SUP adopted a more adaptive approach to comply with the 2020 Europe Strategy by betting on non-expansive, sustainable and equitable urban models capable of achieving more compact, livable, creative, multicultural and fair cities (Calvo et al., 2011).

Accordingly, social inclusion held a mainstream position in response to emerging issues such as aging, precarious employment and public services' outsourcing. Thus, SUP solidified itself as instrument for social and territorial reconstruction given its adaptive capacity and flexibility to strategically reorient these instruments during systemic crises.

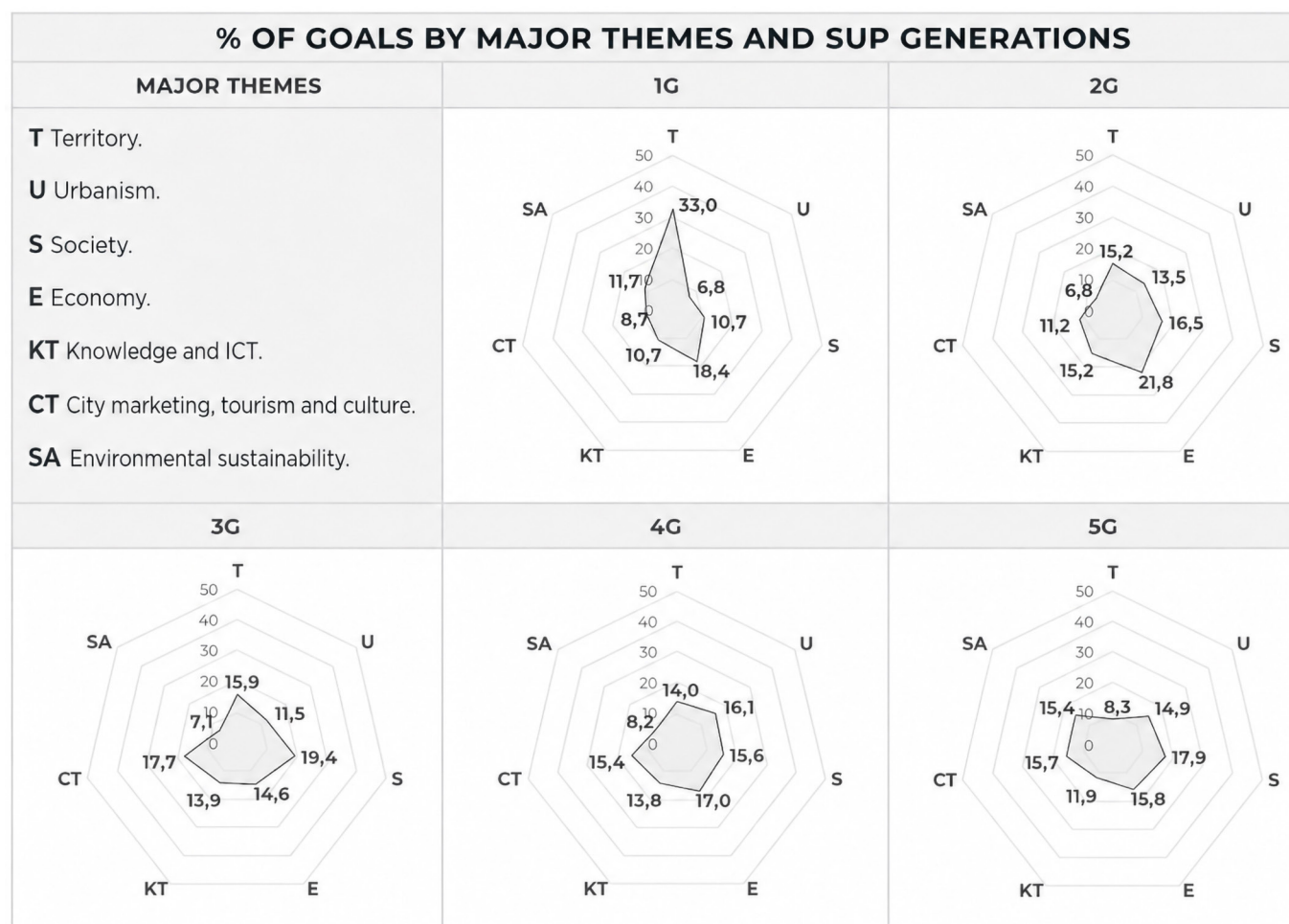
Fifth generation (2014–2019): SUP was reoriented by the 2030 Agenda, by European urban agendas and economic recovery. At that time, the demand for developing Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (ISUDS), as the very way to access ERDF funds (2014–2020), encouraged the proliferation of such strategic instruments. These strategies were aligned with SUP in four key axes: environmental sustainability, digitalization, rehabilitation and social inclusion.

The fact of being in line with European frameworks reinforced the integrality of these strategies (Figure 4) by embodying cross-sectional economic,

Figure 4

Evolutionary analysis based on SUP generations and major themes.

Source: Urban Strategic Plans in Spain published from 1986 to 2020.



climate, environmental, demographic and social dimensions (Rodríguez-Domenech & Cañizares Ruiz, 2023). Social goals reinforced their relevance, at this stage. Initiatives linked to environmental sustainability doubled in relative importance, whereas digitalization emerged as new structuring element in the configuration of the city.

In interpretative terms, this generation disclosed a SUP Europeanization process whose thematic convergence did not exclusively respond to internal dynamics, but to financial incentives and supranational regulatory frameworks aimed at reconfiguring local priorities.

This process strengthened the comprehensive nature of substantive structures, but it also introduced the risk of homogenizing action priorities and triggering the progressive weakening of SUP's metropolitan vision, which was boosted by the expansion of strategic plans developed in small- and intermediate-sized cities.

