The Urban Square as the Origin of Bullfighting Architecture in Spain and Spanish America: Key Case Studies

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Abstract

The main squares of many towns typically feature specific architectural characteristics and dimensions that distinguish them from other, less relevant public spaces. These large, quadrangular spaces, were intended to host various civic and festive functions and festive activities, including celebrations, markets, and spectacles such as bullfighting. Their evolution, from medieval plazas to main Squares and eventually to bullrings, reflects the changing social and cultural needs of communities. Each type of bullring has played an important role in urban life, adapting to architectural and urban transformations throughout the history of cities. Bullrings have undergone a remarkable evolution since their origins. Initially, bullfighting events took place in castle parade grounds or town squares. However, from the 18th century onward, a radical shift occurred, leading to the construction to dedicated bullrings. These new structures adopted various shapes -square, hexagonal, and eventually circular- and were initially made of wood. In the Americas, the Ordinances of Discovery and Population of 1573 play a key role in establishing a standardised urban model in the Spanish colonies. These regulations aimed not only to organise the urban space but also to facilitate the celebration of public events, such as markets, processions, and equestrian festivals, which included bullfighting shows. The Main Squares, originally conceived as multifunctional spaces, gradually evolved to accommodate bullfighting spectacles, ultimately giving rise to bullrings. This study will analyse the morphological and functional transition from Main Squares to Bullrings, highlighting their impact on urban and cultural development. The future of bullrings depends on their ability to adapt to cultural and social changes, while maintaining their architectural and heritage value. Their continuity will rely on their capacity to reinvent themselves and respond to the needs of today's society.

Keywords: *Bullrings, Cultural heritage, Main Squares, public festivities, tauromachy, urban evolution*

1. Introduction

Within the framework of historical urban geography, it is possible to analyse the physical evolution of cities while also understanding how urban planning has shaped social life through specific events. From this perspective, the studying the history of the main squares in Spain reveals not only their architectural heritage but also their role in bullfighting traditions.

Although sources such as Martín (1959) indicate that bullfights originally took place in royal palaces, it is essential to examine the structure, significance, and function of the Main Squares in contemporary bullfighting traditions, as they are considered the primary predecessors of modern bullrings [1]. These spaces historically combined mercantile, representation, and festive elements. However, above all, they served as settings for everyday life, which is why their architectural typology is often described as domestic, Diaz (1993) [2]

the precise origins of these urban locations remain unclear; though they are generally situated between the 14th and 19th centuries, exemplifying the influence of Renaissance trends that shaped not only art but also Spanish collective life. As urban structures, the Main Squares became venues for diverse cultural expressions of the Middle Ages, with bullfighting being particularly significant. From an anthropological and cultural approach, these spaces enclosed and organized festivities that gathered the Spanish public and shaped the nature of public expressions over time.

2. Objectives

- Analyze the morphological transition from Main Squares to bullrings in Europe and the Americas, examining the factors that influenced this transformation..
- Identify emblematic case studies that illustrate this evolution, highlighting their historical and architectural significance.
- Examine the impact of the Ordinances of Discovery and Population (1573) on the spatial configuration of bullfighting venues in the Americas, considering their urban and social implications.

3. State of the Art

Literature and State Archives examine this topic from various theoretical perspectives:

- Geography of Tauromachy, Maudet (2017): Analyzes bullfighting from geographic, cultural and historical perspectives in both Europe and Latin America [3].
- Bulls and Urbanism in Spain: Main Squares, Correderas and Toriles, López (2014): Investigates the imprint of bullfighting festivals on Spain`s Main Squares. [4]

-Ordinances of Discovery and Population, Philip II (1573): Establishes regulations for new settlements and social organization in the Americas, shaping urban configurations, including bullfighting spaces [5].
- The Main Square of Spain, Navascués (2002): Explores the origins and evolution of Spain's Main Squares, highlighting their architectural and social significance .[6]
- The Main Square in Spain and Spanish America. Geographical studies, Ricard (1950): Examines the historical and spatial connections between Spanish Main Squares and their counterparts in Spanish America [7]**.**

4. Methodology

This study employs a multidisciplinary approach that integrates the following methods:

1. Historical-Critical Analysis: A comprehensive review of chronicles, maps, and colonial ordinances to examine the evolution of bullfighting spaces and their urban significance.
2. Comparative Case Study Approach: Analysis of emblematic sites in Europe and the Americas to identify patterns in the transformation of Main Squares into bullfighting venues:
   - o Europe: Main Square in Madrid (Spain), Plaza de San Francisco in Seville.
   - o America: Main Square in Panamá, Plaza de Volador in México City.
3. Archival Research: Examination of primary sources housed in key Spanish archives:
   - o General Archive of the Indies (Archivo General de Indias).
   - o Municipal Archives of Seville (Archivo Municipal de Sevilla).

