

INTEGRATED URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROYAL SITE OF SAN ILDEFONSO (SEGOVIA) A Creative Territorial Strategy

DAVID OLAY VARILLAS (OLAYDAVID@UNIOVI.ES)¹, LUIS CARLOS MARTÍNEZ FERNÁNDEZ
(LUISCARLOS.MARTINEZ@UVA.ES)², CRISTINA FERNÁNDEZ BUSTAMANTE
(CRISTINA@OBSERVATORIODELTERITORIO.ES)³

¹ Oviedo University, Spain.

² Valladolid University, Spain.

³ Observatorio del Territorio. Oviedo University, Spain.

KEYWORDS

*Strategic planning
Urban development
Peri-urban area
Territorial potential
Royal Site of San Ildefonso*

ABSTRACT

Planning a territory's future according to sustainability criteria constitutes a complex challenge, particularly in the current context of global transformation, characterised by uncertainty and the need for adaptive responses. Within this framework, territorial planning must seek to develop strategies capable of addressing emerging social, economic and environmental challenges. The Royal Site of San Ildefonso is a peri-urban area located between Segovia and Madrid and presents distinctive conditions that call for an innovative and creative approach. Its rich and diverse monumental and environmental heritage, together with its residential appeal and diversified economy, position it as a territory with considerable potential for the implementation of integrated development policies. Furthermore, its well-established connectivity with major urban centres reinforces its strategic role both as a tourist destination and as a space for territorial cohesion. Consequently, the Royal Site of San Ildefonso represents an ideal laboratory for designing and promoting sustainable development models in both urban and regional contexts.

Received: 01 / 04 / 2026

Accepted: 15 / 07 / 2026

1. Introduction: Territorial Planning and "Creativity", a Pairing Yet to Be Explored

The current context of global change, and its associated consequences, gives rise to local effects that are complex to address owing to their scale and the large number of actors involved. This globalised context requires decision-making, as well as the development of adaptation and/or mitigation measures, at the local level, with strategic planning constituting an instrument capable of contributing to territorial development through, for example, the optimisation of endogenous resources (Fernández Güell, 2010).

In this regard, it should be borne in mind that preparing a strategic planning document for the integrated and sustainable development of a specific territory necessarily involves a complex process. Martínez Fernández & Olay Varillas (2025) describe this process as follows:

The preparation of a strategic planning document as a creative tool for the integrated and sustainable development of a specific territorial area necessarily entails a complex process, particularly in a context such as the present one, which is constantly evolving and in which global and local dynamics and transformations require continuous adaptation. (p. 176)

On the basis of these general principles of socioeconomic change, together with the need for constant adaptation to both local and global circumstances, strategic territorial planning has evolved over time, as Chiarella Quinhoes (2005) notes. This evolution has given rise to different generations of strategic territorial plans, each with its own approaches and particularities (Hermosilla Pla & Mayordomo Maya, 2024). Nevertheless, as Martínez Fernández & Olay Varillas (2025) point out, every project, regardless of the stage or generation within which it is framed, must have as a common denominator a rigorous and in-depth analysis that makes it possible to understand the territory. This not only facilitates the optimal use of its internal resources and potential, but also helps to eliminate or minimise its weaknesses and threats.

The need to apply strategic planning criteria adapted to territorial circumstances is not new. Its origins date back to 1982 in the city of San Francisco. As Farinós Dasí et al. (2005) explain, the initiative arose in the following circumstances: The US city commissioned Andersen Consulting to prepare a plan that would enable it to avoid the adverse consequences arising from the budget-cutting policy adopted by the United States Government.

This project was subsequently replicated in many other contexts, not only at the local level but also at subregional, regional and supraregional scales. These territories saw strategic territorial planning as a particularly effective instrument for deciding which principal courses of action should be pursued in order to promote their social and economic development (Farinós Dasí et al., 2005).

Accordingly, the first strategic territorial planning project carried out in the United States in the early 1980s established a precedent that would be followed years later by a significant number of cities around the world, including, to cite some of the most important, Barcelona, London, Milan, Lisbon, Amsterdam, Chicago, Ontario, Sydney, São Paulo, Rosario and Medellín (Martín Mesa & Merinero Rodríguez, 2010). Martín Mesa & Merinero Rodríguez also note that the preparation of plans by these cities encouraged many others to develop their own strategic territorial planning documents, while also fostering the emergence of inter-city cooperation networks aimed at increasing collaboration and generating knowledge. Hermosilla Pla & Mayordomo Maya (2024, p. 114) describe the resulting approach as follows: An innovative form of planning in cities, known as Urban Strategic Planning, which applies the local governance model to public policies. This planning is based on citizen participation and public-private cooperation (Martín & Merinero, 2010). During

this period, the first city networks were established for the development of initiatives and relations with European institutions.

With regard to the creative dimension of strategic city planning, Fernández Güell defines this approach as follows:

A creative process that lays the foundations for integrated long-term action, establishes a continuous decision-making system involving risk, identifies specific courses of action, formulates indicators for monitoring results and involves local social and economic actors throughout the entire process. (Fernández Güell, 1997, p. 54)

From the perspective of creative cities, Olmedo-Barchello et al. (2020) highlight the need to devise new, more inclusive models of the city in which factors such as contemporary lifestyles, sociocultural diversity, the quality and accessibility of infrastructure, and the strategic incorporation of technological innovations that have a positive impact on liveability and well-being in everyday life are addressed in a planned manner. All of these aspects are consistent with the basic principles of strategic territorial planning advocated within the European Union over recent decades.

In the case study examined in this paper, the aforementioned process of global change, together with the development of the municipality of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso itself, were key factors in the local government's decision in 2017 to prepare a new document following the previous strategic plan, which had been designed for the 1996-2004 period. The new strategic plan was intended to define the course to be followed by the municipality and to provide the following:

a document capable of guiding and laying the foundations for the municipality's socioeconomic development over the coming years through appropriate sectoral planning. [...] to set out a series of guidelines facilitating coordination, complementarity and integration among the different planning instruments affecting the municipality, all with a view to fostering synergies across different municipal spheres (transport, quality of life, economic activity, etc.) (Ayuntamiento del Real Sitio de San Ildefonso, 2019, p. 5).

