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Land at the Service of the Regional Growth Coalition: Projects of Special Interest in the Region of Castilla–La Mancha (Spain)

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Abstract: Neoliberal urbanism land planning has led to the development of public–private coalitions associating common interest with lucrative private enterprise projects. In Castilla–La Mancha (Spain), this regional growth coalition was backed by a spatial planning instrument, known as Projects of Special Interest (PSI). The aim of this article is to analyse the PSI as a paradigmatic example, to study its key points and examine its current dimensions. This case study employs a review of the literature, desk research, content analysis, interviews and observation. The PSI scheme has permitted private initiatives and developments, and privately used public constructions of many different types, reducing timeframes through possible recourse to expropriation, using basic measures of land reclassification, undervaluing the ecosystems involved and even facilitating construction in areas that had previously been declared protected, or where resources such as water are not guaranteed. Despite the failure of many of these projects and the expected economic growth not being realised, the instrument has been revived, as it is directly linked to multinational enterprises investing in the region.

Keywords: regional growth coalition; regional planning; spatial planning; territorial development



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1. Introduction

“And an unethical use of space” (Kielyr, the eldest daughter of the family in *Captain Fantastic*, when looking at the golf course housing development where her grandparents live) [1].

In the 21st century, different parts of the inland Spanish region of Castilla–La Mancha, in the centre of the Iberian Peninsula, have witnessed the construction of golf courses, a shopping centre, private housing estates, technology parks, an international airport, a private care home, a tyre testing facility and even a theme park (Figure 1), publicly approved and facilitated for private use. This regional growth coalition [2], is composed of a public–private partnership, operated through the spatial planning instrument of Projects of Special Interest (*Proyectos de Singular Interés*) (PSI) created in Castilla–La Mancha. This was enabled by regional spatial planning legislation promoted under the generalised spread of neoliberal urbanisation in Europe [3], and the construction and real estate boom in Spain.

Growth has long been associated with prosperity [5]. Hence, entrepreneurial regions prioritise growth-based, market-led urban development over welfare and distributive public policies [3]. To this end, there emerges a coalition for regional economic growth that tends to bring together a pluralistic group of private actors, including land and property owners, investors, developers and financiers, and the public administration [6], forming a public–private alliance where regional institutions facilitate projects developed by private, for-profit companies. The public acts at the service of private interest, and regional governmental institutions become the administrators or facilitators of the strategic interests of capitalist development. This gives rise to a serious, global problem, because these urban development projects need land, which they consume and transform. This generates a process of increasing of artificialised land—non-agricultural, non-wooded and

non-natural land. This is a worldwide problem, given the ecological impacts generated and the misuse of the scarce resource of land for private profit and speculative gain. The profligate conversion of land into urban areas is thus not only an environmental problem, but also a social problem, given the inappropriate use of resources.

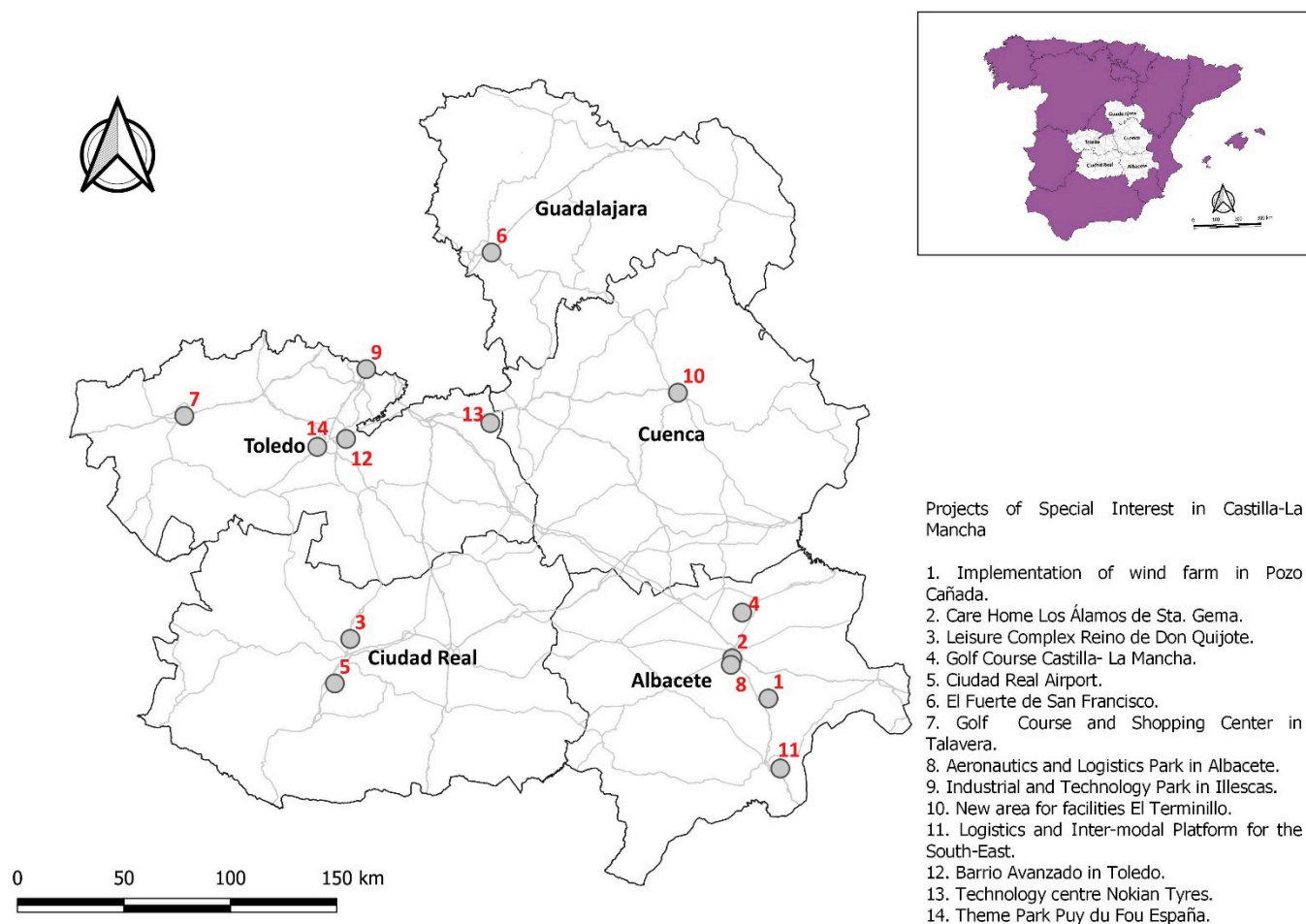


Figure 1. Projects of Special Interest in Castilla–La Mancha. Source: Regional Government of Castilla–La Mancha [4] and own preparation.