5. Historical Background of Main Squares

Navascués (1993) suggests that the origins of Main Squares align with the logics of the Greek agora, later acquiring additional attributes during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the colonial urbanism imposed in the Americas, particularly Mexico towards the 18th century. This evolution imparted to these spaces a sense of universality and reinforced their role as public and collective domains [6]. However, this argument is not widely accepted from the Spanish perspective. Díaz (1993) proposes alternative origins rooted in Muslim traditions, highlighting the presence of bulls, bullrings, and other elements within Spanish festive history as indicative of this influence[2].

During the 16th century, several evolved models of Main Squares emerged, culminating in later versions characterized by rectangular layouts with facades supported by arcaded structures, creating a sense of architectural harmony. However, variations in form and function were also observed. On the subject, Ricard (1950) describes the Main Square as a rectangular structure bordered by monumental buildings of uniform style, distinguished by their prominent arcades -among the most notable examples being those of Madrid and Salamanca [7].

The existence of an organic typology of Main Squares, shaped by topography and vernacular architectural sensibilities, endowed them with a distinctive picturesque quality. Due to their scale and integration within the urban fabric, these spaces were considered as genuinely natural rather than artificially designed, embodying an aesthetic of spontaneous beauty. Ricard notes that in these settings, "where the rural and popular prevail over the more cultured and erudite conception (...) where each is expressed with its own voice in the general concert of Spanish squares that makes them Castilian" (p.3) [7].

As the central axis of urban life, the Main Square also served commercial and military purposes. This dual role led to its use for both civic celebrations and punitive spectacles, including public executions and criminal punishments. Conversely, it also provided the stage for events of positive connotation, such as religious processions, weddings, tournaments, and theatrical performances (Fig. 1)**.**

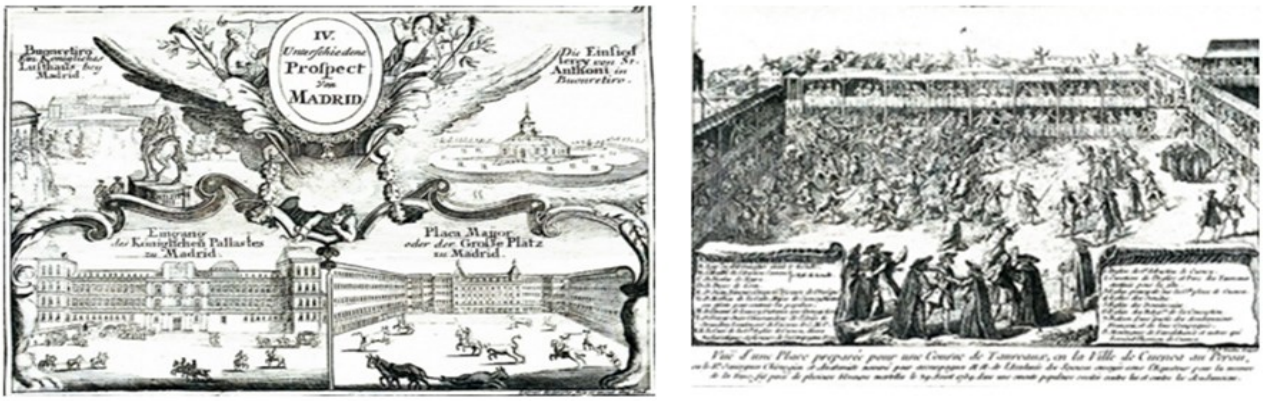

Fig. 1. Plaza Mayor de Madrid during bullfighting festivities celebrating the marriage of Charles II and Mariana of Austria, 1690 (left); Plaza Mayor de Cuenca, Peru, 1920–1930 (right). Collection: Real Maestranza de Sevilla. Source: Photograph taken by the authors at the Bullfighting Museum of the Bullring de Sevilla.