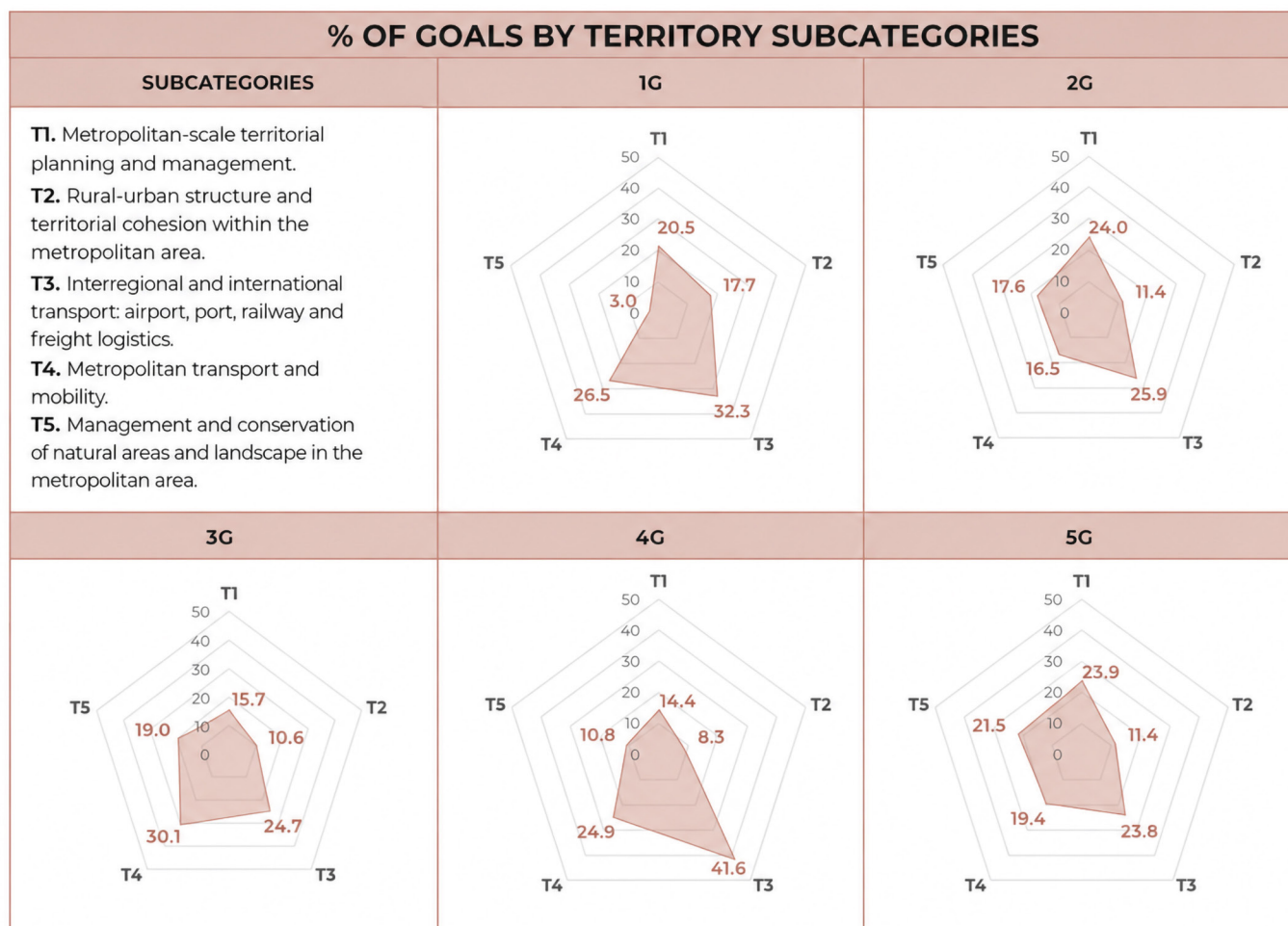
3.2. Territory

Territorial goals focused the need for finishing metropolitan transport networks in the first SUP generations, as well as for strengthening international connections with infrastructure like ports, airports and railways (Figure 5). It boosted the creation of logistics hubs intended to revitalize metropolitan economies.

Figure 5

Evolutionary analysis based on Territory subthemes.

Source: Urban Strategic Plans in Spain published from 1986 to 2020.



This approach disclosed an infrastructural priority framework and the concept of territory understood as primary physical support for urban competitiveness. Accordingly, the negative externalities deriving from such processes got little attention.

Such interests remained in the second generation by leveraging the geostrategic position of cities like Málaga (on the Mediterranean axis) or Zaragoza, as logistics hubs in the Iberian Peninsula hinterlands. The unstoppable globalization broadened urban areas of influence and intensified horizontal interactions between cities. This process demanded organizing actors' growing complexity in the metropolitan territory (Merinero Rodríguez, 2010), operating in broader environments and promoting multilevel governance mechanisms. SUP faced a growing mismatch between institutional boundaries and real socioeconomic dynamics.

The third generation introduced the concern with protecting the natural environment due to the pressure put over urban development. This approach gathered goals aimed at conserving open spaces and *peri*-urban landscapes, which ended up encouraging the creation of metropolitan green networks focused on non-motorized mobility and fostering the (re) valuing of the *peri*-urban territory agricultural character and functions.

The fourth generation, in its turn, was marked by the economic crisis and once more emphasized the strengthening of international connections as economic recovery strategy. Thus, the plans boosted the development of infrastructures designed to set cities as intermediate logistics and commercial connections in order to attract investments and population.

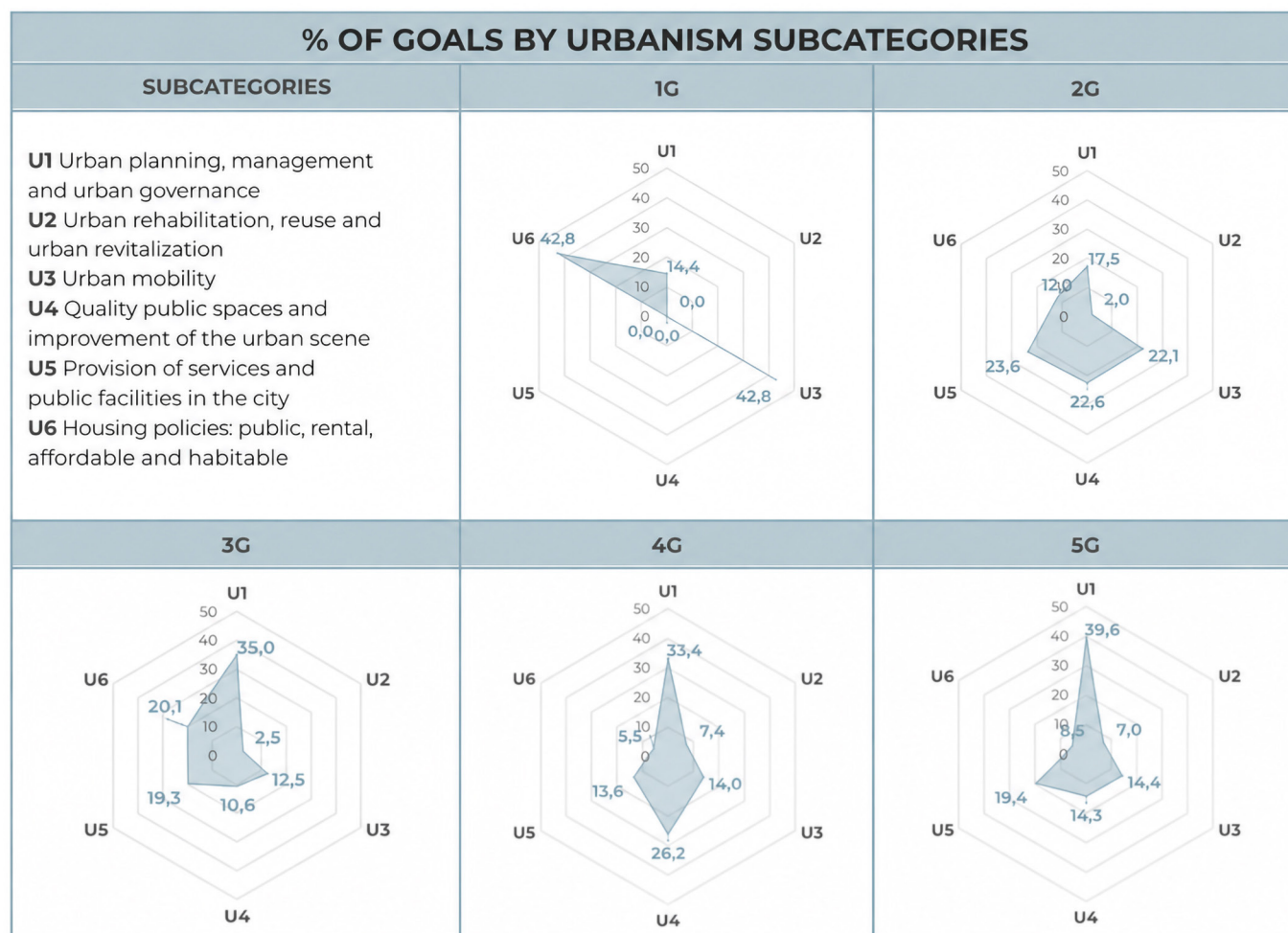
Finally, despite the general decline in the relevance of territorial goals, the fifth generation showed renewed appreciation for concepts like urban-rural cohesion, which comply with regional and national policies aimed at demographic challenge for territorial integration and supra-municipal governance. Thus, equity and demographic balance strategies broaden SUP's interpretive scope.