In Spain, all levels of the public sector have focused on a construction-based growth model involving developers, promoters, financial institutions and private companies, under the rationale that it creates wealth and employment. This triggered a speculation bubble [7] and a construction boom, which impacted planned and urbanised land and multiplied housing, facilities and infrastructures, especially for mobility. Between 2000 and 2012, during the housing bubble and its consequences, Spain was the European country with by far the greatest growth in land use (218,000 ha, 19% of the European total) [8]. This housing bubble, which endured from the end of the 1990s to the 2008 economic crisis [9], was driven by neoliberal policies, with deregulation designed to enhance the role of private industry and transfer the control of economic factors from the public to the private sector, with dramatic territorial, environmental and socio-political consequences [7,10,11]. Political leaders enabled speculation, since they allowed building levels to be increased, leading to high densification processes in extension areas and new peripheries [12]. Urban planning policy in Spain led territories to be increasingly dependent on the real estate market, tourism and services [13]. This process led to the subversion of spatial planning and land-use plans [14], ending in empty urbanism (urban areas that remained empty) when the housing bubble burst [15].

Since the declaration of the Constitution in 1978 and the subsequent adoption of 17 statutes of autonomy, spatial planning has been under the exclusive jurisdiction of the autonomous communities—administrative regions with a notable level of self-government. Consequently, there are now 17 spatial planning laws, each with a different name, as well as numerous specific regional and sub-regional planning instruments. A common theme across the communities is that of speaking of spatial planning in terms of managing growth, and very rarely in terms of re-planning what already exists [7]. During the Spanish construction spike, this led to a conjunction of political ambitions as demonstrations of power and (supposed) progress [16]. Regional and local politics played a key role in the Spanish housing bubble [17] and in the acceleration of urban sprawl [18,19]. To facilitate the process, many autonomous communities (Aragón, Canary Islands, the Community of Valencia, Extremadura, etc.) incorporated PSIs without having to submit them to urban planning systems. This led the autonomous communities to indiscriminately prioritise such projects of general interest over previously existing urban planning.

In the case study considered in this research, namely Castilla–La Mancha, an Autonomous Community founded in 1982, PSIs have existed since the enactment of Law 2/1998 on Spatial Planning and Urban Development Activity, which was the community's first regional spatial planning legislation. The last of the amendments to the law was Legislative Decree 1/2010, which approved the revised text of the Law on Spatial Planning and Urban Development Activity of Castilla–La Mancha. These projects have been approved by the regional government and are initiatives of significant social and economic interest. The regional governments, led by the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, a social-democratic political party that was in power from the first democratic elections in 1983 until June 2011, and again from July 2015 to the present, have used the PSIs as a spatial planning tool, typically at the service of the economic growth of private companies, under the assumption that this represented progress in Castilla–La Mancha. Based on legal concepts of an indeterminate character and subjective interpretation, such as “public utility” and “social interest”, PSIs authorise construction in locations where, under municipal or regional regulations, it would not be permitted. The instrument has had a substantive effect on territorial transformation, as it enacts changes in the legal land system (land-use classifications), and involves the implementation of amenities and provisions as well as the generation of land supply for industrial use, residential use, commercial use, recreational use, etc. PSIs are used to reclassify land for the construction of any building considered of regional interest by the government of Castilla–La Mancha.

The regional growth coalition model came to a halt in 2008. With the Great Recession, Spain went from boom to crash [9] and, similar to other European countries, entered into a period of economic crisis, which, in its case, was especially profound [20]. When the model of explosive urban growth broke down, the social and territorial effects of the crisis emerged [11], and the intensity of the speculative property bubble gave rise to unsustainable developments with dramatic consequences [7]. This marked an unprecedented phenomenon, from which lessons should have been learnt so as not to repeat the same mistakes in the future and to act with greater respect for territory. Nevertheless, this was not the case. In the specific case under study, the spatial planning instrument of the PSI continues to exist in Castilla–La Mancha, and, following a period of inactivity resulting from the crisis and the policies of extreme austerity applied to public spending [21] by a conservative regional government, in 2018, the instrument was revived with the approval of two new projects.

Why, as asked by Schmidt and Thatcher [22], are neoliberal ideas so resilient? The aim of this article is (1) to analyse the PSIs in Castilla–La Mancha as a unique, paradigmatic case study of a neoliberal regional growth machine, or a coalition, where land is put at the service of private interests with public backing. This main aim gives rise to the following research questions: How and why has a spatial planning tool such as the PSIs been used by the regional growth machine? Where have they been used, and what have they been used for? We study the projects that arose as a consequence of administrative discretion,

from a leisure complex with housing developments to a casino and golf courses, as well as infrastructures and facilities at the service of private enterprises, from a wind farm to business and technology parks, and even an international airport. A particular aim of the research is (2) to highlight how, since 2018, this planning instrument has been revived with the objective of attracting investment from transnational companies. The following questions will also be answered: (3) What are the main mechanisms by which PSIs are implemented? (4) What are the consequences of the land conversions stimulated by PSIs?

The article draws attention to a failed system, and could help public decision-makers to learn from mistakes in the past and reflect on the present and future of regional spatial planning. For the rational and sustainable use of land, it is key to determine an appropriate location for economic activities, amenities and infrastructures, and the most appropriate use of the fragile, finite resource that is land. That is, it is essential to implement appropriate spatial planning and correct urban planning for the benefit of citizens, and for the speculative and lucrative interests of private enterprise.

The article is structured as follows: introduction, background, methodological approach, results, discussion and conclusions.