In relation to public recreational activities, the Main Square functioned as a space distinct from commercial areas, serving as a dedicated venue for events. Typically rectangular in shape, it was interconnected with surrounding streets, which often featured arcades. A notable example of the festivities held in Madrid's Main Square is the bullfighting celebration for the Marriage of Charles II and Mariana of Austria in 1690. Beyond festive events, the square also hosted judicial spectacles, including executions and bonfires.

During bullfight events, the entrances to adjacent streets were sealed with wooden boards, and the space was even illuminated to accommodate nighttime spectacles. Records indicate that by 1605, following the birth of Philip IV, candelabra were installed as a symbol of the widespread joy occasioned by the event. A common practice during festivities was the rental of windows overlooking the square, allowing property owners to generate income while providing spectators with privileged views for enjoyment. After the fire of 1561, Francisco de Salamanca traced his design based on the "market-square", providing a sense of everyday life to the structures.

Navascués (1993) reflects on the European context of the late Middle Ages, when military and commercial developments propelled

what became known as the "renewal of the city", leading to new settlement patterns and urban transformations driven by economic imperatives. Additionally, the crowns of Castile and Aragon consolidated control over territories previously under Muslim rule, initiating the foundation of new cities structured around central squares, as seen in Villarreal de los Infantes [6]. There, the Main Square was strategically located at the intersection of the city's two principal axes, ensuring direct connectivity with the entrances of the walled enclosure. While time has eroded some of its original essence, elements of its foundational design remain intact.

Key infrastructural aspects of Main Squares included the layout of wooden structures and the adaptation of porticoes to accommodate stands, as well as the installation of staircases at corners to optimize spectator capacity. These design features evolved progressively to enhance more space for growing congregation of attendees.

Regarding the typology of Main Squares, Flórez (2008) identifies two primary models: the "Ordered Main Square " and the "Planned or Regular Main Square". The first model, believed to originate from the Catholic Monarchs as an extension of medieval market squares, was conceived with a strong utilitarian focus, [8]. A defining feature of this typology was the inclusion of "consistories" - official administrative buildings- integrating public space under a unified design concept, coinciding with the contributions already cited by Díaz [2]

On the characterization of the Main Square as an urban phenomenon, López (2008) highlights its deliberate exclusion of natural ornamentation and surrounding monuments , as well as the elimination of residential and commercial functions. This pretended isolation confers the square a distinct complexity : "it is left to itself, with its ability to attract the flows of sociability, to produce the necessary permeabilities. Being designed as a space for interior experiences, its capacity for isolation is even structural" (p.199) [4].

6. The Role of Major Squares in Urban Planning

According to Diaz (1993) the architecture of the Main Square contributed to the harmony and order of Spanish infrastructure [7]. This was regulated through ordinances that unified aspects such as facades. Aguilera (1977) referred to the Spanish Crown's intention to promote "a repertoire of legal, economic, administrative norms...constitutive of an urbanistic theory of special relevance" (p.9) wherein the city served as the axis formalizing diverse relationships within the social fabric [9].

Although most Spanish cities were characterized by irregular layouts due to Muslim urbanistic influence, the Ordinances aimed to establish patterns, particularly during the late Middle Ages. This Spanish approach became mostly visible during the conquests in newly influenced territories Wyrobisz. (1981) noted, "Spanish theory and practice in the construction of colonial cities in America was a unique phenomenon of its kind. We know of no other example of such detailed legal regulation of matters related to the founding of new cities" (p.33) [10].

6.1 The Main Square of Madrid

The Main Square of Madrid was inaugurated in 1617 and designed by the architect Juan Gómez de Mora. It was conceived as a multifunctional space, serving as a marketplace, a venue for political ceremonies, theatrical representations, bullfighting festivals, the game of canes, royal proclamations, and religious processions (Fig. 2). The square is a closed rectangular space measuring129 meters in length and 94 meters in width. The surrounding buildings, standing five floors high (23 meters), feature 477 balconies for spectators, 277 of which were available for rent during festivities.