3.3. Urban planning

Urban planning goals played secondary role in the initial plans (Figure 6), which primarily focused on mobility and the need for housing in response to the fast growth of large cities like Barcelona. At this point, urban planning emerged as subordinate to the economic and territorial logic, more like functional support than as structuring urban-project axis.

These goals gained greater prominence in the second generation in an economic crisis scenario spurring the provision of public services and facilities. This process opened room for a more socially oriented urban planning, which was followed by both urban renewal interventions and the creation of new urban centralities.

This shift towards a more social and redistributive urban planning can be interpreted in light of the "planner's triangle" by Campbell (1996),



which places planning within the permanent tension among economic development (efficiency), territorial justice (equity) and environmental protection (ecology).

The plans drew inspiration from the Barcelona-Bilbao models, which were benchmarks in managing urban appeal, identity and external projection. Consequently, urban spaces ceased to be only conceived as infrastructural support to establish themselves as social cohesion instrument and symbolic construction of the city in order to boost sustainable development.

The uncontrolled expansion of urban peripheries shaped what Burriel (2008) called “the prodigious decade of Spanish urban planning” in the third generation, at the height of the real estate boom. This process put pressure over public services and sustainability, itself, when demographic growth was driven by immigration and imbalance in property ownership, resources and development. Therefore, in response to it, SUP recommended to strengthen coordination through regulatory planning and housing protection policies in cities under strain.

City councils abandoned the expansionist approach and adopted the consolidated city’s regeneration after the housing bubble bursting. The value of developable land plummeted (Farinós et al., 2015) and, as highlighted by Gaja (2015, p. 15), “once the vein of urbanization *ex novo* was exhausted,

Figure 6

Evolutionary analysis based on Urban Planning subthemes.

Source: Urban Strategic Plans in Spain published from 1986 to 2020.

focus shifted to the transformation of the existing city”. Accordingly, the fourth-generation SUP boosted the sustainable urban planning principles, namely: moderate density, mixed uses, proximity and social cohesion (Friedmann, 2011) by giving centrality to public spaces (Charmes, 2011) as coexistence and inclusion infrastructures.

These strategies programmatically met instruments such as URBAN and Urban Initiatives (UI) (Gregorio Hurtado, 2018), which encouraged the improvement of traditional and historical neighborhoods by integrating the social, physical and economic dimensions.

The fifth generation consolidated the integration of sustainability, governance, health and urban intelligence principles. Priority was given to revitalizing existing cities, improving the quality of public spaces and the social role of urban planning to ensure cohesion and equity under the influence of both the 2030 Urban Agenda and the EU guidelines, within a post-crisis scenario marked by the weakening of the Welfare State.