2. The Royal Site de San Ildefonso: Geographical Context and Characterisation

2.1. The Supra-Municipal Territorial Context

The concept of a city system defined by Pred (1977), understood as a set of interdependent cities integrated within a higher-order territorial framework (Maturana Miranda et al., 2016), is manifested in Castile and León, as Calderón Calderón (2012) notes, through the existence of a network of urban spaces around which territorial relations and flows are organised, forming an interdependent functional unit. In this regard, and in accordance with the provisions of the Spatial Planning Guidelines of Castile and León, the author characterises the urban system of Castile and León as one in which a vertical and hierarchical structure is replaced by a horizontal structure based on relations and balances, as follows:

a network of urban centres that structure territorial relations and their flows, forming an interdependent functional unit that interacts through territorial corridors which facilitate exchanges and enable the generation of localisation and urbanisation economies. (Calderón Calderón, 2012, p. 743)

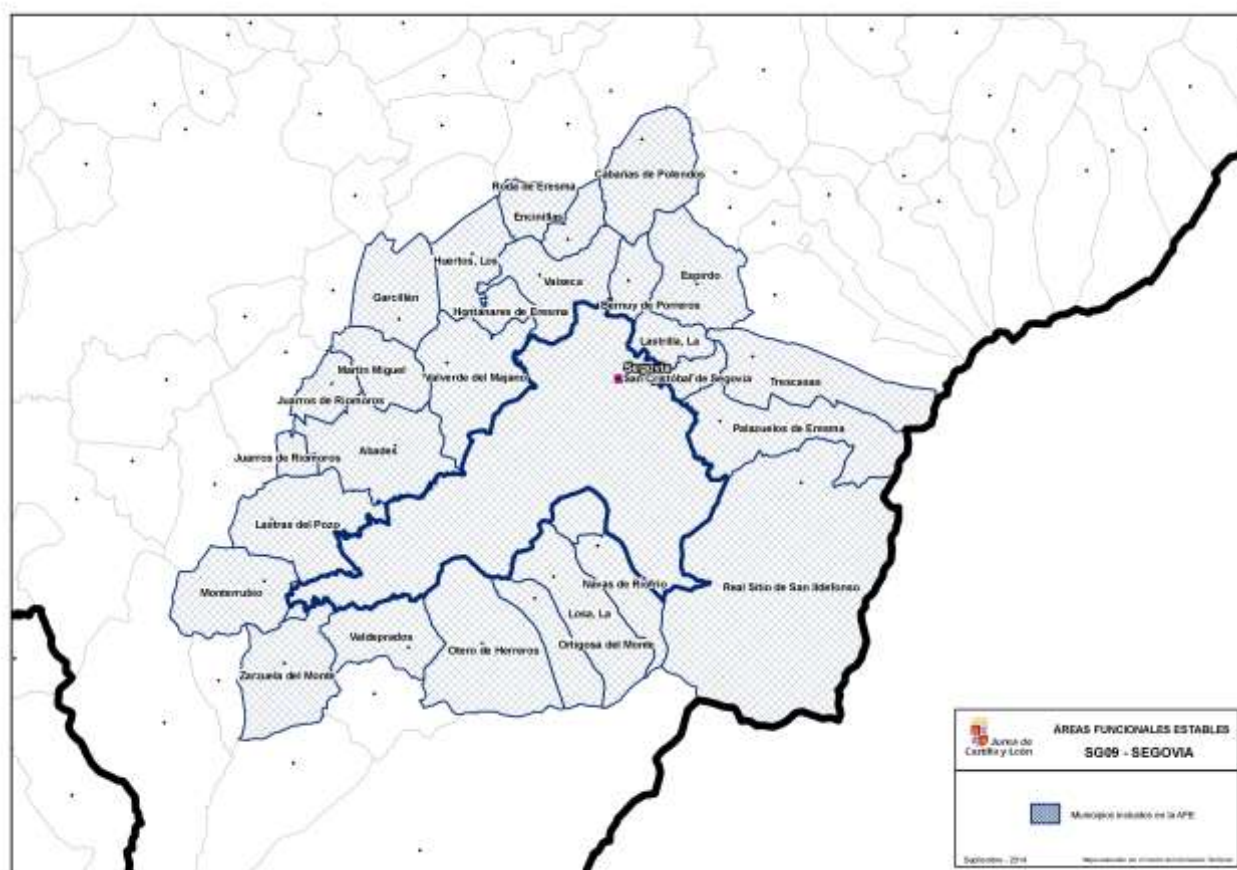
The Royal Site of San Ildefonso is a municipality located within the peri-urban area of the city of Segovia. It is also becoming increasingly integrated into the Valladolid-Segovia-

Madrid urban axis. This process is directly related to the transport infrastructure network. The progressive improvement of existing road and rail infrastructure, together with the development of new infrastructure, has steadily reduced the distance to these urban areas in terms of travel time. By road, the municipality is 18 minutes from Segovia, 75-80 minutes from Madrid and 120 minutes from Valladolid. As regards rail transport, Segovia-Guiomar high-speed railway station, although located outside the municipality, is nearby and provides journey times of 25 and 35 minutes to the national and regional capitals, respectively (Ayuntamiento del Real Sitio de San Ildefonso, 2019).

The location of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso within this complex and, at the same time, competitive territorial context is a key factor contributing to the increasing integration of this peri-urban area into a highly dynamic zone, both demographically and economically. Nevertheless, this convergence of factors, which are positive *a priori*, not only presents advantages and opportunities that should be harnessed, but also generates tensions—or threats, to put it another way—of a highly diverse nature that must be addressed.

Moving down the territorial scale of analysis to the provincial level, Segovia has traditionally performed the role of administrative and political centre, as well as other functions associated with its status as the principal urban centre and, accordingly, the provincial capital (Velasco Romera, 2011). Beyond the city and municipality of Segovia itself, a broader urban territorial area has emerged: the "Segovia Urban Area", as identified by the Statistical Atlas of Urban Areas (Ministerio de Fomento, 2020). The Atlas defined such areas as geographical spaces characterised by high concentrations of population, economic activity, services, facilities and infrastructure, together with two fundamental features: territorial continuity and functional integration. In this regard, successive editions of the Atlas have classified the Segovia Urban Area as a "large urban area", a category applied to territorial areas comprising agglomerations of more than 50,000 inhabitants made up of one or more municipalities. In the 2025 edition (Ministerio de Vivienda y Agenda Urbana, 2025), it comprises five municipalities: Segovia, Palazuelos de Eresma, Royal Site of San Ildefonso, La Lastrilla and San Cristóbal de Segovia. It should be noted that the municipalities of Segovia and the Royal Site of San Ildefonso stand out for historical and functional reasons, and it is highly probable that the historical relations between the two settlements provide the main explanation for the natural expansion of the city of Segovia towards the south-east. This process initially took place from the second half of the twentieth century onwards along the La Granja road (now the CL-601) and, by the beginning of the twenty-first century, through peripheral urban developments around this transport route (Velasco Romera, 2011).

Furthermore, Law 9/2014 of 27 November, declaring the Stable Functional Areas of Castile and León (Presidencia de la Comunidad de Castilla y León, 2014), establishes a set of "Stable Functional Areas" for the purposes of territorial planning. One of the principal objectives of these areas is to optimise the management and governance of these territories by strengthening voluntary mechanisms of association and fostering solidarity among municipal communities regarding the exercise of exclusive powers and regulatory development. In this respect, each of these areas comprises, on the one hand, a basic planning and service unit and, on the other, the municipalities within its surrounding area or *alfoz*, with which functional relations are established and developed, thereby making the implementation of common planning measures appropriate (Ayuntamiento del Real Sitio de San Ildefonso, 2019). Within this geographical and functional context, the Royal Site of San Ildefonso, together with 26 other municipalities, forms part of the Segovia Stable Functional Area (Consejería de Presidencia de la Comunidad de Castilla y León, 2014) (see Figure 1). It therefore comprises 12.9% of Segovia province's 207 municipalities and covers 12.2% of the provincial territory. In 2024, it accounted for 53.2% of the province's population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2025a, 2025b).