Fig. 2. Plan of Madrid by Frederic de Wit and Antonio Marcelli, 1622-1635. Source: Miguel de Cervantes Virtual Library

On the north side of the square stood the Bakery House, with bread stalls on the ground floor and upper floors designated for the royal hall used for ceremonies. The south side housed the Casa de la Carnicería, which contained public butcher shops, as well as salt and leather warehouses. The east and west sides accommodated blacksmiths, rented housing for the secondary nobility, and carriage gates. The square had nine entrance arches, the most outstanding being the Toledo Arch on the south side and the Cuchilleros Arch on the northwest side.

This square functioned as a bullring until 1749 when King Ferdinand VI commissioned the construction of the Puerta de Alcalá bullring, which he donated to Madrid's two hospitals. Designed by the architect Ventura Rodríguez, this new bullring had a capacity of 12,000 spectators (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Main Square of Madrid during a bullfight, 1960 (left). Source: Miguel de Cervantes Virtual Library. Aerial view of Madrid and the Puerta de Alcalá bullring, 1854, by Alfred Guesdon (right). Source: Ceres.mcu.es

6.2 The Plaza de San Francisco in Seville

The Plaza de San Francisco in Seville has borne this name since 1980. Unlike other Spanish capitals, Seville has never had a main square in the traditional sense, but this square has historically fulfilled that role and is considered the city's main axis. Trapezoidal in shape, it maintains its medieval layout and has served various functions over time, including as a marketplace, a site for proclamations, executions, religious processions and bullfights.

The square was surrounded by key structures integral to Seville's religious, commercial, and political life. On the north side stood the Town Hall (Casa Consistorial), while the east side was home to the convent of San Francisco. The east side featured noble residences, and the south side housed shops and commercial establishments. The buildings surrounding the square followed a hierarchical height structure, ranging from two to four floors, with balconies overlooking the plaza.

Fig. 4. Map of Seville, 1771, showing the location of the Plaza de San Francisco. Source: Archive of the Seville Provincial Council.

In 1730, a bullfight was held in the Plaza de San Francisco to celebrate the visit of King Philip V to Seville during his journey (Fig. 5). The medieval trapezoidal plaza was temporarily adapted with three-level wooden structures, with a capacity for 8,000 spectators. Following this bullfight, construction began on a rectangular wooden bullring in the Arenal sector, chosen for its strategic location near the river, outside the historic center, and for facilitating the transport of bulls from the Andalusian pastures.

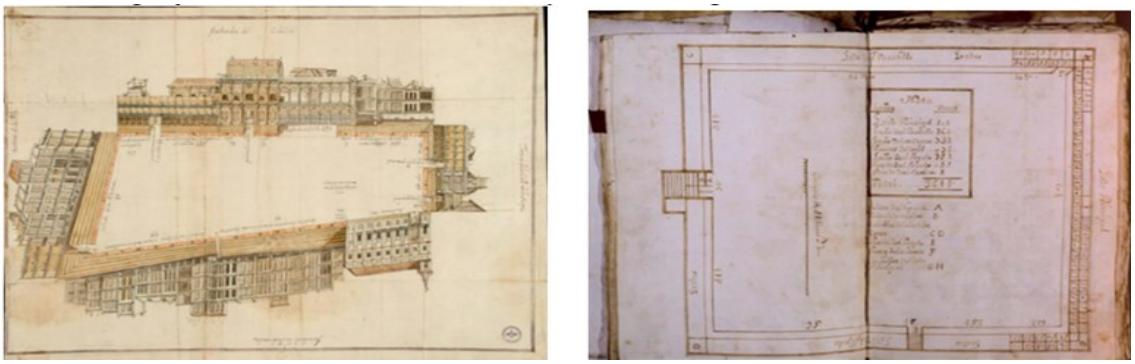

Fig. 5. Plan of the Plaza de San Francisco prepared for the bullfight celebrating the stay of King Philip V, 1730 (Left), Source: Archive. Plan of the first wooden bullring in Seville,1733 (Right), Source: Photograph taken by the authors at the library of the Real Maestranza in Seville.

6.3 The Main Squares in the Americas

Main squares in America serve as the central axis of the city, surrounded by buildings and streets that house key administrative and religious institutions, such as the City Hall and the Cathedral, along with the most important commercial establishments.

In managing territorial expansion, authorities drew upon prior experiences in structuring domains. This knowledge laid the foundation for a comprehensive set of regulations outlined in the Ordinances of Discovery, New Population and Pacification, issued by Philip II in the Forest of Segovia on July 13, 1573 (Fig. 6). These ordinances originated from the Council of the Indies; the governing body responsible for organizing all administrative affairs in the Americas.