2. Background—Short History of Neo-Liberal Development

The neoliberal regional growth machine is a political alliance of boosters that includes land owners, developers, realtors, banking and insurance companies, construction companies, energy and utility interests, car and truck manufacturers, technical firms and subcontractors in engineering and design fields. It also includes the political figures that facilitate projects [5], a select type of stakeholder who only have profit in mind. Since the mid-1970s, most local and regional economic development strategies have focused on attracting investment from private enterprises and on providing all the infrastructure, services and facilities required by such corporations [23]. There is an overriding concern to preserve a good business atmosphere and to make profit from speculative development [24].

This process, first underlined by urban sociologists in the United States [25] and applied to cities described as growth machines, highlights an alliance between business groups and politicians [26]. The term “growth coalition” was coined to refer to the constellation of interests in cities that promote the notion of a city having an overarching interest in growth and real estate development [26]. A broad-based political lobby that presses for unrestricted building development would be responsible for these urban growth machines [26]. Urban growth machines have been identified as playing a significant role in spatial planning to facilitate and enhance capital accumulation [27]. Under global capitalism, such differing forces as financialisation, institutional capacity, innovative entrepreneurship, the housing sector, consumption, technology and cultural economy play key roles. Although they may be considered independent entities, these forces are also interrelated [28]. In the urban growth coalition thesis, Rodgers identified a pluralistic group of primary and secondary actors that support investment capital. The leading actors, who he refers to as “place entrepreneurs”, include property owners, land owners, investors, developers and financiers. Among the secondary actors are local politicians, professionals in the media, academics, important personalities, trade unions and small retailers [6].

Broadening the scale of governance from cities to regions, Harvey speaks of regional growth coalitions, where regional administrations undertake projects through an alliance with private interests and different regional actors for the economic gain of the private corporations involved [2]. Most of these projects, however, are implemented in cities in these regions, and thus urban growth coalitions are seen to integrate with regional growth coalitions [29] in regions where such public–private alliances are formed to promote growth.

Stone, in a study on the specific case of Atlanta (Atlanta, GA, USA), used the term “regimes” to refer to agreements undertaken between the public and private sectors [30]. On a regional level, Leo talks about the regional growth management regime [31]. Studies on regime politics, typically centred on the United States and on a particular city [32,33],

tacitly coincide in that the geographical boundaries of the regime are those of a city, or at most, of a metropolitan area. Regimes, however, are not only established in particular cities and are not only focused on a city, but can extend to a regional level [29]. On this level, moreover, if a ruling political coalition pursues a plan of growth management, then environmental, land-use, and regulatory considerations come into play that have implications far beyond the city's limits [29].

Stone proposes four types of regime, each corresponding to a specific strategy: (a) maintenance regimes, oriented towards safeguarding a pre-existing situation; (b) development regimes, devoted to promoting economic growth; (c) opportunity creation regimes for the lower classes, focused on improving education, health care, public transport, etc.; (d) middle class progressive regimes, sensitive to issues such as the environment, heritage and social housing [30]. Of these four, the model established by neoliberal urbanism is clearly and predominantly inclined towards the second type, development regimes, which are destined to promote economic growth built on alliances for maintaining urban development and public and social amenities. Urban management prioritises growth-based, market-led urban development over distributive and welfare public policies [3]. In neoliberal politics, one of the priorities is to build in response to the capitalist demand for profit [33]. "Neoliberalism promotes and normalizes a 'growth-first' approach to urban development", [34] (p. 394). Nonetheless, Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer describe this form of neoliberal urbanism as unsustainable and destructive [33].

Cities and regions seek to become "winners", finding a successful niche in the globalised economy. To do so, according to Hadjimichalis and Hudson, they need to adopt appropriate institutional arrangements and appropriate social attitudes, and successfully utilize their resource endowments, whatever they may be [20]. To this end, ambitious construction and development projects are implemented as competitive strategies [35]. "Building becomes a mechanism of competition, employed to reposition a region in a more compelling light, both nationally and globally", [16] (p. 91). Projects are painstakingly supported by means of legislative and political decisions, exploiting growth as a means of economic production [16]. Despite the potential of spatial planning to guide the scale, rate and shape of urbanisation, it has been unable to control and manage growth [36], having prioritised a model of development where land is put at the service of private capitalist interests. However, after the crisis of 2008, many of the projects are now manifestations of an irrational belief in the power of the growth machine, where costs and consequences have radically exceeded any potential benefit [16].

3. Methodological Approach

3.1. Description of the Case Study

Castilla-La Mancha is one of Spain's autonomous communities, comprising five provinces, which are, from north to south and from west to east, Guadalajara, Toledo, Cuenca, Ciudad Real and Albacete. It is a landlocked, inland region, located in the middle of the Iberian Peninsula, covering an area of 79,463 Km² (accounting for 15.7% of the area of Spain). It is the third most extensive of the 17 communities, after Castilla y León and Andalusia, and, with a population of 2,045,221 in 2020, the ninth most populated. At 25.74 inhab/km², its population density is low. It is one of the most economically disadvantaged regions of Spain. The per capital gross domestic product was EUR 21,004 in 2019, the third lowest of the 17 autonomous communities, ahead only of Andalusia and Extremadura, and far from the Spanish per capita GDP of EUR 26,426 and the European Union mean income of EUR 31,160. It is also far below the EUR 35,193 of the Community of Madrid [37], the region that includes the Spanish capital, and the northern neighbour Castilla-La Mancha, on which it strongly depends, both socially and economically.

The Statute of Autonomy of Castilla-La Mancha gives it exclusive responsibility for spatial planning, urbanism and housing. Under the enactment of Law 2/1998 on Spatial Planning and Urban Development Activity that was reinforced in Legislative Decree 1/2010, which approved the revised text of the Law on Spatial Planning and Urban

Development Activity of Castilla–La Mancha, there have come to exist in the region so-called Projects of Special Interest (PSIs), the aim of which is to implement infrastructures, constructions or installations of significant social or economic interest in the region, defining and designing them for their immediate execution [38]. Specifically, the objectives can be any of the following:

- (a) “Infrastructures of any type, comprising constructions and complementary facilities adapted for complete and effective management or exploitation, in the area of land or air communications; telecommunications; execution of hydrological plans and civil works; gas production, transformation, storage and distribution; collection, storage, conduction or transportation, treatment or sanitation, purifying and new utilisation of water or any type of waste, including urban and industrial.
- (b) Works, constructions and facilities, including any complementary urban development required to execute regional public housing policies or programmes and educational, recreational, healthcare, social welfare and sports installations, amenities and establishments destined to appropriate products and services for citizens.
- (c) Facilities for industrial and tertiary activities, the object of which is production, distribution or commercialisation of goods and services, including any complementary urban development required, which is not provided for in the current spatial planning initiatives.
- (d) Public works and services and joint actions, agreed upon by the public administrations, or required, in any event, to accomplish common tasks or concurrent, shared or complementary competences” [38].