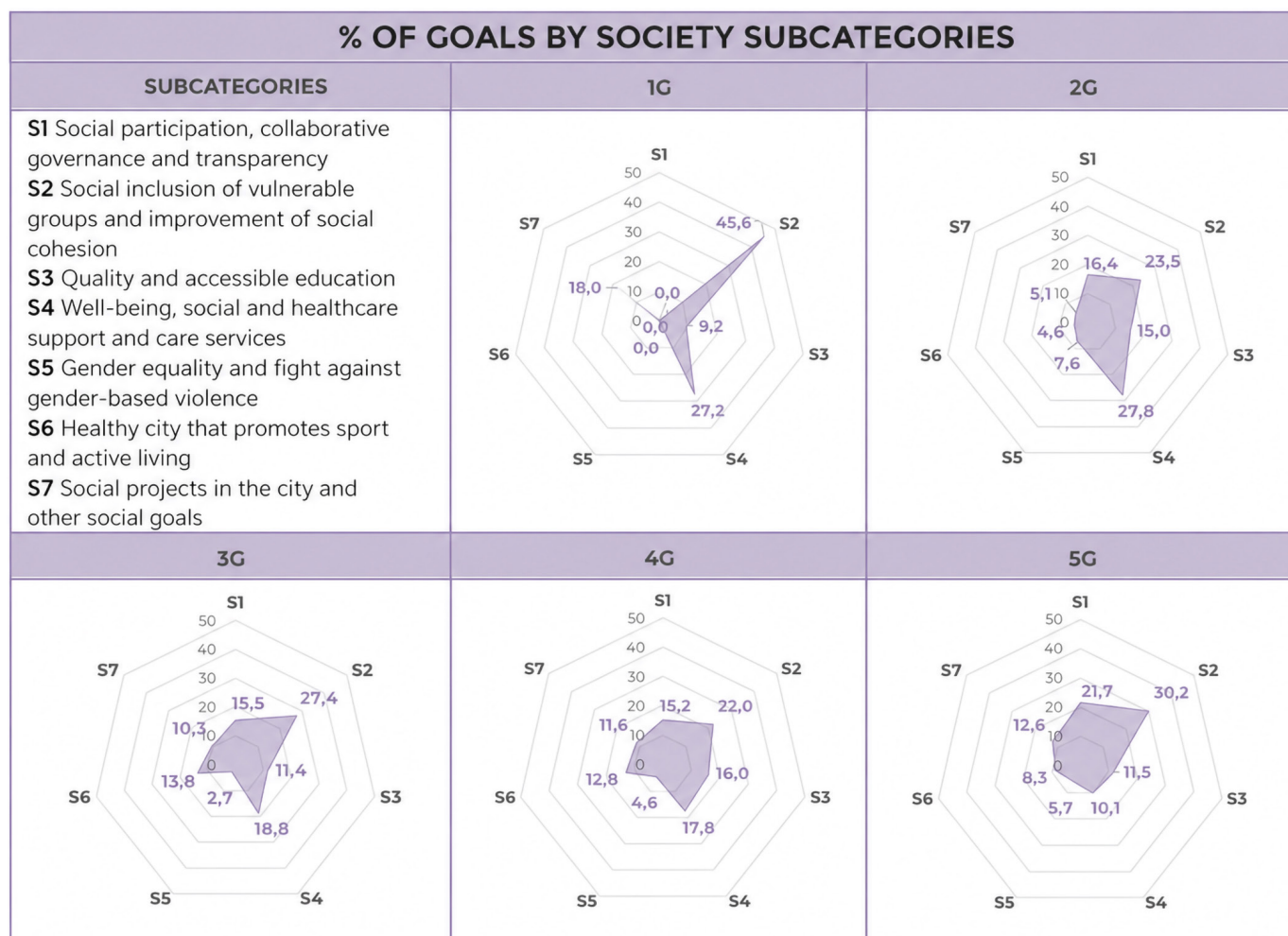
3.4. Society

SUP embodied goals aimed at reducing inequalities and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups since its very beginning (Figure 7). Barcelona’s

Figure 7

Evolutionary analysis based on Societies’ subthemes.

Source: Urban Strategic Plans in Spain published from 1986 to 2020.



case stands out given its integrate programs for disadvantaged neighborhoods, and reintegration and social assistance strategies.

These goals were intensified during the second generation in response to increased social diversity. Measures against the exclusion of immigrants, young people, the unemployed and low-income families were strengthened to promote social integration through public education reinforcement and the consolidation of goals linked to equal access to social and healthcare services, with emphasis on older adults and disabled individuals.

Simultaneously, participatory and transparent urban planning was encouraged and it strengthened local democracy (Pascual Esteve, 2001) and SUP's legitimacy (Mäntysalo et al., 2015) as key link between regulatory urban planning and social movement. Therefore, strategic planning emerged as interface between citizenship and institutions by broadening its political dimension to spheres beyond the mere elaboration of actions.

Social goals reached their highest developmental level over the third generation in response to inequalities stemming from the asymmetrical growth model. It triggered improvements to social and healthcare services and introduced the "healthy city" principles (Barton & Grant, 2013), which head toward physical and mental well-being.

This shift highlighted SUP's anticipatory nature, which formulated initiatives linked to emerging challenges associated with aging, the biophysical dimensions of the city and the growing pressure put on care systems.

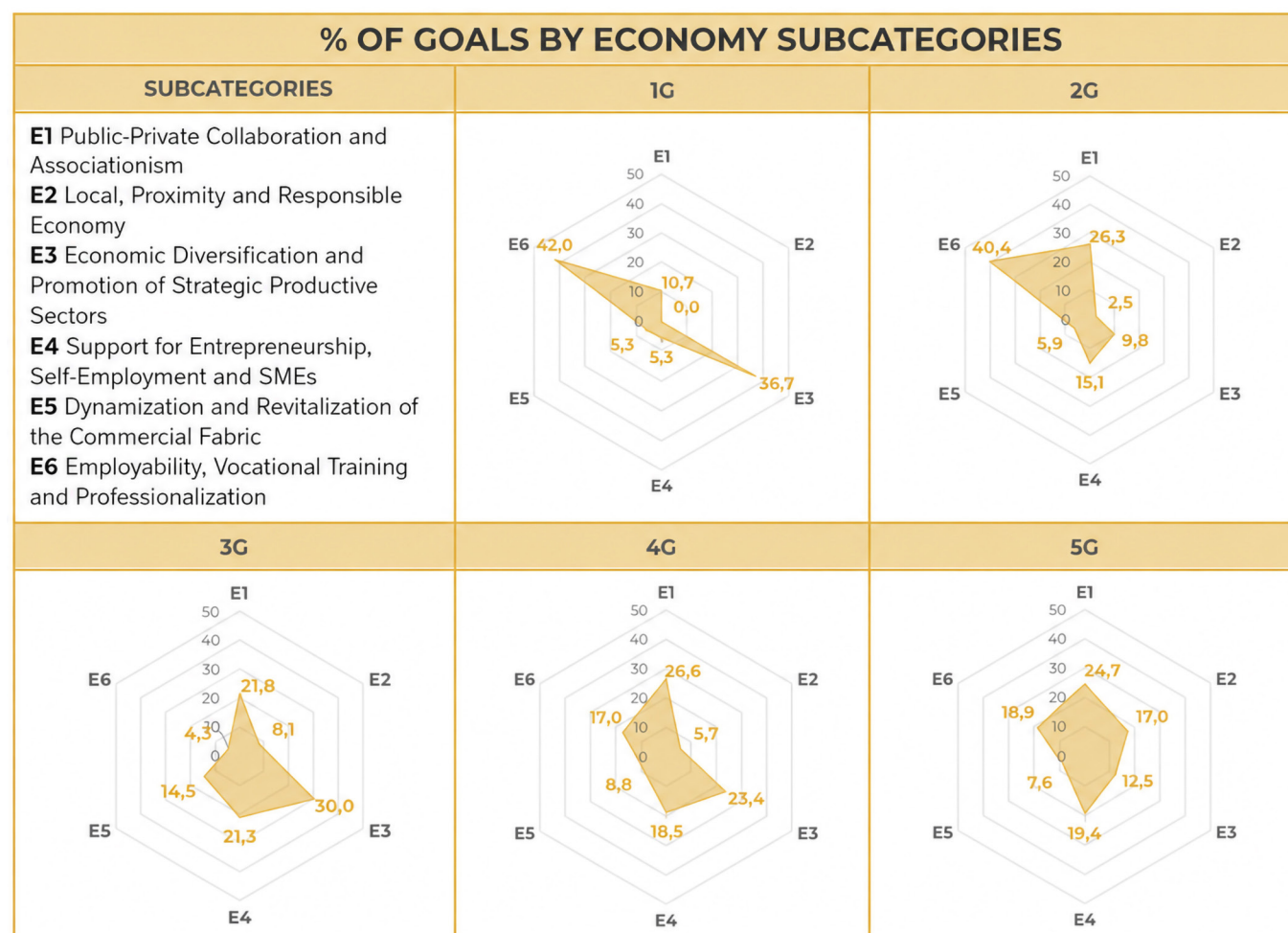
The fourth generation reinforced education as social cohesion axis at the economic crisis time. The public spending decrease impaired the institutional response capacity, and shifted care and assistance functions to both family networks and the third sector (Lorenzo Gilsanz, 2014). Such a dynamics highlighted the Welfare State weakness and underscored the need for strengthening support mechanisms for vulnerable groups.