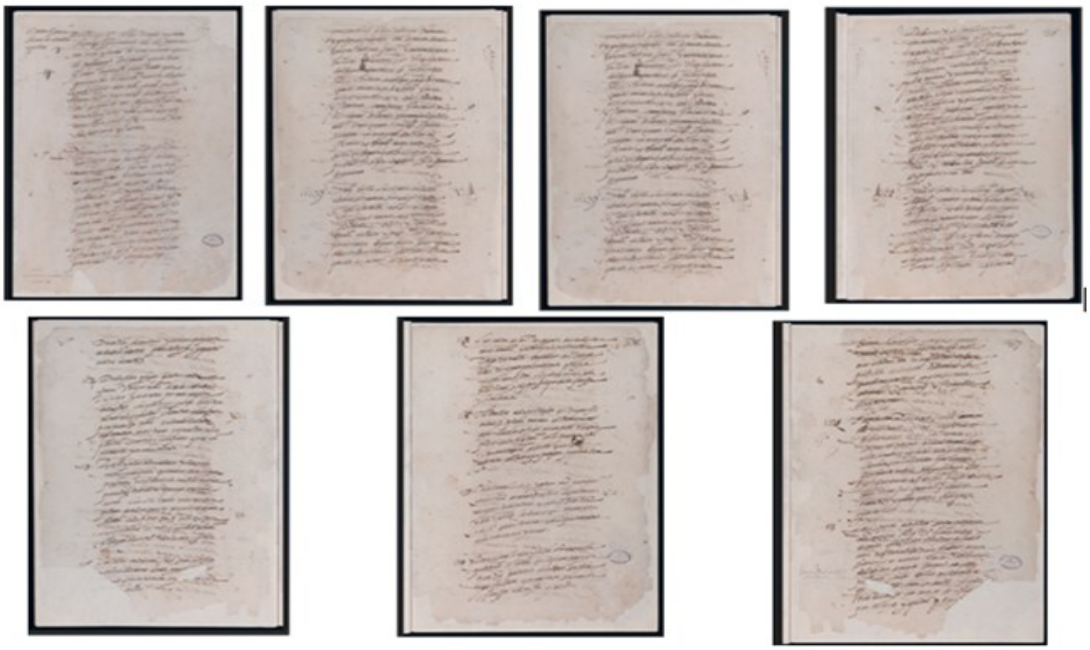

Fig. 6. Ordinances of Discovery, New Population and Pacification of the Indies, issued by Philip II on July 13, 1573, in the Forest of Segovia., Source: General Archive of the Indies.

As Brewer (1998) points out, Renaissance ideas were introduced through the court, , especially in architecture, to revive the legacies of the past in infrastructure. Consequently, rectilinear lines and straight-angled facades were reintroduced and replicated in buildings and cities of the Spanish Empire [11].

According to Terán (1998), Philip II's Ordinances incorporated pre-existing foundational experiences from the American conquest, institutionalizing prior practices while adding some formal concepts [12]. In contrast, Wyrobisz (1981) argues that the Ordinances represent the "culminating achievement of Spanish legislation regarding colonial urban planning" (p.19), as evidenced in the 148 paragraphs that outlined specific urban planning policies [10].

It is estimated that prior to these provisions, other royal instructions had been issued, including writings addressed to Pedrarias Dávila in 1513 and to Cortés in 1523. This regulatory framework possesses all the attributes of territorial planning law and encompasses the urban theory employed by the Spanish. The original document is physically housed in the General Archive of the Indies in Seville.

Rather than a mere declaration of principles, the Ordinances represent a set of operational guidelines. Further analysis indicates that they standardized the Main Square as a rectangular space enclosed by buildings of equal height and window count, featuring a public building, known as the Consistorial House, on one side. Additionally, all four sides of the square were designed with uniform arcades at ground level (Aisenson, 1995) [13].

The Ordinances of Discovery, New Settlement and Pacification comprise 148 articles divided into three sections: the first concerns "Discoveries" (35 articles), the second relates to "New Settlements" (105 articles), and the third addresses to "Pacifications" (11 articles). This research focuses on Ordinances 112-113, which establish the Main Square as the structural element organizing urban layouts and serving as the population center. These ordinances also relate to social and cultural activities, such as equestrian festivals, and define approximate rectangular dimensions ranging from 60x80 meters to 150x220 meters (Fig. 7).