A total of 14 PSIs have been approved across the 5 provinces of the Autonomous Community of Castilla–La Mancha: 1 in Guadalajara, 1 in Cuenca, 5 in Toledo, 2 in Ciudad Real and 5 in Albacete (Figure 1).

3.2. Method

This article is a case study [39] combining the universal—the use of land at the service of the regional growth coalition—with the particular—the case of the PSIs in Castilla–La Mancha (Spain). The methodology used follows that of Easterby-Smith et al. [40]. The focus is positivist, starting with an existing theoretical framework and subsequently using data from the case study to generate findings [40]. To achieve the aims of the research, we used literature reviews, desk research, content analysis [41], interviews and observations [42].

First, a review of the selected literature was conducted. The literature available helped form the conceptual focus of the research and provided theoretical validity. Subsequently, we performed a qualitative content analysis [43] of spatial planning legislation in Castilla–La Mancha, and especially of the documentation on the PSIs authorised in the region. The documentation was compiled from the information published by the Regional Government of Castilla–La Mancha (JCCM, in its Spanish acronym) [38], and a study of the Official Journal of Castilla–La Mancha, which publishes laws and regulations, using the key words “*Proyecto de Singular Interés*”. With this documentation, we also conducted analysis, a valuable approach for scrutinizing institutional knowledge [44]. This process was completed with a digital search of news in the media on the PSIs. This was useful for examining the development of some of the projects, particularly those that were finally not undertaken.

We also carried out unstructured interviews using open-ended questions with public, municipal and regional decision-makers, private entrepreneurs and academic experts. Six interviews were conducted between February and April 2021—three with stakeholders and three with academics. Their answers were of value to clarify specific aspects of the research.

The material collected was compared and complemented with direct and indirect field observations. The researcher made personal observations, with field notes and photographs. However, the dispersion of the PDIs across the region and the present restrictions on mobility under the health measures in Spain during the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the author from visiting all the PSIs on the ground. To fill this gap, help was requested from collaborators, and Google Maps and Google Street View were both used. Specifically, the

geographer Juan Antonio García collaborated in the fieldwork on the PSIs in Albacete. In the case of the PSIs, where it was impossible to conduct the fieldwork in situ, their current status and condition were explored through the use of satellite photographs and maps in Google Maps, and by navigating the area in two dimensions by means of Google Street View, similarly to Yin et al. [45].

4. Results. Land at the Service of Private Interests with Public Support: Types of PSI

PSIs have been, and continue to be, a regional planning instrument used to implement a regional public growth coalition, reaching agreements to promote development. Since the spatial planning instrument of the PSI was created, a total of 14 have been approved in Castilla–La Mancha (Table 1), the first in 2000 and the last ones in 2018. Some of these PSIs were abandoned (3)—the leisure complex, the logistics platform, the *Barrio Avanzado* (a sustainable neighbourhood)—or were completed but are now inactive (1)—the airport in Ciudad Real. Others are still under construction (1)—the public facility area in Cuenca— or are partially open while work continues (2)—the technology centre and the theme park in Toledo. The projects were developed with no logical programming, guided by the political choice of regional social-democratic governments and private enterprise proposals, without any prioritisation or timetabling of any type. The particular priorities of the regional growth coalition at each point in time were followed. Additionally, even when a coalition exists for only a short period of time and then disbands [46,47], the decisions made will have long-term consequences [48].

Any private person, natural or legal, as well as public administrations, can develop a PSI [38]. Overall, private promoters, either through the direct adjudication of a PSI (7) or through its use after public construction (4), are the main beneficiaries. Only three of the PSIs are completely public (Figure 2). Broadly speaking, the scheme applies the neoliberal logic, under which any urban intervention should be economically productive, with private enterprise emerging as the leading player in spatial planning. The lack of coordination, the overblown scale and the widespread arrogance behind the construction boom in Spain [16] are the identifying characteristics of the PSIs in Castilla–La Mancha.

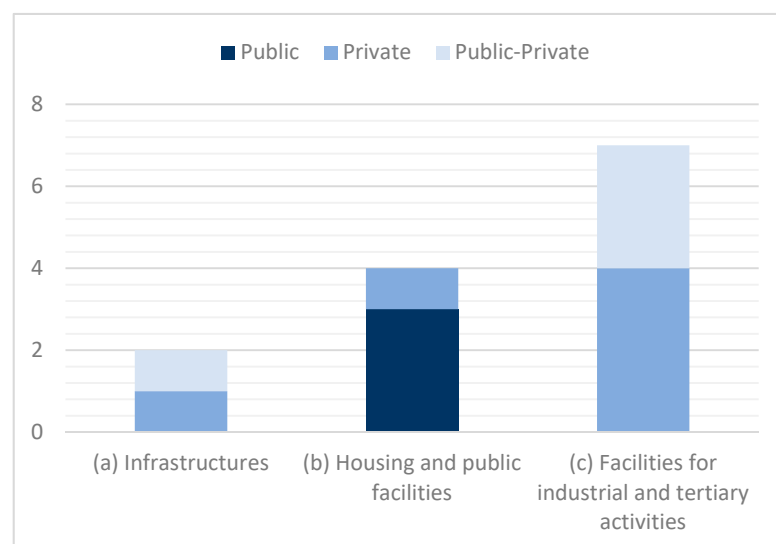


Figure 2. PSIs in Castilla–La Mancha by type and form of promotion. Source: own preparation using available documentation.

Table 1. Projects of Special Interest in Castilla–La Mancha. Source: own preparation using available documentation *.