SUP embodied a compensatory function in the face of the State withdrawal, which showed not only its adaptation ability but its structural limitations in fiscal restriction scenarios.

The fifth generation deepened the commitment to inclusion by embracing diversity as social and economic asset. The number of proposals aimed at adapting cities to an aging population increased and mechanisms for citizen participation, transparency and accountability were strengthened. However, this stage also revealed setbacks in socio-health goals in parallel to services' privatization within a neoliberal context (Van Dyk et al., 2024). This matter foreshadowed current challenges related to the Welfare Model's equity and sustainability.

3.5. Economy

The economic dimension has been a constant SUP axis as it adjusts itself to structural and cyclical contexts (Figure 8). The first Bilbao and Barcelona plans followed industrial restructuring and the transition to a service-based



economy, with emphasis on productive diversification and advanced services. This economic centrality shows that SUP was initially conceived as urban productive restructuring and competitive repositioning instrument.

This transition was consolidated in second-generation plans through public-private partnerships, the promotion of business networks and clusters, and through the creation of industrial parks designed to attract investments and to boost the local economy. Neoliberal-oriented approaches were consolidated through SUP (Olesen, 2014) because both generations of instruments were combined with compensatory mechanisms aimed at generating quality employment, facilitating young people and the unemployed integration into the workforce, and at adjusting the training system to the demands of a transforming productive sector.

The third generation took advantage of the economic expansion to promote entrepreneurship and the development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (PYMES). This stage met the emergence of innovation hubs and the transformation of mature sectors (industry, agri-food, among others) into advanced tertiary activities linked to ICT, R&D&I and the creative economy (Hall, 1996). This trend multiplied innovation spaces and helped modernizing the commercial fabric in line with a growing entrepreneurial and technological culture.

Figure 8

Evolutionary analysis based on Economics' subthemes.

Source: Urban Strategic Plans in Spain published from 1986 to 2020.

Due to the onset of the Great Recession, the fourth generation accomplished its goal to diversify a declining production model by promoting reindustrialization strategies, creating strategic clusters, and strengthening tourism and the creative economy (Méndez et al., 2012). These initiatives came up within a fiscal constraints context that ended up giving greater relevance to public-private cooperation.

The fifth generation presented clear convergence with both the 2030 Agenda and new urban agendas as it adopted a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient vision. Sectors linked to the local, green and circular economy, such as agri-food, renewable energy and responsible tourism, were prioritized. Likewise, the social and solidarity economy, and the corporate social responsibility were added to it as principles aimed at linking economic prosperity to collective well-being by integrating the productive, environmental and social dimensions.

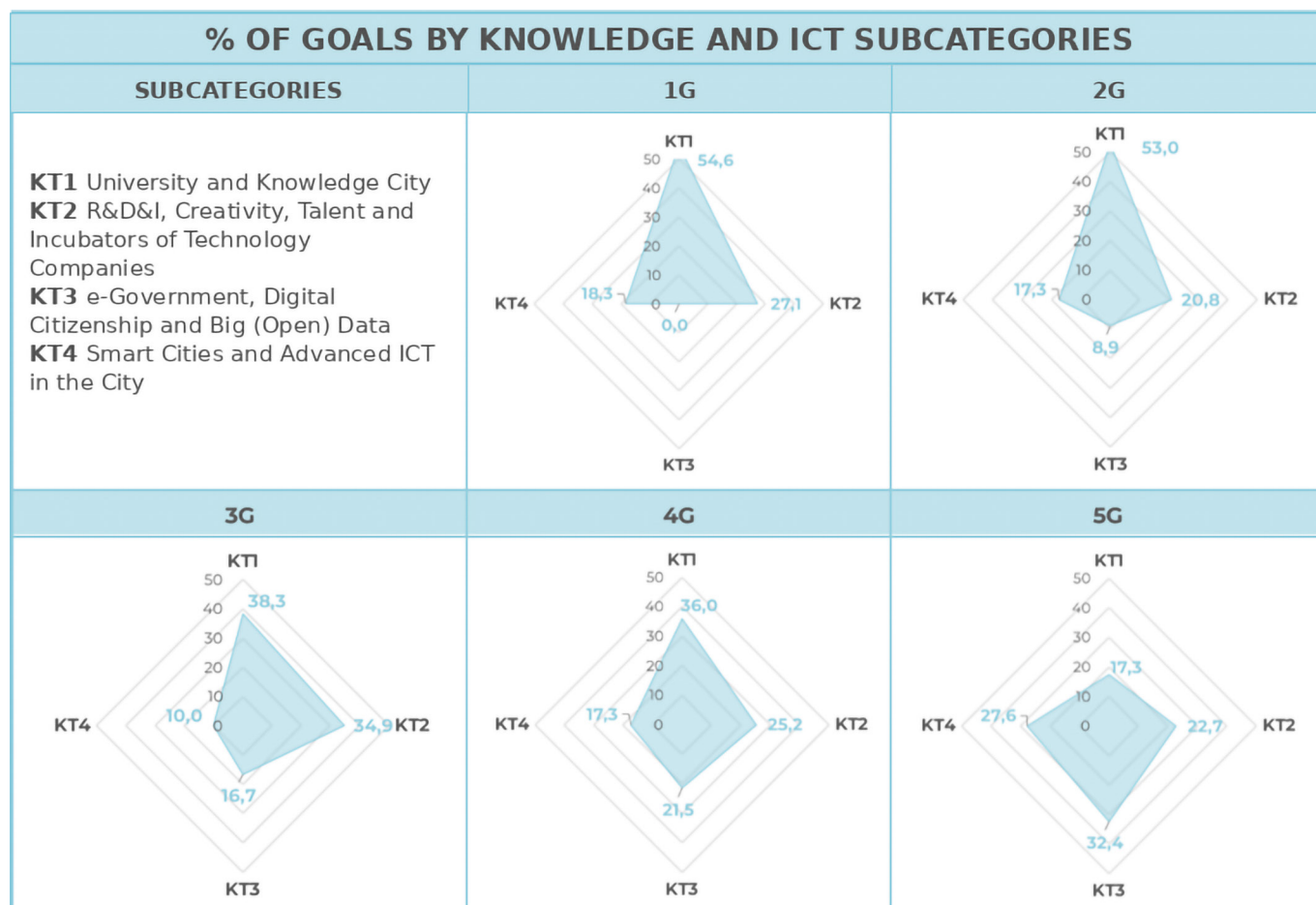
3.6. Knowledge and ICT

Since its first formulation, SUP embodied goals aimed at consolidating cities as knowledge hubs (Figure 9). It acknowledged science, education, innovation and technology as development drivers. Bilbao sought to strengthen the link among university, territory and citizens in its first generation, while Barcelona was taking its first steps toward digital connectivity.