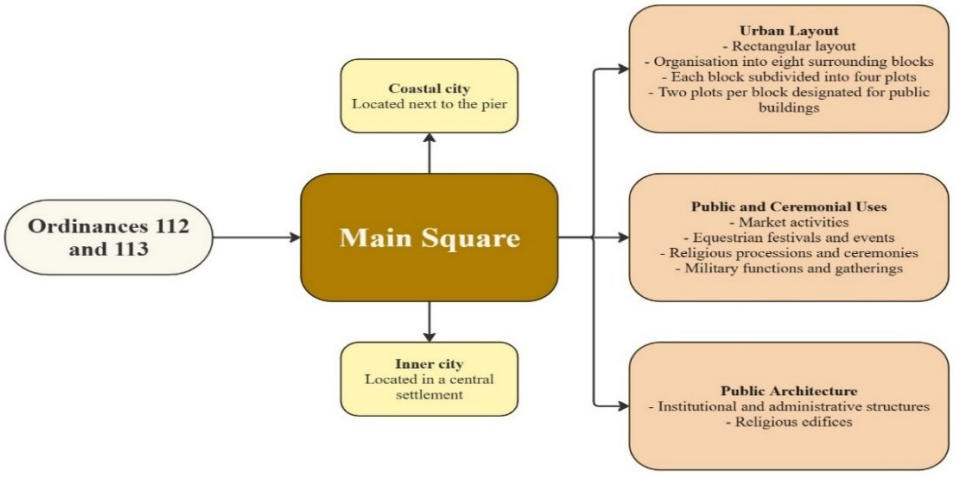

Fig. 7. Summary of the characteristics of the Main Squares under the Ordinances 112 and 113. Source: Authors' owns work.

The urban model of the Main Square, as established by the Ordinances, follows an orthogonal layout in which straight streets intersect to form a grid pattern covering 12 hectares. At the center lies the main square, surrounded by eight city blocks. Each block contains four lots (totaling 32 plots), with two designated for these public buildings. In this way, the Main Square functions as the articulating element of Spanish urban development.

According to Section 112 of the Ordinances, the shape and size of the square were strictly regulated. Its width was not less than 200 feet and not more than 532 feet, while its length could range from 300 to 800 feet. However, , the preferred dimensions were 400 by 600 feet, as specified in Ordinance 113. The main public administrative and religious buildings were to be situated within or around this space.

In addition, the rectangular shape of the square was intentionally linked to equestrian activities, such as parades, tournaments and bullfights, which required an elongated space for horses and riders.

Fig. 8. Plan of the city of Panama (left) and plan of the city of Quito, Ecuador (right). Source: General Archive of the Indies.

These measures reflected a deliberate effort to ensure urban growth for the future (Fig. 8). The document ratifies the relevance of the Main Square as both a communal gathering space and a focal point for urban development. It was intended to serve as a reference for the city's overall form, particularly in its symbolic dimension. As Aguilera (1977) stated, "That is to say, in the main square a series of factors are concentrated and superimposed that turn it into the authentic central element of the theoretical model exposed in the Ordinance" ((p.21) [9].

The Main Square of Panama

Panama City (Old Panama) was one of the first cities established on the Pacific coast, founded around 1519. Its main square, of irregular rectangular shape adapted to the terrain, was located next to the Convent of Santo Domingo to the north and the Cathedral to the east. The square also housed the town hall, royal warehouses and residential buildings (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9. Map of the city of Panama (1586) by Bautista Antonelli. Source: Library of the Naval Museum of Madrid.

This space functioned as a bullring for festivities, including bullfights held to celebrate the arrival of the Viceroy of Peru, Don Fernando VI. These events utilized temporary wooden bleachers for spectators. Additionally, this plaza served as a marketplace.

In 1671, the city was sacked and burned by the pirates , prompting its relocation to what is now known as the Old Center. The new settlement replicated the central square model. In this new location, the Plaza del Triunfo, today called Plaza Herrera, served as a bullring until 1914, when the first Vista Alegre bullring was inaugurated.