No.	PSI	Date Approved	Type	Purpose	Surface Area	Public or Private	Pre-Existing Land Use	Current Status	Investment
1	Implementation of wind farm in Pozo Cañada (Albacete)	4 April 2000	(a) Infrastructures	Wind farm with 37 wind turbines and auxiliary equipment	49.8 ha	Private	Ecological Livestock	Functioning	No data
2	Care Home Los Álamos de Sta. Gema in Albacete	2 July 2002	(b) Works, constructions and facilities, housing and public facilities	Care home for older persons	2.2 ha	Private	Land for development	Functioning	EUR 4,478,403
3	Leisure Complex Reino de Don Quijote	-23 July 2002 PSI 1.1. General infrastructures -8 June 2004 PSI 5 Golf academy and tennis club -3 November 2004 PSI 2.1. Hotel-casino La Mancha -30 May 2006 PSI 1.2. General infrastructures	(c) Facilities for industrial and tertiary activities	Leisure complex comprising three golf courses, a tennis club, three hotels, a casino, a Don Quijote theme park, a high-end residential complex with 7000 homes and 2000 units of public housing	149.3 ha	Private	Agricultural Ecological Livestock	Abandoned	No data
4	Golf Course Castilla–La Mancha (“Las Pinailas”) in Albacete	29 October 2002	(c) Facilities for industrial and tertiary activities	Golf course, club house and related facilities	80.3 ha	Private	Agricultural Ecological	Functioning	No data
5	Ciudad Real Airport	22 July 2003	(a) Infrastructures	Airport	1831.9 ha	Public (land)–private (promotion and use)	Agricultural Ecological Livestock	Inactive	EUR 157,196,000 (initial planned investment)
6	El Fuerte de San Francisco in Guadalajara	7 June 2005	(b) Works, constructions and facilities, housing and public facilities	1004 units of public housing, public facilities, buildings for tertiary and commercial use and restoration and rehabilitation of buildings of cultural interest for use as facilities	24.6 ha	Public	Land for development Heritage Urban	Functioning	EUR 9,150,000

Table 1. Cont.

No.	PSI	Date Approved	Type	Purpose	Surface Area	Public or Private	Pre-Existing Land Use	Current Status	Investment
7	Installation of golf course and shopping and leisure area with hotels in Talavera de la Reina	18 October 2005	(c) Facilities for industrial and tertiary activities	Golf course and club house, shopping, leisure and hotel area	72.8 ha	Private	Agricultural Ecological	Functioning	EUR 24,197,534
8	Aeronautics and logistics park in Albacete	27 July 2008	(c) Facilities for industrial and tertiary activities	Industrial and tertiary facilities for manufacturing, testing, maintenance and assembly of aeronautical components	83.3 ha	Public (land and promotion)–private (use)	Land for development	Functioning (but largely vacant)	No data
9	Industrial and technology park in Illescas (Toledo)	23 September 2008	(c) Facilities for industrial and tertiary activities	Industrial and technology park for the development of industry, research and development and innovation activities with new technologies	49.2 ha	Public (land and promotion)–private (use)	Agricultural	Functioning (but largely vacant)	EUR 41,855,526
10	New area for facilities El Terminillo in Cuenca	15 September 2009	(b) Works, constructions and facilities, housing and public facilities	University hospital complex and public university administration facilities, sports and cultural amenities	42.5 ha	Public	Agricultural Ecological	Only healthcare facilities under construction	EUR 222,510,000
11	Logistics and intermodal platform for the southeast in Hellín (Albacete)	Approved 21 December 2009 and shelved 12 May 2012	(c) Facilities for industrial and tertiary activities	Railway infrastructure and construction of a freight logistics and intermodal platform	13.8 ha	Public (land and promotion)–private (use)	Agricultural Ecological Livestock	Abandoned	No data
12	<i>Barrio Avanzado</i> in Toledo	3 August 2010 and expired 19 September 2018	(b) Works, constructions and facilities, housing and public facilities	2000 units of public housing, buildings for tertiary use and public facilities	39.2 ha	Public	Land for development	Abandoned	No data
13	Technology centre Nokian Tyres in Santa Cruz de la Zarza (Toledo)	22 May 2018	(c) Facilities for industrial and tertiary activities	Technology centre for industrial research and provision of services for a tyre manufacturing chain	248.5 ha	Private	Agricultural Ecological Livestock	Functioning and under construction	EUR 59,979,579
14	Theme Park Puy du Fou España in Toledo	13 November 2018	(c) Facilities for industrial and tertiary activities	Historical and cultural theme park with shows	161.1 ha	Private	Agricultural Ecological Livestock	Functioning and under construction	EUR 241,602,000

* The reader can find more descriptive information on all these projects, as well as maps and plans of each one, at the regional government website on PSIs [4], or by requesting the information from this author by email at: luisalfonso.escudero@uclm.es.

The regional government's responsibility for spatial planning and the enormous power it holds have been implemented in the form of multiple projects that essentially carry expectations of profit for private companies. PSIs have been granted for 2 infrastructure works, 4 housing and public facility developments and 8 facilities for industrial and tertiary activities (Figure 2), and the subtypes, as mentioned, are markedly heterogeneous. As regards the PSIs of private promotion and/or use, we can list:

- Infrastructures—a wind farm and an airport;
- Housing and public facility developments—a care home;
- Installations for industrial and tertiary activities—two industrial parks and a technology centre (industrial activities) and a leisure complex, two golf courses, a shopping centre, a logistics platform and a theme park.

Before the existence of PSIs, similar urban development projects were obliged to respect spatial planning policy and municipal urban planning regulations. Once created, the PSIs were used at the discretion of the regional government for multiple, highly different initiatives, many of dubious viability. There now follows a brief description of the cases mentioned, similar to the work of Asporgerakas and Mountanea [49]. Nonetheless, the descriptions are not the same length in all cases, as occurs in the previously cited work [49], given the heterogeneity of the projects in terms of dimension and economic investment (Table 1).

The first private PSI for the construction of infrastructure, and indeed the first of them all, was the wind farm in the province of Albacete, constructed in 2000. This comprises 37 wind turbines and auxiliary equipment for the production of electricity, managed by a multinational company headquartered in Spain. Infrastructures for renewable energy will not be re-employed in the PSIs, and new projects will be developed in the region over the years to adhere to energy sector policies and plans.