Figure 1. Stable Functional Area SG09 – Segovia

Source: Junta de Castilla y León, 2014

Nevertheless, Nevertheless, as Molina de la Torre & Delgado Urrecho (2014) point out, despite the difficulty involved in clearly and precisely defining both the Segovia urban area and its sphere of influence, given the diversity of existing classifications, it is essential, in order to understand the province's settlement structure, to consider, albeit briefly, the so-called service centres in the provincial rural environment, understood as basic functional units within the territory of Segovia. In other words, these centres provide basic services to the population living outside the strictly urban sphere. The authors thus note that, beyond the purely urban area represented by the city of Segovia, there is a basic network of service centres, with the Royal Site of San Ildefonso, together with El Espinar and Cuéllar, classified as "first-level service centres" owing to the importance of the services they provide and the facilities and infrastructure available. This means that, although the Royal Site of San Ildefonso is a municipality within Segovia's peri-urban area, it also provides services to a broad group of municipalities across the province. This reinforces both its urban and peri-urban character and gives it a distinct identity within the urban context in which it is located.

Although the Royal Site of San Ildefonso is a municipality in the province of Segovia and belongs to the Autonomous Community of Castile and León, it also borders the Autonomous Community of Madrid. Both Segovia in general and the Royal Site of San Ildefonso in particular have close links with Madrid, as Solís Trapero (2008) had already shown, identifying the municipality as part of Ring 3 of the four rings that make up the Madrid urban region. The Royal Site is linked to the national capital not only through labour mobility but also through second-home ownership and is therefore affected by processes of population and residential diffusion. The municipality has a significant floating population, associated not only with the large number of tourists but also with the notable presence of second homes and the marked seasonality of their use. In this regard, the construction of the A-601

dual carriageway and the AP-61 motorway has provided a direct connection between Valladolid and Madrid via Segovia, thereby strengthening the position of the Royal Site along the Valladolid-Segovia-Madrid axis.

The Royal Site of San Ildefonso's inclusion within the urban area and sphere of influence of the city of Segovia, together with its status as a first-level service centre, its direct relationship with Madrid and its location on the Valladolid-Segovia-Madrid axis, therefore creates a structurally dichotomous scenario in which the tensions arising from proximity to major concentrations of population, activity and services coexist with opportunities for development. These risks and opportunities are shaped by the existence of highly developed road transport infrastructure, making it particularly important, as Martínez Fernández & Olay Varillas (2025) note, to have a strategic planning project capable of serving, through a creative approach, as a tool for promoting integrated and sustainable territorial development. This becomes all the more relevant when the current context of uncertainty and continuous transformation is also taken into account, in which global dynamics and trends require constant adaptation.

It is therefore possible to argue that the Royal Site of San Ildefonso brings together a number of factors that supported the implementation of an innovative territorial strategy which, on the one hand, could take advantage of the benefits deriving from its role as a hinge between the national, provincial and regional capitals and, on the other, could provide a comprehensive, coordinated and specific response to the socioeconomic needs identified.

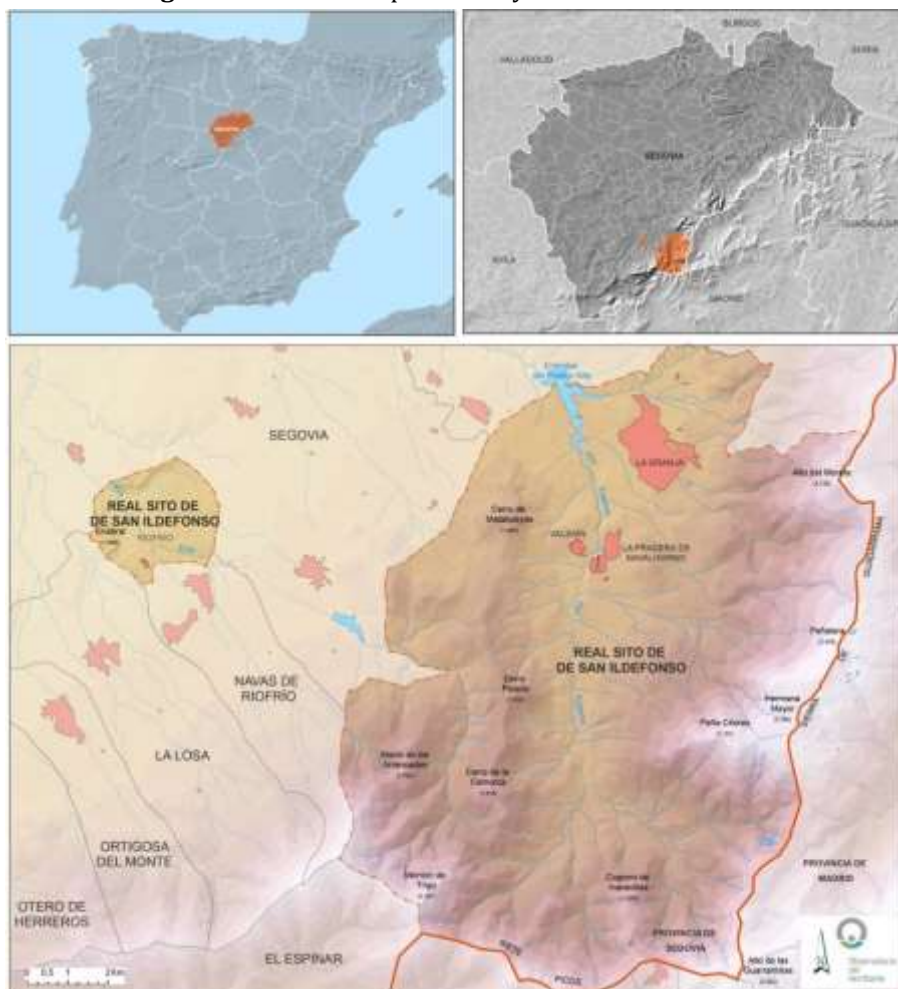
In short, there was a need for a strategic planning tool capable of operating at two levels: on the one hand, the local level, given its capacity to act directly on the territory itself; and, on the other, the level shaped by global factors, which lie beyond the scope of strategic planning itself but to which it must nevertheless be able to respond through the development of mitigation and adaptation strategies or actions. This dual local-global scale of action is what largely gives planning its rationale: understanding the characteristics of territories and fostering their sustainable development while minimising, as far as possible, the negative effects of global processes (Olay Varillas, 2025).