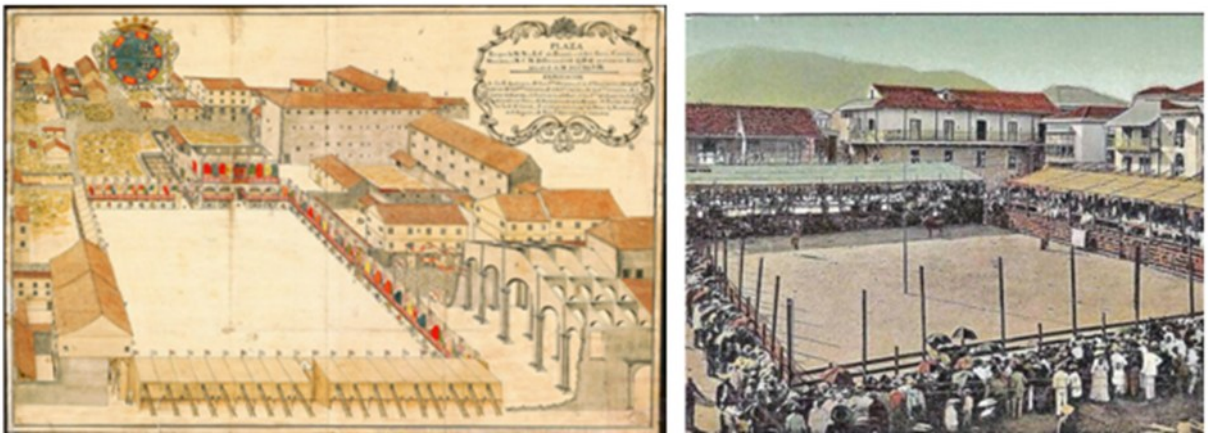

Fig. 10. "Square where the Most Noble and Loyal City of Panama celebrated Bulls, Comedies, and Masquerades for Our Catholic Majesty Don Fernando VI," 1748 (left). Source: General Archive of the Indies, Seville. Postcard of Plaza del Triunfo during a bullfight, 1887, Panama (right). Source: La Estrella de Panamá newspaper.

Mexico City's Main Square

The Zócalo, officially known as Plaza de la Constitución since 1812, serves as the main square of Mexico City. It has a rectangular layout measuring 195 x 240 meters and is crossed by streets at its four corners (Fig.11). This square functions as the center of religious, political, and economic power in Mexico.

The Zócalo stands atop the ruins of the Mexica city, which was razed in 1524. In its place, colonial authorities built significant buildings: the Cathedral to the north, the Viceroyal Palace and City Hall to the east commercial establishments known as the Portales de Mercaderes to the west, and the Portal de las Flores to the south.

Fig. 11. Plan of Mexico City (1628), created by the architect Gómez de Trasmonte and copied in 1660 by Dutch cartographer Johannes Vingboons. Source: Miguel de Cervantes Virtual Library.

The General Archive of the Indies in Seville holds a plan of a wood bullring built with a rectangular layout and rounded corners, built in the Plaza del Volador of Mexico City (Fig.12).; The plan, dated November 4, 1769, depicts 84 compartments surrounding the arena, along with two designated seating areas for authorities. It also includes four entrance doors -one on each side- and corrals for the bulls..

Fig. 12. Plan of the wooden bullring in the Plaza del Volador, Mexico City (1769). Source: General Archive of the Indies (left). Plaza del Volador (1713-1715) by Juan Patricio Morlete (right). Source: National Prado Museum.

7. From the Main Square to the Plaza and the Bullring: An Urban Transformation

The evolution of Main Squares reflects not only architectural and infrastructural changes but also broader transformations in Spanish social structure and urban movements, particularly the resettlement of citizens to peripheral areas. At an infrastructural level, the specialization of the bullfighting festival led to the development of dedicated bullrings. This transition also brought a shift in construction materials, from wooden structures to the more permanent masonry that characterizes modern bullrings Notably, cattle (bovines), essential necessary for both cities foundations and early bullfights, were introduced to the Americas by the Spanish [3].