Figure 9

Evolutionary analysis of Knowledge and ICT subthemes.

Source: Urban Strategic Plans in Spain published from 1986 to 2020.



These strategies were broadened in the second generation, which is featured by stronger push for research, technological development and talent attraction. Accordingly, Bilbao and Barcelona achieved knowledge-intensive economies through initiatives like the 22@ project, which integrated urban planning, business innovation and university development.

This process consolidated the city model of information and knowledge (Castells, 1992), which is substantiated by technology parks and science centers, as well as by infrastructure and information systems connecting administrations, universities, companies and services in creative urban environments capable of retaining talent and attracting investments.

This process is part of what Cohen (2006) described as the transition from a post-industrial model to a more diversified and informational one, which is characteristic of 21st-century urban economies. According to these economies, the city stops to compete exclusively for physical resources and starts competing for human capital, knowledge and relational capacity.

The third generation reinforced this orientation through integrated R&D&I strategies and embodied goals linked to creative industries, ICTs and applied science within an economic prosperity scenario. At the same time, a cultural narrative of innovation emerged as urban identity and social transformation drive (Pascual Esteve & Tarragona Gorgorio, 2009).

At this point, several cities replicated the 22@ model as it happened with the Cartuja Science and Technology Park, in Seville. This phenomenon disclosed inter-city learning and transfer dynamics, although it also highlighted the risk of increasing the homogenization of the adopted strategies.

The loss of universities' centrality as urban engine became clear in the fourth and fifth generations. The university was displaced by digitalization, which ended up embodying a strategic role. Platforms aimed at participation, e-administration and digital literacy were achieved to reduce the digital divide and improve interactions between the city and its citizens. Initiatives like the @Toletum (Toledo), the "Network of Knowledge Neighborhoods" (Málaga) and the Smart Office (Palma) reflect the evolution towards a digital city marked by physical hybridization and virtual space (Pueyo et al., 2018).

All of these elements fall within the emerging framework of smart cities marked by Big Data incorporation, digital information infrastructures and intelligent urban management systems. These changes open room for digital twins and artificial intelligence applied to the urban environment (Birkin, 2025) as the very response to contemporary sustainability challenges in cities.

The most recent plans aligned with European urban agendas and have focused on digitalization strategies and on deploying technological solutions in urban spaces (WiFi networks, mobile charging stations and sensors) by applying sustainable water, energy, mobility and environmental

management. They have also sought to attract technology companies and digital industries like IoT, 3D printing and online marketplaces.

These changes also reached the most touristic cities and the so-called “smart tourist destinations” (Ivars-Baidal & Vera-Rebollo, 2019) that have integrated technologies aimed at improving tourists and residents’ urban experience as sustainable management of tourist spaces.

Thus, SUP digitalization emerges as structuring vector redefining urban management models and reconfiguring territorial competitiveness patterns.

3.7. City marketing, tourism and culture

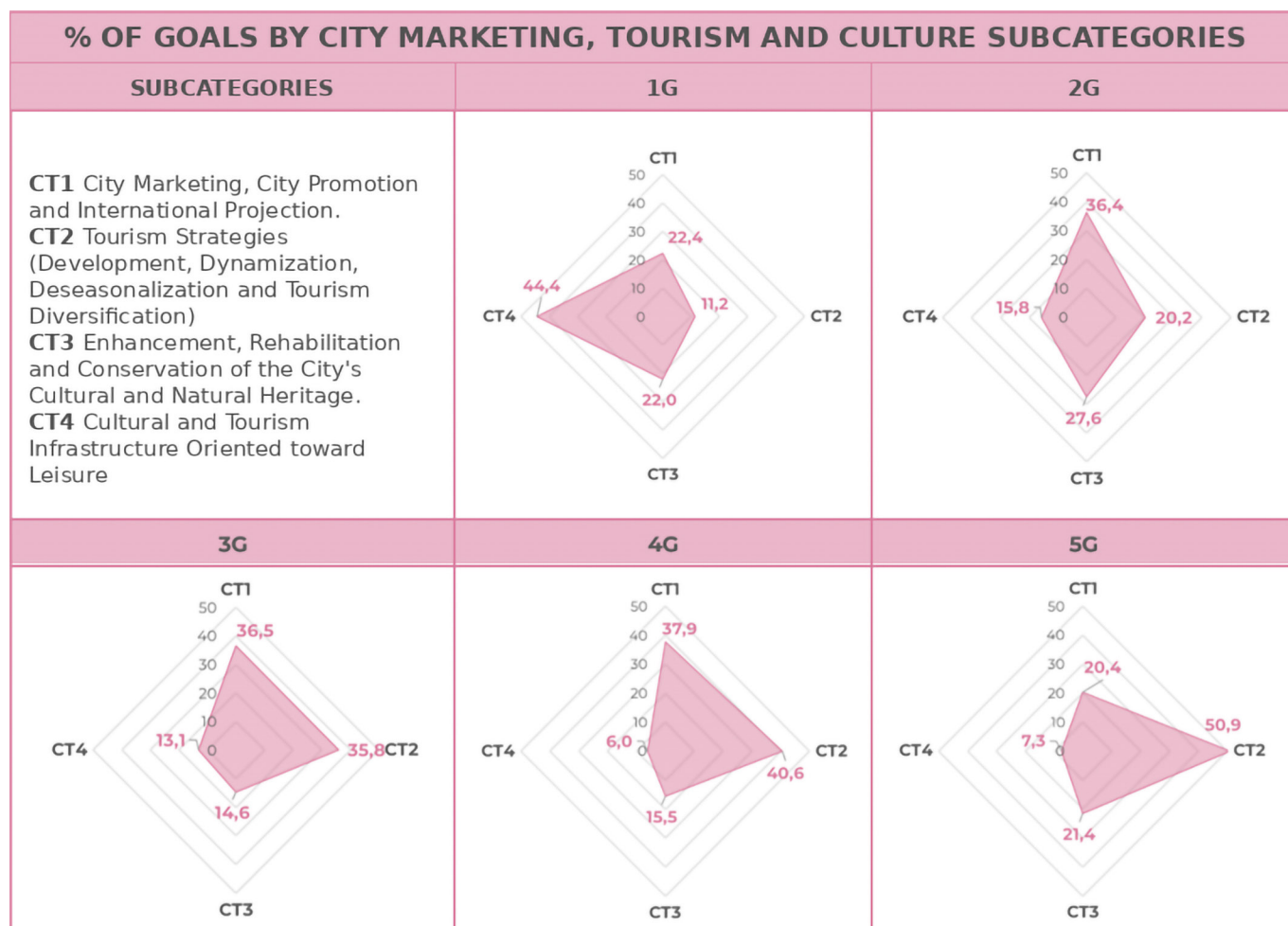
SUP has conceived cities’ external projection as key axis for their economic and symbolic repositioning since its earliest generations (Figure 10). The Bilbao and Barcelona plans led to major cultural and tourism infrastructure projects, besides developing strategies for productive transformation toward creative and cultural urban economies. This process fostered heritage environment rehabilitation and improvement as the very basis for the new urban identity.