2.2. Key Geographical Features: Territorial Characterisation of the Study Area

In addition to the territorial context outlined briefly and in general terms in the previous section, and with the aim of gaining a more detailed understanding of the different aspects that characterise the municipality, this section provides a concise territorial characterisation of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso, based on the diagnosis carried out in the Strategic Plan of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso (Ayuntamiento del Real Sitio de San Ildefonso, 2019). The purpose is to identify the key issues that highlight both the positive aspects and those regarded as weaknesses, which will ultimately form the basis for defining the strategic priorities on which its future development will be built from a creative perspective.

The municipality of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso (see Figure 2) covers an area of 144.81 km², within which only four population centres are located. Three of them, La Granja de San Ildefonso, La Pradera de Navahorno and Valsaín, are classified as urban land. The fourth settlement, Riofrío, is associated with the management of a *dehesa* which, in the form of a walled enclave approximately 3 km in diameter, is located around 5 kilometres west of the main municipal territory (Ayuntamiento del Real Sitio de San Ildefonso, 2019).

Figure 2. Location map of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso



Source: Ayuntamiento del Real Sitio de San Ildefonso, 2019

The municipality's population has remained above 5,000 inhabitants in recent decades, reaching a peak of 5,725 in 2009. The population is distributed across the four settlements mentioned above, although La Granja accounts for almost 85% of the total (INE, 2025b), whereas Riofrío has fewer than 10 inhabitants. The current population figure represents the highest level recorded since 1900. This means that the Royal Site has followed a different trajectory from that of the province of Segovia, which reached its population peak in the 1950s and, despite various fluctuations, currently has population levels similar to those recorded in 1900.

The structure of the municipal population shows a sustained trend towards a growing proportion of older people, with those aged 65 and over accounting for more than 20% of the population, compared with 12% for those under the age of 15 (INE, 2025a). This pattern is similar to that observed at both provincial and regional levels.

The economy is notable for its diversification and for being less dependent on the tertiary sector than the province as a whole. It is based primarily on services and industry, while the primary sector plays only a very limited role. Of the approximately 1,600 to 1,800 jobs generated in the municipality, around 55% are in the service sector and approximately 35% in industry, with the latter accounting for almost one tenth of all industrial employment in the province of Segovia. By contrast, only around 3% of jobs are in the primary sector (SIE, 2025). This distribution is even more pronounced in terms of business activity, since 75% of businesses belong to the service sector, particularly retail, restaurants, accommodation and repair services, reflecting the importance of tourism in the municipality. This helps to explain the presence of around 75 hospitality establishments and approximately 30 accommodation establishments offering more than 1,500 bed spaces. These include the

Parador de La Granja, which is associated with a Congress and Convention Centre. In the industrial sector, the main focus of activity is the glass factory operated by the multinational Verescence Group, which employs around 500 people.

Land use, meanwhile, reveals a municipality with a very small proportion of arable land (0.1%), despite being the place of origin of the *judión de La Granja*, which has a Quality Mark owned by the Ayuntamiento del Real Sitio de San Ildefonso. Areas associated with livestock farming account for 28.7% of the territory, while wooded forest land is clearly predominant, accounting for 63.8%.

In this respect, analysis of the territorial configuration shows that the northernmost and eastern sectors of the municipality have the most varied topography, alternating between summit areas, slopes and valleys. The former are distinguished by elevations well above 2,000 m, including Peñalara, Bola del Mundo and Montón de Trigo. These areas combine exposed rock with scrubland and pasture and, as elevation decreases and the different climatic belts succeed one another, give way to a variety of tree species. The most characteristic and emblematic of these is Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), also known as Valsaín pine, which has traditionally been highly valued and is widely recognised in the timber sector.

This area is of considerable natural value and has traditionally been used through the exploitation of its various endogenous resources, which have been associated, in the broadest sense, with forestry, hunting and livestock farming. In recent years, however, other forms of use and enjoyment have also developed, particularly those linked to tourism and leisure activities. These include sports such as skiing at the Navacerrada ski resort, as well as active tourism activities such as climbing and hiking. The road over the Navacerrada Pass is particularly important in providing access to this area, both from the Castile and León side (CL-601) and, above all, from the Madrid side (M-601), where it connects with the road to Cotos Pass (SG-615). Tourism has also been reinforced by the inclusion of a large part of this area within the boundaries of Sierra de Guadarrama National Park, which has the Valle de Valsaín Visitor Centre (Boca del Asno) within the municipality. The centre receives more than 12,000 visitors per year and is the only facility of its kind on the northern side of the Park. Park counters record more than 300,000 pedestrians annually and between 50,000 and 60,000 vehicle passages (Ayuntamiento del Real Sitio de San Ildefonso, 2019; Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico, 2023).

The remaining part of the municipality corresponds to the central, western and northern sectors, located at lower elevations, with the lowest areas lying at around 1,000 m above sea level, and comprising mid-slope areas and flatter terrain. Pine is less prevalent here, while other forest species are more prominent, including Pyrenean oak or *melojo* (*Quercus pyrenaica*) and holm oak (*Quercus ilex*). Also noteworthy is the significant presence of *dehesa* landscapes and meadow areas, which are closely associated with livestock farming.

One of the municipality's most distinctive features is its high natural value. The entirety of its territory is covered by at least one of seven forms of environmental protection: the Royal Site of San Ildefonso-El Espinar Biosphere Reserve; the Sierra de Guadarrama Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC); the Voltoya and Zorita Valleys SPA and SAC; Sierra de Guadarrama National Park, whose entire specially protected area lies within the municipality; and Sierra Norte de Guadarrama Natural Park. In addition, the environmental provisions of the Segovia Subregional Spatial Planning Guidelines include several protected sites. Within the municipality, the Pontón Alto reservoir, the entire River Eresma and several other watercourses are also designated as protected areas under the Duero River Basin Management Plan.

This important natural heritage is complemented by an equally significant cultural heritage, much of it linked to the Crown. The municipality contains several Assets of Cultural Interest, including buildings classified as Monuments such as the Casa de Oficios, the Antiguas Caballerizas, the Palacio de Valsaín, the Casa de la Botica, the Casa Bauer and the Real Fábrica de Cristales de La Granja, as well as the Palacio de La Granja, including its ancillary buildings and gardens, and the Palacio de Riofrío and Casa de Oficios del Bosque

de Riofrío. It also includes sites classified as Historic Gardens, namely the gardens of the Palacio de San Ildefonso and the Riofrío estate or woodland, together with the Historic Ensemble designation covering the settlement of La Granja de San Ildefonso. To these must be added an extensive list of protected elements included in the catalogue of the municipality's General Urban Development Plan.