As an infrastructure devoted to the production of electricity by means of wind energy, its public utility and social interest were immediately plain in the eyes of the regional government, although the project was to be developed by a private company that would make profit from it. "In accordance with the regulatory legislation on the electricity sector, and given the nature of the electricity supply as a public service, it can be construed that the present action is part of a system of indirect management of public services and objects, through private initiative" [50] (p. 39).

The second PSI infrastructure is, given its dimension and its uneven development, one of the most striking cases. It is the international airport of Ciudad Real, a PSI approved in 2003, built on publicly owned land but privately promoted and exploited. The case is so paradigmatic that it already has its place in the literature [16]. In short, after many delays and problems in its construction, it was not opened until December 2008 (being planned to open in the first half of 2006), in the middle of the economic crisis, which dramatically undermined its viability. The situation became so unsustainable that it closed once and for all in 2021, with severe losses and debts for the investors, among whom were the regional government and the regional bank, the *Caja Castilla-La Mancha* (finally bailed out by the Bank of Spain, and subsequently integrated into a number of new banking conglomerates), and it remains inactive today. It is a ghost airport (Figure 3), included in the list of unfinished, abandoned or under-utilised infrastructures that form part of the inheritance of Spain's construction boom. This PSI was a great failure. It held considerable promise of profit for its promoters, but was considered of interest for the region [51] because it marked "the start of innumerable industrial, commercial and service activities that will trigger job creation and a decline in unemployment", [52] (p. 8). None of the expected synergies were ever realised, ending in public debt derived from the regional government's investment and support for the project.

The PSIs dedicated to housing and public facilities (4) are publicly developed and are thus outside the scope of this research, with one exception—that of the Los Álamos care home for older adults in Albacete, approved in 2002. As part of the faltering, experimental beginning of the PSI initiative, a project was approved, based on very simple,

permissive documentation. Soon after, the spatial planning instrument of the PSI was reserved for more complex projects, and the multiple care homes for older persons that were built in the region, both public and private, were included under social policy and its corresponding legislation.



Figure 3. (a) Ciudad Real airport, left; (b) vacant lots at the aeronautics and logistics park in Albacete, right. Sources: Google Maps, use permitted for non-commercial purposes (<https://about.google/brand-resource-center/products-and-services/geo-guidelines/#google-maps> (accessed on 19 August 2021)), and photograph by J. A. García (April 2021), used with permission. If interested, the reader can request further photos from the author by email at: luisalfonso.escudero@uclm.es.

Most of the PSIs of private promotion and/or use, and indeed most of them in general, are devoted to industrial and tertiary facilities. The classic sectoral division serves to categorise, but given the goods–services continuum, such categorisation is difficult. Such PSIs are simply grouped together according to whether their main purpose is industrial (3) or tertiary (4).

Beginning with the industrial facilities, three PSIs that could be included in this category have been approved. Two of these, the aeronautics and logistics park in Albacete and the industrial and technology park in Illescas, both from 2008, are of public promotion and private use. They are prioritised for the development of activities mainly related to the aeronautical industry and linked to the prior existence of industrial plants belonging to the European multinational Airbus. Planned as installations to foster economic development based on new technologies and strategic sectors, they are currently both characterised by their low level of occupancy (Figure 3), with many vacant lots, while, at the same time, the leading aeronautical company involved is immersed in an acute crisis. The expectations of growth and development, linked, as in other places, to new manufacturing activities [35], have also failed to be realised.

The third case, the Nokian Tyres technology centre, in a rural municipality of the province of de Toledo, 78 km from Madrid, is different because it is a project that was directly undertaken by a Finnish multinational to carry out its industrial activity—tyre manufacturing. Additionally, it was approved in 2018, after nine years of austerity policies, during which the spatial planning instrument of the PSI had been neglected. This revival

of the PSIs has increased their complexity and the requirements for their approval—as underlined, in an interview, by a municipal decision-maker involved in the development of the project. The venture is a test circuit, and includes related installations for industrial research and the provision of services for a tyre manufacturing chain (as can be seen in the promotional video: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/ykrhwyekiiqc0oz/V%C3%ADdeo%20de%20Nokian%20Tyres.MP4?dl=0> (accessed on 19 August 2021), used with permission). The PSI is now focused on providing viability and public support for a 100% private installation. The agreement has been forged with an expanding multinational corporation, which, at the same time, among other assets, has opened a new factory in Dayton (United States) [53].

With regard to the facilities for tertiary activities, the first PSI worth highlighting is that of the projected Reino de Don Quijote leisure complex, initially approved at the start of 2002. This is a paradigmatic example of the Spanish real estate boom at the beginning of the 21st century, while also being a failed initiative, which has now been abandoned. The project comprised three golf courses, three hotels, a casino, a theme park, a high-end residential complex and a public housing development on the periphery of Ciudad Real (as can be seen in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICSe8HvYD2I> (accessed on 19 August 2021) and <https://www.juliaschulzdornburg.com/el-reino-de-don-quiote> (accessed on 19 August 2021)). With this project, the regional government set the growth machine in motion through an agreement between the public authorities and private actors interested in the real estate business. It created a new urban area by means of a complex system involving the planned approval of 17 partial PSIs, although final permission was only given for five. However, it corresponded neither to demographic demand nor the reality of the market, as its failure and discontinuation demonstrated. In 2005, the project was clearly already economically, functionally and temporally unviable [54]. Finally, only one of the golf courses and a few single-family dwellings in the surroundings were built, while the casino, theme park and other developments ended up being quixotic dreams.