Barcelona’s international success after the 1992 Olympic Games was a turning point for second-generation plans. City marketing and the adop-

Figure 10

Evolutionary analysis based on Citymarketing, tourism and culture subthemes.

Source: Urban Strategic Plans in Spain published from 1986 to 2020.



tion of business marketing methodologies aimed at urban spaces emerged as consolidated tools to strengthen the city's brand and international projection. Likewise, historic city centers traditionally associated with heritage conservation were conceived as economic assets (Solís et al., 2020) capable of generating urban appeal and revitalizing degraded areas.

From the 2000s onwards, tourism acquired increasing importance in urban strategies and this approach's goals were in line with policies stemming from national indicative tourism planning, such as the Plans for Excellence and Tourism Revitalization (Ivars-Baidal, 2004). These instruments suggested actions for mature and emerging destinations, revitalization actions, seasonality reduction and tourism diversification, as well as for heritage valuing.

The crisis context corresponded to the fourth generation, when strategies aimed at attracting direct foreign investments and international tourism got more intense. Cities competed for global visibility through urban branding strategies (Precedo Ledo et al., 2010) and product specialization processes: major events (Madrid, Seville, and Valencia), cultural tourism (Zaragoza and Donostia/San Sebastián), ecotourism (Elche), gastronomic tourism (Vitoria-Gasteiz and Telde) or multi-segment tourism (Santa Cruz de Tenerife).

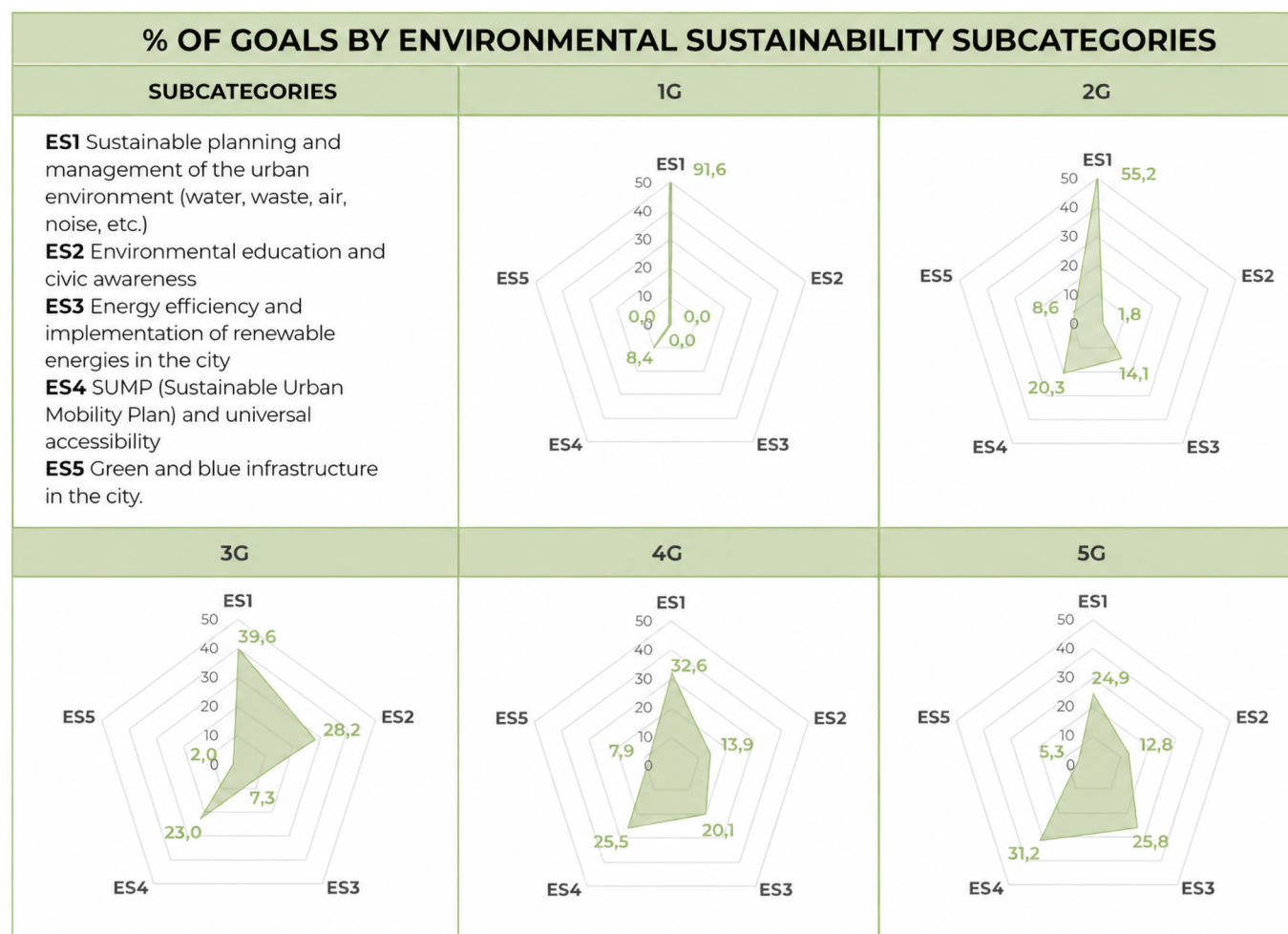
These trends got more intense in recent plans, mainly in mid-sized cities and tourist destinations like Marbella, San Cristóbal de La Laguna, Vélez-Málaga and Santa Pola. Many of these cities dedicated more than 50% of their strategic goals to tourism. Thus, diversification, seasonality reduction and tourism model updates became priorities to ensure competitiveness during the transition to a sustainability paradigm.

The latest generation of plans aligned with the 2020 Spanish Tourism Plan Horizon principles and led to sustainable and inclusive tourism strategies, as well as to rehabilitate actions, besides valuing historic centers and heritage buildings in inland destinations.

This alignment with national frameworks exposed the multi-scalar articulation of local strategies. Simultaneously, it signaled a programmatic shift towards sustainability, which is understood as corrective criterion against the expansive tourism model and as expression of the growing awareness of environmental limits associated with emerging 'touristification' processes.