Another distinctive feature is the significant presence of institutions and public bodies within the municipality. Patrimonio Nacional owns 199 properties, including the Royal Palace of La Granja, the fountains and gardens of La Granja and the Palace of Riofrío. These palace complexes constitute another of the municipality's principal tourist attractions, receiving between 300,000 and 400,000 visitors each year. Also noteworthy is the Organismo Autónomo Parques Nacionales, which owns the Pinar de Valsaín and Matas de Valsaín forests, both classified as being of public utility and together accounting for 75% of the municipality's total area. In addition, the Royal Site of San Ildefonso is home to several national centres: the Valsaín National Forest Genetic Resources Centre, located in Monte de Valsaín; the Centro Nacional del Vidrio Foundation, housed in the Real Fábrica de Cristales and incorporating the Museo Tecnológico del Vidrio; and the National Centre for Environmental Education, based in Valsaín.

3. The Royal Site of San Ildefonso: From Creative Theory to Territorial Project Implementation

3.1. The Strategic Plan of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso: Key Features of the Method Applied

As noted above, one of the main advantages of strategic planning is its capacity to operate, through a creative approach, at two levels. At the local level, it is well suited to intervening directly in matters concerning the territory itself; at the global level, it can do so through the development of mitigation and adaptation strategies or actions addressing issues which, although they have local effects, extend beyond municipal boundaries. This dual scale of action undoubtedly provides significant added value to this form of planning.

For all these reasons, the context of global change affecting every territory from social, economic, demographic, environmental and other perspectives further highlights the need for new development approaches which, based on a creative, innovative, flexible and open framework, make it possible to address identified needs and adapt to current circumstances without diminishing or undermining the identity-defining values of each territory.

On the basis of these preliminary considerations, the methodology applied in preparing the Strategic Plan of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso is structured into four components: diagnosis; SWOT/CAME analysis and identification of needs; intervention strategy; and monitoring and evaluation plan. Two further decisive elements are incorporated into the process: participation and the cross-cutting assessment of the Intervention Strategy (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Workflow of the Strategic Plan for the Royal Site of San Ildefonso



Source: Ayuntamiento del Real Sitio de San Ildefonso, 2019

The diagnosis provides the essential basis for a detailed and in-depth understanding of the territory under consideration. Its preparation takes into account the different variables (demographic, social, economic, cultural, political, etc.) operating in the Royal Site of San Ildefonso. It is necessary to understand their behaviour over time in order to identify their historical trends and current situation, as well as to anticipate their possible future development. It is also important to determine the extent to which these dynamics are global or local in nature, with the aim of establishing mitigation or adaptation measures in the former case, or specific measures to correct or enhance them in the latter.

Once an understanding of the territory and the variables affecting it has been acquired, the information is systematised within a structure that makes it possible to organise all the data obtained and draw conclusions from them. Hence the usefulness of preparing a SWOT matrix, which provides a concise overview of the Weaknesses, Threats, Strengths and Opportunities present in the Royal Site of San Ildefonso. The so-called CAME analysis is then applied to these factors in order to provide an initial indication of how Weaknesses might be Corrected, Threats Addressed, Strengths Maintained and Opportunities Exploited. A direct consequence of this process is the identification of the specific needs present within the municipality and, therefore, the areas in which action is required. These needs encompass both the shortcomings identified within the territory, which must be addressed, and the positive aspects and potential that offer scope for further improvement.

Once this point has been reached, the foundations are in place for developing the proposal component: the intervention strategy, which incorporates sectoral, cross-cutting and territorial aspects and must display three defining characteristics: integrated, in order to address all dimensions of the territory; open, because it is defined with the participation of all stakeholders present within the territory; and flexible, owing to its capacity for adaptation. Another defining feature of the strategy is its hierarchical tree structure (axes,

measures, lines and actions), which progresses from the most general issues to the most specific.

This is consistent with the reflections of Olmedo-Barchelo et al. (2020), for whom creative cities require the design of new models of inclusive development, understood in the broadest sense as encompassing all aspects that benefit everyday life and therefore taking into account socioeconomic, environmental, cultural and other factors.

Reaching this stage of the process has required participation to be conceived in an open and adaptable manner, combining horizontal participation through public consultation and contributions, key stakeholders and sectoral working groups with vertical participation through consultation at different levels of the administrations or institutions involved. Together with the development of the strategy itself, participation is one of the areas offering the greatest scope for incorporating a creative approach into the planning process.

The intervention strategy is assessed through a cross-cutting evaluation. The aim is to analyse the coordination of its actions and the internal synergies among them. This contributes, on the one hand, to examining the complementarity of the axes, lines, measures and actions and, on the other, to ensuring their suitability for addressing the needs identified. In addition, the Plan itself incorporates a Monitoring and Evaluation process designed to provide a tool for assessing the extent to which the strategy has been developed and implemented once the final document has been approved, both in terms of its implementation and its degree of physical and financial effectiveness.

3.2. Participatory Planning through a Creative Approach: A Symbiosis for Defining the Territorial Model Desired by the Community

In a context in which strategic territorial planning is conceived as an integrated planning tool capable of defining and achieving the territorial model desired by a community (Fernández García & Olay Varillas, 2021), citizen participation in all its forms, together with citizens' commitment, constitutes a fundamental element of territorial development for two reasons. First, citizens possess direct knowledge of the particularities, strengths and weaknesses of the territory itself. Second, it is the citizens themselves who will ultimately experience the positive and negative consequences of the territorial policy adopted (Martínez Fernández & Olay Varillas, 2025).

From this perspective, the citizen participation process associated with the Strategic Plan of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso was designed to be open and adaptable, combining, as outlined above, horizontal and vertical participation. This made it possible to involve all stakeholders and segments of municipal society, thereby enriching the document.

For all these reasons, the participation process constituted a particularly valuable mechanism for obtaining information on more qualitative aspects, providing first-hand perspectives on and knowledge of the territory, as well as generating ideas and proposals for the future (Martínez Fernández et al., 2016). All of this helps to complete the territorial diagnosis, identify and specify needs, and define the strategy. The information gathered during the process was systematised and anonymised for inclusion in the document itself, since it constituted an indispensable source for the preparation of the Plan. Implementing this participatory process required the identification of a broad range of key stakeholders, with whom an ongoing dialogue was maintained throughout the preparation of the Plan.