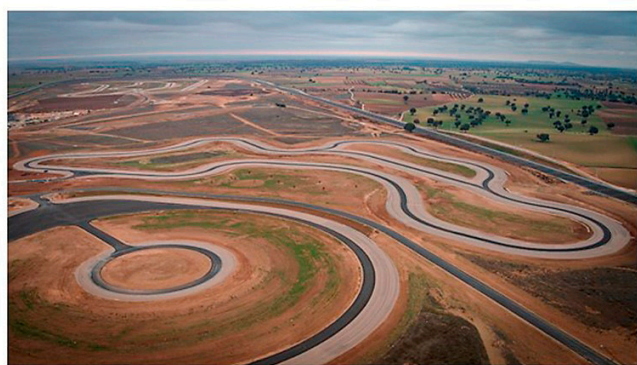
The golf course option was repeated in two other PSIs, one in Albacete in 2002, and another in 2002 in Talavera de la Reina, the second most populated city in the province of Toledo in 2005. During the years of dramatic economic growth, this type of tertiary development combining sport and tourism use was a popular concept. The PSI in Talavera de la Reina also included a shopping centre, again privately promoted and managed, but classified as of special interest for the region. As in other cities, a shopping mall is regarded as an urban attraction [35], part of the geography of consumption of today's cities, which themselves have become objects of consumption [55].

Another PSI project dedicated to tertiary activity, but of another type, is that approved in 2009 for the logistics and intermodal platform in Hellín (Albacete). Promoted by the JCCM, it would be for private use. The project, deeply impacted by the economic crisis that started in 2008 and the regional government's subsequent policies of budget austerity, was swiftly abandoned given "the impossibility of undertaking the expense (. . .) due to the dramatic economic and financial situation of the Government of Castilla-La Mancha", [56] (p. 17042).

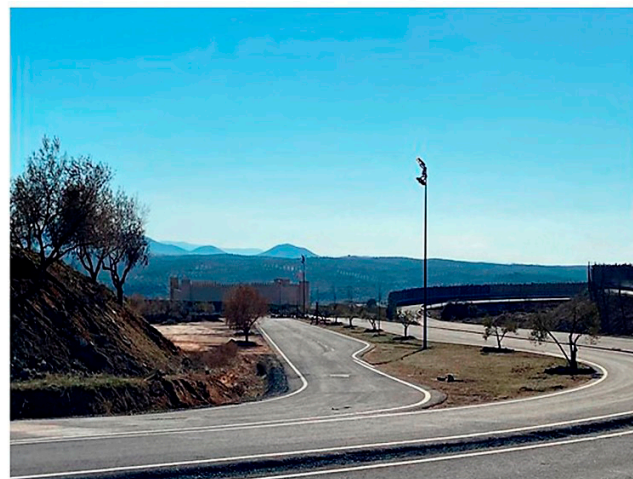
Lastly, in 2018, a PSI was approved for the Puy du Fou España in Toledo, a historical and cultural theme park with organised shows. Once more, the regional government decided to use a regional spatial planning instrument to promote, support and facilitate a private, for-profit initiative launched by a multinational corporation with a similar theme park in France, and a project for a further one in China.

In this sense, it is worth noting that, since 2018, the PSI, as a planning instrument, has been revived with the aim of attracting investment from multinational enterprises (Figure 4). This revival of the PSI marks a return to the regional growth coalition as a means to firmly support private initiatives. Indeed, given the critical situation triggered in March 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic, with its vast negative consequences for the regional economy, two laws, 5/2020 and 1/2021, were enacted to facilitate priority projects that can reactivate economic activity, in the form of private enterprise initiatives to attract

investment [57,58]. This legislation provides for the prioritised declaration of public utility or social interest in a way that is simpler and quicker than the PSIs. This opens the door to projects that can be undertaken by any company in any part of the region, although, thus far, none have been implemented, given the uncertainty of the current pandemic situation.



(a)



(b)

Figure 4. (a) Nokian Tyres circuit, left; (b) Puy du Fou España, right. Source: company management, used with permission, and author's own photograph from April 2021. If interested, the reader can request further photos from the author by email at: luisalfonso.escudero@uclm.es.

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. Land as a "Flexible" Resource: Key Points of the PSIs to Facilitate Private Initiative

The PSIs in Castilla–La Mancha were the result of a regional growth coalition, where land had been regarded as a *flexible* resource at the service of private initiatives, but with significant public support. The instrument, as a manager of a company awarded a PSI noted in an interview, makes it much easier for private investors to develop projects. Why? This study has identified four key benefits that PSIs give to private companies undertaking a project:

- (a) The reduction of the time required to implement projects and the possibility of expropriating parcels of land. PSIs allow the time typically required to build infrastructures and facilities to be halved [38]. This aspect is highly valued by private companies. For example, the company responsible for the theme park project, in their report on the PSI, notes that, thanks to the regional government's support, they were able to complete the urbanisation and building work within the planned deadline and thus avoid problems with the project's funding structure [59].

Additionally, implementing a PSI is one of the cases in which the expropriation permitted under the law can be instituted by both the public administration and private promoters. This, for promoters, ensures the viability of the project; although they cannot acquire all the land required by purchasing it on the market from the owner who has voluntarily put in on sale, they have the right to expropriate it, as the regional government allows them to acquire private property against the wishes of the owner.

- (b) Land reclassification, which is arguably the key factor. The spatial planning instrument of the PSI allows land to be reclassified with respect to the urban planning regulations in force. They can be implemented on any type of land, and municipal planning systems, given that urban development planning is the direct responsibility of each municipality, must be modified or reviewed to fit a PSI [38]. In practice, this

allows for construction in any location that may be considered of interest to the region. Without the corresponding PSIs being approved, it would clearly have been legally impossible to implement the projects that were finally built. The regional growth coalition in Castilla–La Mancha reached the extreme of becoming the promoter that suggested how the municipal urban development plan should be modified, as occurred in the case of the multinational energy enterprise that developed the wind farm [49].

This has meant that PSIs have constantly modified urban development plans and regulations in the municipalities in which they are located. Rural lands previously devoted to agriculture have been urbanised, as in the case of the airport in Ciudad Real or the golf course in Albacete, for example. Land originally covered in natural vegetation has been developed, as in the case of the wind farm in Albacete, which was built on part of a protected forest ecosystem [16].