3.8. Environmental sustainability

Since their first formulations, environmental goals focused on improving the metropolitan environment by cleaning up rivers and estuaries, such as the Nervión estuary in Bilbao, and by achieving sustainable water, air and waste management (Figure 11). These strategies were essentially reactive and mostly aimed at mitigating environmental impacts resulting from previous urban and industrial growth stages.



These approaches were extended to second-generation plans that had embodied the growing concern with sustainable urban mobility. Programs were developed to integrate different transport modes (tram, bicycle and pedestrian) into cities undergoing fast growth.

These strategies were developed along with local Agenda 21 initiatives to promote an integrated environmental planning. The influence of sustainable development principles outlined in the Brundtland Report and in the 1992 Rio Summit inspired the reinforcement of environmental goals in third generation plans to mitigate the development model's effects. The development model is featured by fast occupation of undeveloped land, which leads to degradation of urban and metropolitan ecosystems.

Accordingly, SUP emphasized environmental education initiatives and promoted civic accountability as social awareness instruments. Consequently, the plans embodied a cultural dimension of sustainability by broadening its scope to levels beyond mere technical management and by introducing a perspective focused on changing collective values and behaviors.

Sustainability became a core Spanish SUP axis in the fourth and, mainly, in the fifth generation. Within this scenario, these instruments were essential to achieve environmental sustainability and channel ecological concerns into the local public agenda and actions (Gustafsson et al., 2019). This shift was further reinforced by the European Union's sustainable

Figure 11

Evolutionary analysis based on Environmental Sustainability subthemes.

Source: Urban Strategic Plans in Spain published from 1986 to 2020.

urban development policies, which were progressively integrated to the mainstream (Busti et al., 2020) of the 2007–2014 and 2014–2020 cohesion policy funding programs. They helped institutionalizing the environmental centrality in local strategic planning.

The plans' thematic structure at this stage were in line with national and international agendas on climate change by binding it to two major strategic lines, namely: sustainable urban mobility and energy efficiency.

The first approach emerged in response to the environmental impact of private transport and low-density urbanization (Salom Carrasco, 2020). At this point, plans progressively integrated Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) and achieved the so-called “inverted mobility pyramid” (Cebollada & Avellaneda, 2020): walking, cycling, public transport, car-pooling and private vehicles. Cities like Zaragoza and Vitoria-Gasteiz consolidated themselves as leaders in this field by boosting cycling networks, accessible and inclusive mobility initiatives, park-and-ride facilities, low-emission zones and traffic calming measures.

However, the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) formulation was reinforced as one of the main SUP axes in the fifth generation. These strategies were designed in line with compact, mixed-use and proximity city models linked to contemporary debates such as the “15-minute city” (Moreno et al., 2021) or even the “5-minute city” (Bolea Tolón et al., 2022), which were introduced as key to improve quality of life and reduce ecological footprint.

These approaches are in line with (de)growth parameters and coexist with other trends aligned with ecological modernization principles (Cebollada & Avellaneda, 2020). The electric vehicles promotion stands out among them as technological transition strategy heading toward cleaner mobility. Therefore, measures such as renewing municipal fleets with non-polluting vehicles, encouraging the use of electric vehicles, installing EV charging stations, setting up electric bike rental services, offering combined transport tickets or passes and implementing efficient “last-mile” logistics solutions were proposed.

Energy efficiency heading toward ecological transition, (de)carbonization and the “zero emissions” goal is the second strategic line. Accordingly, the most recent instruments have redefined local energy models by prioritizing renewable sources, energy-efficient building renovations, bioconstruction and bioclimatic architecture.

At the same time, intelligent urban management systems were developed for street lighting, waste collection and for the water cycle, as well as energy management centers. All of these elements fall within a climate justice and resilience scenario that gave relevance to strategies aimed at mitigating the urban heat island effect, reducing energy poverty and decisively boosting Green Infrastructure in line with the European environmental policy.

4. Conclusions

The longitudinal analysis of 84 urban strategic plans in Spain over more than three decades revealed significant thematic evolution in line with the country's socioeconomic changes. It was possible observing a transition based on initial focus on territorial competitiveness and infrastructural modernization aimed at a more inclusive, environmentally responsible and digitally advanced planning across five generations.

In contrast to more static and hierarchical normative planning, SUP has shown adaptive focus on the social context at the time to define its principles. The 1990s strategies responded to Spain's entry into the EEC and to its efforts to attract major international events by prioritizing economic development and international projection.

However, the 2008 crisis was a turning point driving the shift towards social cohesion, community resilience and claim for public spaces. These changes disclosed the decisive influence of socioeconomic context as the crisis acted as catalyst for strategic reorientations and highlighted SUP's ability to adapt to structural changes in the urban development model.

The latest generation of plans was influenced by the 2030 Agenda, mainly by European regulatory frameworks and incentives linked to urban policy. It consolidated this change through a cross-sectional approach that have integrated sustainability, digitalization and multi-level governance. This 'Europeanization' process reinforced the environment centrality in local strategic planning. However, it also led to a certain discursive homogenization by reconfiguring priorities and thematic structures in cities of different sizes and in contexts under common financial and regulatory frameworks.

Therefore, SUP has evolved from focus on competitive economic development to a more comprehensive, sustainable and digital vision, in Spain. Accordingly, environmental sustainability, technological transformation and social equity have emerged as essential cross-sectional axis in local urban agendas.

What appeared in the early generations as complementary dimension focused on correcting socio-environmental externalities progressively became a structuring principle of the urban project.

Thus, sustainable mobility, energy efficiency, green infrastructure, and social and climate justice ceased to occupy a peripheral place and became integrated to the very core of strategic planning.

Although beyond the scope of this study, the emergence of a sixth SUP generation is also clear. It is shaped by the post-pandemic context and by new structural challenges posed by the housing crisis, digital acceleration and global instability. This scenario pointed toward a stage marked by higher uncertainty and complexity level where strategic planning must create more flexible, resilient and forward-looking responses to increasingly volatile global dynamics.

In methodological terms, using QCA has allowed rigorously comparing plans' thematic evolution, identifying specialization levels and constructing a model that can be extrapolated to other regions and countries. Furthermore, it opens up new lines of research aimed at adding artificial intelligence to methodological protocols in order to quickly detect urban strategies' structure and thematic evolution. This approach could be completed by collaborative methodologies based on planning offices by broadening the analysis to include dimensions that remain relatively unexplored, such as organizational structure, institutional participation and strategies' degree of effective implementation.

However, significant challenges remain, including lack of binding regulations, administrative fragmentation and the need for stable funding. Addressing these elements requires strengthening collaborative governance, multi-level coherence and effective strategies monitoring. Nevertheless, the present results have confirmed that SUP, understood as flexible and forward-looking instrument, remains key to set the strategic foundations for resilient and inclusive cities prepared for the 2030 challenges.

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