In this regard, co-creation, understood as a management initiative that brings together different actors with the aim of achieving an outcome that is satisfactory and beneficial to the different parties involved (Baena García, 2019), finds a particularly suitable field of application in strategic territorial planning in general and in its participatory processes in particular. Indeed, one of the objectives of this form of planning is to achieve the social and economic model desired by the community. Villalobos Ramírez (2024) likewise highlights the role of co-creation in creative design as an issue of considerable importance, whereby citizens are conceived not merely as passive beneficiaries but also as active agents in finding solutions to the problems that affect them. Along similar lines, Hernández-Gil & Herrera

Peralta-(2021) refer to tools for co-creating responses to the socioeconomic circumstances of a society through research that incorporates a new dynamic:

the participation of the individuals under analysis as actors with two essential functions: i) to provide information as a source for generating new knowledge, and ii) to collaborate in creative solutions (Ansell & Torfing, 2014), to the point of transforming reality (Innerarity, 2011). (Hernández-Gil & Herrera-Peralta, 2021, p. 22)

3.3. Strategic Development for the Royal Site of San Ildefonso

Strategic planning for the Royal Site of San Ildefonso was structured around three main aspirations: (1) improving the population's quality of life; (2) preserving both cultural and natural heritage; and (3) strengthening and diversifying the local economy. These aspirations were intended to address the 12 needs identified: (1) fostering positive demographic trends and rejuvenating the population structure; (2) combating the high degree of seasonality in both residential occupancy and tourism; (3) increasing the use of underutilised resources; (4) promoting associative activity as a development mechanism across different sectors; (5) encouraging entrepreneurship and the consolidation of SMEs and self-employed workers; (6) promoting training and professionalisation in the sectors with the greatest needs; (7) fostering the use and development of the primary sector; (8) promoting a tourism revitalisation programme; (9) supporting the conservation, research and enhancement of heritage resources; (10) improving the management of sustainable and safe mobility; (11) optimising municipal administrative management and consolidating inter-administrative cooperation; and (12) increasing the local population's knowledge of the municipality's resources and activities.

On this basis, the intervention strategy of the Strategic Plan of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso represents the culmination of a process translated into concrete and applicable measures. The strategy is structured around five major axes or strategic focal areas, from which the lines, measures and actions derive: (1) economic activity and employment; (2) quality of life and social development; (3) communication and transport; (4) heritage; and (5) governance, administrative simplification and citizen participation.

This resulted in a planning framework with two fundamental characteristics: on the one hand, rigour in addressing the needs identified and, on the other, realism. Its measures were defined through a co-creative approach arising from the broad and comprehensive participatory process, which involved collaboration among the administration, citizens, the business community and the drafting team.

3.3.1. Economic Activity and Employment

The economic diversification of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso in itself justifies the definition of a specific strategic focal area aimed at maintaining and consolidating this characteristic. Economic activity and employment are characterised by the predominance of the tertiary and secondary sectors. This situation is closely linked to two fundamental factors: the diversity of its landscape and the richness of both its natural and cultural heritage, together with its well-established industrial tradition. This is reflected in the presence of numerous businesses related to hospitality and accommodation, as well as a major glass-manufacturing facility and other activities. By contrast, the primary sector is characterised by its limited importance.

Each sector presents its own particular circumstances and therefore needs to be addressed individually. Accordingly, this axis is structured around four lines of action: one for each economic and productive sector (primary, secondary and tertiary), and a fourth, cross-cutting line devoted to issues relating to business and employment in general.

In view of these considerations, the axis was designed with the aim, on the one hand, of strengthening and consolidating the secondary and tertiary sectors, as these are the most

dynamic and are regarded as strategic sectors for local development. On the other hand, it seeks to revitalise the primary sector, which has progressively lost importance within the municipality's economic and employment structure and currently faces new scenarios, challenges, needs and difficulties.

All of this is framed by the dual objective of making structural progress towards a more resilient and diversified local economy with sufficient capacity to respond effectively to periods of recession or unforeseen adverse circumstances. Ultimately, the main rationale of this axis lies in pursuing the balanced development of local economic sectors by drawing on endogenous resources.

3.3.2. Quality of Life and Social Development

Beyond the richness and diversity of its extensive heritage (cultural, environmental, landscape, etc.), quality of life in the Royal Site of San Ildefonso is closely related to its urban character, which has been strongly shaped both by its historical links to the Crown and by its current position within the sphere of influence of some of the major urban areas at provincial, regional and national levels.

Within this markedly urban context, the consolidation of the polycentric area formed by the Valladolid-Segovia-Madrid axis, within which the Royal Site of San Ildefonso is located, creates considerable and novel development opportunities arising from the varying intensity of the flows and relationships of all kinds that take place on a daily basis along this axis. These flows are reinforced by the main road and rail links connecting these areas. This location already exerts an influence on the Royal Site of San Ildefonso and must be properly managed and harnessed in order to enhance its territorial advantages over other areas with similar characteristics, while also improving its services and facilities and further strengthening its integration into the urban system described above.

The Royal Site of San Ildefonso's integration into and adaptation to this higher-order urban reality, together with the functions deriving from its inclusion within it, are essential to maintaining and improving quality of life. For this reason, the main aim of this second axis was to incorporate a series of proposals which, in the form of specific actions, would be capable of promoting and supporting processes of continuous innovation in an urban area able to adapt to citizens' evolving demands in relation to housing, public services, basic services and infrastructure, leisure and recreation, among other areas. All of these issues focus attention on the urban policies to be implemented in order to improve the quality of life of the local population. At the same time, this strategic axis is geared towards a form of development that seeks to integrate the town's historical values with any new urban elements that may emerge.

It is also noteworthy that the quality of life of the local population rests not only on the municipality's status as a functionally integrated small urban area or on the availability of basic services and infrastructure, but also on other intangible factors, such as a sense of tranquillity, enjoyment of nature and heritage, and respect for the environment.

3.3.3. Communication and Transport

In general terms, both physical and technological connectivity, together with the intrinsic relationships characteristic of urban and peri-urban environments, simultaneously constitute cross-cutting factors of competitiveness and opportunity for the socioeconomic development of territories, as well as for improving different indicators of social well-being, economic activity and demographic dynamism within a given area.

All of these issues are particularly relevant in the Royal Site of San Ildefonso, which has a small urban centre but plays an important role in the urban network and the spatial organisation of the province. At the same time, it forms part of Madrid's sphere of influence and displays economic dynamism based on the diversification of local activity. In this context, improved accessibility through modern transport infrastructure, together with

appropriate Information and Communication Technologies, constitutes a strategic area that should be strengthened and optimised.

Improved accessibility is a key differentiating factor for progress in two respects: economic and demographic. From an economic perspective, it not only facilitates access to new markets but also strengthens links with existing ones. From a demographic perspective, it contributes to retaining the local population and attracting new residents by facilitating employment-related and leisure flows and interactions with the main population centres both within and beyond the surrounding area.

Furthermore, from a purely physical perspective, the location of the Royal Site on the aforementioned Valladolid-Segovia-Madrid axis offers considerable potential for taking advantage of this metropolitan integration. Although this potential has not been fully exploited in recent decades, it is an aspect that the Strategic Plan must take into account given the considerable scope for improvement and development in terms of economic activity, as well as from demographic and social perspectives.

Ultimately, the advantageous strategic position of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso within a wider territorial framework, directly linked to improved accessibility and closer connections with other major urban centres, enhances its prospects for maintaining and strengthening both its population and local economy. This is one of the factors that provides sufficient justification for the design of a specific axis devoted to communication and transport.