- (c) The use of rustic land for urban projects and its increased value. The law establishes that when the project is intended to be implemented on rustic land, declaring the project as a priority implies that the urban development classification of the land provided for in the spatial and urban planning regulations is approved [38]. A key to business is buying or owning rustic land, then getting it reclassified as urban. This immediately enhances the value of the land, with the PSI being an instrument that permits this significantly increased value to be obtained. For example, the golf course and shopping centre in Talavera de la Reina were built on reserved rustic land that was not available for urban development due to its agricultural interest. Once converted into urban land, its value increased exponentially, to the benefit of the private promoter.
- (d) Laissez-faire in dealing with the environmental impacts of the projects. The PSIs tend to undervalue, if not totally disregard, the environmental value of the places in which they are to be implemented, and their development goes ahead although the area might be environmentally fragile or there is a lack of resources, such as water. A clear example of this is the golf course on the outskirts of the city of Albacete, located next to the environmentally delicate banks of the River Júcar, which was justified as a means to conserve the ecosystem [60], despite transforming native woodland into an 18-hole golf course.

The *flexible* use of land as regards the environment is also evident in the construction undertaken by the tyre-manufacturing company, which, to a certain extent, is also contradictory. The company's installations partially affect a series of *dehesas*, a Mediterranean type of agroforestry and cultural landscape, considered of great ecological value in the Iberian Peninsula, which were previously classified as specially protected non-developable rustic land. Nonetheless, it is also worth highlighting that the company has publicised the project's respect for the environment (as can be seen in this video: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/s9ytkpii2g68e1/V%C3%ADdeo%20de%20Nokian%20Tyres%20medio%20ambiente.MP4?dl=0> (accessed on 19 August 2021), used with permission). This ecological awareness includes a project to introduce a plant, the guayule, which is a natural, sustainable resource, as a raw material for manufacturing the company's tyres [61]. This innovation will logically give the company a competitive advantage when realised.

In addition, from an environmental perspective, throughout the Spanish construction boom, the demand for water in regions with an exceptionally arid climate, such as Castilla–La Mancha, was intensified [16]. In the case of the theme park PSI, the regional president requested the State administration to order that water be supplied by the Hydrographic Confederation of the River Tagus, because “it would be good (. . .) not all the water needed is available” [62].

5.2. Concluding Thoughts and Outlooks

When we think of spatial planning, it is almost always in terms of planning growth. The PSIs in Castilla–La Mancha have been, and continue to be, an instrument that, in practice, has permitted the construction of anything in any place, for the sake of what is alleged to be public utility and regional interest. They have mainly been used to facilitate private initiatives and promotions, or initiatives combining public construction with private use. The spatial planning instrument of the PSI enables companies to implement an urban development project using shorter timescales, the possible recourse to expropriation and, most importantly, land-use reclassification. In addition, this has been done while undervaluing the ecosystems of the planned locations, and even facilitating construction in previously protected areas or where resources such as water are not guaranteed. The justification has always been that of economic development and job creation. However, eventually, land has been wasted, creating a problem that is not only environmental, but also social, in the misuse of resources, and what is ultimately a lost opportunity for social investment. This habit of putting land at the service of growth is a global problem, having been reported, for example, in California (USA) [63] and China [64]. The Spanish real estate boom led to an enormous waste of land [17], facilitated in the case of Castilla–La Mancha by the spatial planning tool of the PSIs.

In conclusion, as most PSIs are awarded for private promotion and use, spatial planning is handed over to private companies, with the preconceived idea that it will eventually be to the benefit of the entire population [65]. In PSIs, as Hombold says for the marketing of the cities [66], public means government leaders (rather than community) and private means business (not the private citizen). As affirmed by Gottdiener, new projects are supported by governments because they lead to economic gain [67], although this is not always the case, with the failed PSIs being a clear example: two industrial parks, the logistics platform, the airport and the leisure complex. In total, 5 of the 11 private-use PSIs have been abandoned, not been built, or are almost empty, as in the case of the industrial parks. The expected growth of the coalition between politicians and private stakeholders, which led to the projects being classified as of special interest for the region, never came about. Additionally, overall, Castilla–La Mancha continues to be one of the Spanish autonomous communities with the lowest per capital income [37].

The PSIs in Castilla–La Mancha are an example of the hypothesis of Romero, Jiménez and Villoria [7] that planning is no longer a guarantee of spatial rationality or a defence of the general interest, becoming instead an instrument of legal certainty at the service of private interest groups. As underlined by Simmie, despite the potential of spatial planning to guide the scale, rate and shape of urban development, it has been incapable of controlling and orienting growth [36].

With the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008 and the end of the Spanish construction boom, a challenge emerged as regards knowing what to do with the large-scale projects that had been the subject of significant economic and social investment, and how to decide on the integration or disintegration of the unfinished spaces. Specifically, the boom in infrastructure has been highly expensive due to their under-utilisation [11]. In Castilla–La Mancha, the failed or unfinished PSIs are today spaces that nobody is quite sure what to do with. Furthermore, the lessons of the great recession have not been learned, and, after a period of austerity, the PSIs of the regional growth coalition have been taken up once again, but now by means of capturing investment from multinational corporations, the development of whose activities is then facilitated. If, as stated by Hadjimichalis and Hudson, institutions are not merely “out there” to serve companies [20], in the case of the post-crisis PSIs, they are still doing just that. This situation has been made even more serious by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the publication of laws designed to make a call for private investment, thus further facilitating their proposals [57,58]. Today, private interests are prioritised over collective ones, and the region offers itself to any multinational corporation that wishes to set up in Castilla–La Mancha. Private initiative is facilitated

and given prominence in decision-making processes. Spatial planning processes reflect a narrow set of interests rather than the community's needs [47].

The PSIs, as a spatial planning instrument, are regarded as needing a structural overhaul. They should no longer be considered part of the regional growth machine and their ultimate purpose should be that of social and public interest. The projects should not be promoted by private developers nor oriented towards use by private enterprises that benefit financially from the PSIs. It would be reasonable to uphold the idea of a regional project that goes beyond municipal planning, facilitating the development of the latter if the needs of the community are taken into account. To this end, they should be designed to incorporate measures of citizen participation, and not just the publicly available information on the projects. However, and despite its irrationality, the present system permits and promotes these projects, given the continuing strength of the neoliberal spatial planning model in Castilla–La Mancha. The machine rolls on at full power.

In the future, it would be useful to develop spatial planning systems that play a public and social role in ensuring territorial justice. To this end, academic studies will be needed that continue to address regional spatial planning, and which make up for the limitations of the current work, which focuses on only one case.

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