3.3.4. Heritage

The existence of an exceptional wealth of environmental and cultural resources, together with their importance as strategic assets for the development of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso, justifies the inclusion of a dedicated axis within the intervention strategy defined in the Strategic Plan.

One of the municipality's most distinctive features is undoubtedly the diversity of its landscapes and the richness of its cultural heritage, which together constitute a differentiating factor in relation to other territories, not only at provincial level but also at regional and even national level.

The fact that the Royal Site possesses a significant concentration of heritage, cultural, environmental and landscape assets of recognised value is of considerable importance when defining the intervention strategy. These elements are not only part of the local community's identity but also constitute an economic driver and retain considerable potential as resources for stimulating economic and social activity.

From this perspective, this heritage axis is oriented towards implementing actions aimed at optimising the use of these resources through policies that prioritise their conservation, promotion and integration into activities that are not only economic in nature but also related to local social and cultural dynamism.

In view of the above, it is important to emphasise that actions aimed at preserving and restoring these heritage assets carry significant weight *per se* within local territorial policy, both as a sector of activity and in terms of environmental restoration and employment generation.

Ultimately, the municipality's extraordinary and diverse environmental and cultural heritage is one of its principal defining features. Progress in its maintenance, improvement, dissemination and enhancement, with sustainability as a priority, therefore constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of local development and must, in turn, contribute to improving the quality of life of its inhabitants. Achieving this objective requires effective coordination among the various administrations and bodies, at different levels, that exercise competences within such a distinctive municipality.

3.3.5. Governance, Administrative Simplification and Citizen Participation

The coexistence in the Royal Site of San Ildefonso of multiple public bodies belonging to different levels of government sometimes creates a complex administrative framework that hampers development by imposing procedures and timeframes that are not always as agile or efficient as they should be.

This situation affects not only local administrative management in relation to business and social matters, but is further compounded when the involvement of supra-municipal administrations is required for everyday issues. In this respect, overlapping competences, excessive administrative procedures, delays in processing cases and the concentration of certain functions in the provincial, regional or national capital become significant barriers that hinder the development of projects and even the completion of routine administrative procedures by residents.

Issues such as establishing appropriate and effective channels of collaboration and coordination between administrations; providing citizens and businesses with digital tools for carrying out administrative procedures online; offering services through one-stop shops; and ensuring that local authorities have the resources and capacities required to provide citizens with more agile and efficient responses are matters that need to be addressed by the Strategic Plan. To this end, the intervention strategy includes a markedly cross-cutting axis aimed, on the one hand, at facilitating all these processes for society and, on the other, at simplifying bureaucratic management within public administrations.

4. Conclusions

At its inception, and in general terms, any strategic plan with a territorial focus can be understood as an operational instrument that makes it possible, in a reasoned, coherent and structured manner, to define and guide the principal courses of action which, in the medium term, will enable the achievement of a previously defined territorial model collectively agreed through the participation of the different stakeholders involved (the drafting team, public administrations and society). These issues are directly related to the preparation of a strategic project underpinned by an innovative and creative approach, built on shared leadership and cooperation among the different actors involved in the process.

As in any other territory, the combination of physical factors (relief, climate, soils, vegetation, etc.) with the diverse range of human activities has resulted in the current configuration of the territory, generating the particular features that define, identify and distinguish the Royal Site of San Ildefonso. In short, nature and landscape, population and economic activities constitute the fundamental pillars underpinning the strategic planning process examined in this article, which is approached from a creative perspective.

In a territory as distinctive as the Royal Site of San Ildefonso, with numerous particularities and responsibilities concentrated within an area of just over 140 km² and a population of 5,000, creativity is essential in defining its territorial model. In the Royal Site, purely local issues are intertwined with multiple and diverse external factors and actors that are fundamental to its present configuration and everyday functioning. Its relationship with its immediate surroundings, both as part of Segovia's urban periphery and as a service provider for nearby municipalities in the province, gives it considerable importance. In addition, its border with Madrid and its location within the Sierra de Guadarrama create strong links with another autonomous community, further reinforced by its position on the Valladolid-Segovia-Madrid axis.

Against this backdrop, the Strategic Plan is oriented towards a future scenario of sustainable development that takes into account a wide range of variables, many of them intrinsic to the territory itself, but many others extending beyond local boundaries. It is a highly creative strategy structured around five strategic axes that frame the principal lines of action through which progress is to be made.

5. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Ayuntamiento del Real Sitio de San Ildefonso (Segovia), which enabled us to put the principles of strategic territorial planning into practice and to apply our own creative working method within the municipality. This resulted in the preparation, between 2017 and 2020, of the "Strategic Plan of the Royal Site of San Ildefonso", which has provided the basis and guiding framework for the development and writing of this paper.

References

- Ayuntamiento del Real Sitio de San Ildefonso (2019). *Plan Estratégico del Real Sitio de San Ildefonso*. Ayuntamiento del Real Sitio de San Ildefonso. <https://www.lagranjaval-sain.com/files/ayuntamiento/2020/PLAN ESTRATEGICO 2020 Real Sitio San Ildefonso.pdf>
- Baena García, A. (2019). La cocreación. Definición y características. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. <https://openaccess.uoc.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/48b552c5-5995-43d0-811d-e8b1269de7e4/content>
- Calderón Calderón, B. (2012). Áreas urbanas y estructura de las ciudades de Castilla y León. En Delgado J.M., *Población y poblamiento en Castilla y León* (pp. 740-809). C.E.S. de Castilla y León. <https://uvadoc.uva.es/bitstream/handle/10324/9116/Capitulo%20libro%20Ces.%20Poblaci%c3%b3n%20y%20poblamiento.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Chiarella Quinhoes, R. (2005). Planificación estratégica y desarrollo territorial. *Espacio Y Desarrollo*, (17), 208-225. <https://revistas.pucp.edu.pe/index.php/espacioydesarrollo/article/view/11355>
- Consejería de Presidencia de la Comunidad de Castilla y León (2014, septiembre 26). Decreto-Ley 2/2014, de 25 de septiembre, por el que se declaran las áreas funcionales estables de Castilla y León. *Boletín Oficial de Castilla y León*. <https://bocyl.jcyl.es/boletines/2014/09/26/pdf/BOCYL-D-26092014-1.pdf>
- Farinós Dasí, J., Olcina Cantos, J., Rico Amorós, A., Rodríguez Navarro, C., Romero Renau, L., Espejo Marín, C. & Vera Rebollo, F. (2005). Planes estratégicos territoriales de carácter supramunicipal. *Boletín de la Asociación de Geógrafos Españoles*, 39, 117-149. <https://bage.age-geografia.es/ojs/index.php/bage/article/view/501>
- Fernández García, F. & Olay Varillas, D. (2021). La planificación estratégica como instrumento de desarrollo territorial integral. *Ciudad Y Territorio Estudios Territoriales*, 53(208), 285-310. <https://doi.org/10.37230/CyTET.2021.208.01>
- Fernández Güell, J. M. (1997). *Planificación estratégica de ciudades*. Gustavo Gili, SA.
- Fernández Güell, J. M. (2010). La prospectiva en la planificación estratégica de ciudades y territorios. En A. Martín Mesa & R. Merinero Rodríguez (Dirs.), *Planificación estratégica territorial. Estudios metodológicos* (pp. 71-85). Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Gobernación y Justicia.
- Hermosilla Pla, J. & Mayordomo Maya, S. (2024). La planificación estratégica territorial participada y su relevancia en el desarrollo local sostenible. Una propuesta de caracterización desde la praxis. En F. J. García-Delgado, M. Hernández-Hernández, A. Martínez-Puche, L. A., Hortelano Mínguez & V. M. Zapata-Hernández (Eds.), *(Con)textos de desarrollo local. Dos décadas de Geografía Aplicada (2003-2023)* (pp. 113-136). Asociación Española de Geografía (AGE)-Grupo de Trabajo de Desarrollo Local de la Asociación Española de Geografía (GTDL-AGE). <https://doi.org/10.21138/dl.2024.6>
- Hernández-Gil, C., & Herrera-Peralta, C. C. (2022). Co-creación aplicada a la gestión de la innovación en sectores de una economía local. *Revista de Investigación, Desarrollo e Innovación*, 12(1), 21-34. <https://doi.org/10.19053/20278306.v12.n1.2022.14202>
- INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística) (2025a). *Censo anual de población*.
- INE (2025b). *Nomenclátor*.
- Junta de Castilla y León (2014). *Mapas Áreas Funcionales Estables (AFES)*. Mapas AFES. Segovia. https://www.jcyl.es/web/jcyl/binarios/800/273/AFE_Segovia_SEP-14.0.pdf?blobheader=application%2Fpdf%3Bcharset%3DUTF-8&blobnocache=true
- Maturana Miranda, F., Rojas Böttner, A. & Poblete López, D. (2016). Trayectoria, evolución y estructura del sistema de ciudades: el caso de la región de Bío-Bío (Chile).

- Cuadernos de Geografía - Revista Colombiana de Geografía*, 25(2), 39-58.
<https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.15446/rcdg.v25n2.45787>
- Martín Mesa, A. & Merinero Rodríguez, R. (2010). Planificación estratégica urbana: un instrumento de gobernanza local para las ciudades y territorios. En A. Martín Mesa y R. Merinero Rodríguez (Dirs.), *Planificación estratégica territorial. Estudios metodológicos* (pp. 13-21). Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Gobernación.
<https://blogs.ujaen.es/catpetdlg/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Libro-Planificacion-Estrategica-Territorial.pdf>
- Martínez Fernández, L. C., Moreno Mínguez, A. & Molina de la Torre, I. (2016). La calidad de vida en el territorio local: propuesta metodológica y práctica de campo. *Prisma Social. Revista de Investigación Social*, 17, 319-342.
<https://revistaprismasocial.es/article/view/1287>
- Martínez Fernández, L. C. & Olay Varillas, D. (2025). City and city model: Villaviciosa as a territory-project in Central Asturias. *Street Art & Urban Creativity*, 11(2), 175–193.
<https://doi.org/10.62161/sauc.v11.5718>
- Ministerio de Vivienda y Agenda Urbana (2025). *Áreas Urbanas de España 2025*.
<https://publicaciones.transportes.gob.es/downloadcustom/sample/3943>
- Ministerio de Fomento (2000). Atlas estadístico de las áreas urbanas de España.
- Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico (2023). *Centro Montes y Aserradero de Valsain. Memoria Anual de Actividades, 2022*.
<https://www.miteco.gob.es/content/dam/miteco/es/parques-nacionales-oapn/centros-fincas/valsain/MEMORIA-ANUAL-2022-CMAV.pdf>
- Molina de la Torre, I. & Delgado Urrecho, J. M. (2014). Una estructura territorial contrastada. En Martínez Fernández, L. C. & Moreno Mínguez, A. (Eds.), *La provincia de Segovia. Interpretación del espacio y definición del modelo territorial* (pp. 353-414). Diputación de Segovia.
<https://uvadoc.uva.es/bitstream/handle/10324/22479/Cap%c3%adtulo%207.%20Una%20estructura%20territorial%20contrastada.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Olay Varillas, D. (2025). *La planificación estratégica integral como instrumento de política territorial: propuesta metodológica y ensayo de aplicación en Asturias* [Tesis inédita]. Universidad de Oviedo.
- Olmedo-Barchello, S., Cristaldo, J.C., Rodríguez, G., Silva, M. da, Acosta, A. & Barrios, O. (2020). Ciudades creativas y su aporte a la creación de un nuevo modelo de desarrollo económico, social y cultural. Una revisión de la literatura. *Población y Desarrollo*, 26(50), 53-63. <https://doi.org/10.18004/pdfce/2076-054x/2020.026.50.053-063>
- Patrimonio Nacional (2025, enero 2). *Patrimonio Nacional bate su récord histórico de visitantes en 2024*.
<https://www.patrimonionacional.es/actualidad/noticias/patrimonio-nacional-bate-su-record-historico-de-visitantes-en-2024>
- Presidencia de la Comunidad de Castilla y León (2014, diciembre 3). Ley 9/2014, de 27 de noviembre, por la que se declaran las áreas funcionales estables de Castilla y León y se modifica la Ley 7/2013, de 27 de septiembre, de Ordenación, Servicios y Gobierno del Territorio de la Comunidad de Castilla y León. *Boletín Oficial de Castilla y León*.
<https://bocyl.jcyl.es/boletines/2014/12/03/pdf/BOCYL-D-03122014-1.pdf>
- Pred, A. (1977). *City-Systems in Advanced Economies: Past Growth, Present Processes, and Future Development Options*. Hutchinson.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315103136>
- SIE (Sistema de Información Estadística. Junta de Castilla y León) (2025). *Cuentas de cotización*.
- Solís Trapero, E. (2008). El horizonte urbano madrileño: más allá de la región político-administrativa. *Anales de Geografía*, 28(1), 133-162.

<https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/AGUC/article/view/AGUC0808110133A/30862>

- Velasco Romera, I. (2011). La expansión del área urbana de Segovia. Transformación paisajística del entorno rural periurbano. En V. González Pérez, & J. A. Marco Molina, Juan Antonio (eds.), *Urbanismo expansivo, de la utopía a la realidad. Comunicaciones al XXII Congreso de Geógrafos Españoles* (pp. 779-790). Universidad de Alicante. <https://rua.ua.es/server/api/core/bitstreams/296fcd0c-50de-4c46-aede-914d6d8f9022/content>
- Villalobos Ramírez, S. (2024). Co-creación en ONGs costarricenses: un estudio exploratorio sobre prácticas participativas. *Revista Reflexiones*. 104(1), 1-25. <https://archivo.revistas.ucr.ac.cr//index.php/reflexiones/article/view/57216>