A prominent example is the Plaza San Francisco in Seville, originally featuring a wooden structure. Its origin is linked to King Philip V's a generous gesture to the Maestranza de Caballería of Seville. Halcón (1997) notes that "at first there were several wooden buildings, then began the factory, which was transformed, expanded, completed and improved over the years, already more than two hundred". Initially situated the Baratillo hill, it was later relocated to the Paseo de Cristóbal Colón. In its early years, the plaza lacked significant surrounding infrastructure, with only a few residential buildings featuring apartments attached. This transition underscores its role as a precursor to purpose-built bullrings. [14]

Another relevant example is the Plaza Cuadrilonga, originally constructed from wood. Over time, understanding the risks posed by the square's corners -where bulls would instinctively seek refuge when they felt threatened-, prompted structural changes that influenced the design of subsequent plazas. Halcón (1996) provides a nourished description of the various construction materials used in these early Main Squares, reflecting their evolution over time [14].

In Spanish culture, the bull has long symbolized power and fertility, making its presence in festive events essential. Accordingly, it was not uncommon for bullfights to be incorporated into weddings and other celebrations deeply rooted in the nation's cultural essence. Díaz (1992b) highlights those cities embraced these festivities, with the Main Squares serving as the earliest formal venues for such events . Initially, the spatial constraints of these plazas resembled those of early stadiums. However, as public interest grew, these spaces were gradually expanded to allow larger audiences. Thus, the bull became a potent urban metaphor, with progressive architectural adaptations reinforcing the relevance and solemnity of the bullfighting tradition [2].

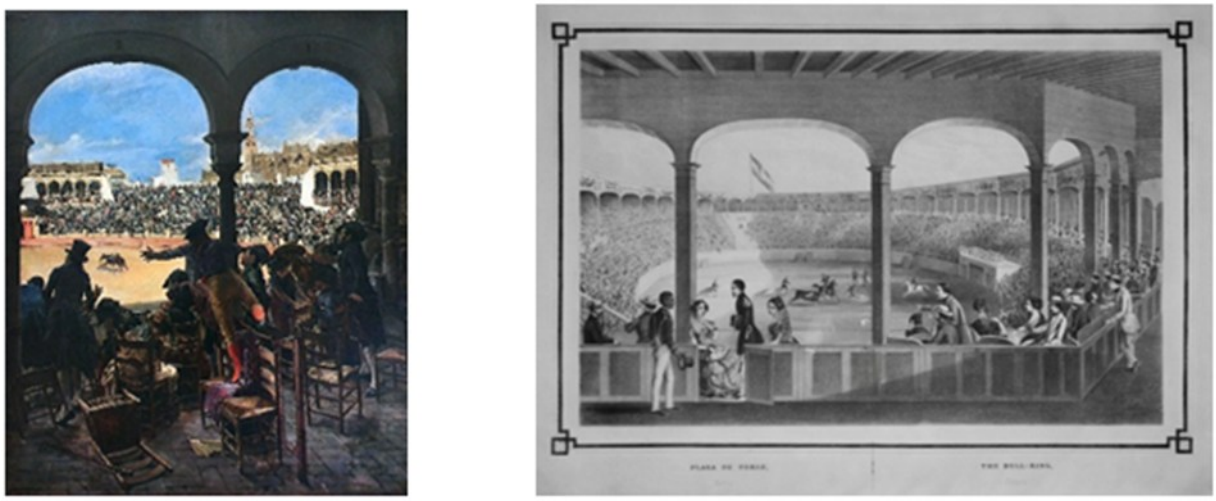

Fig. 13. Bullring of the Real Maestranza de Sevilla (left) and L. Marquier Bullring, Havana (right). Source: Real Maestranza de Caballería Collection, Seville, photos taken by the authors at the Bullfighting Museum of the Seville Bullring.

From an urbanistic perspective, bullfights held during the Middle Ages gradually shifted the use public scenarios towards private purposes, ultimately leading to the gestation of dedicated bullrings. public spaces, by their very nature, are shaped by their "participatory

function" -growing in significance as they are traversed and experienced by neighbors and visitors. As López (2008) notes, "They need time for this receptive function (...) to mature and take root" (p.192). Consequently, the original wooden installations, characterized also by their scaffolding, fences, bleachers and meadows, constituted the architectural mechanism that converted an entire open space for the purposes of private celebrations. Over time, urban squares underwent a structural metamorphosis, incorporating elements such as arcades and galleries, which eventually gave rise to the formalized bullring [4].

Early bullfighting constructions before the 18th century were predominantly associated with the noble class (Fig. 13). However, López (2014) presents evidence of the sport's increasing popularity across both main towns and small villages, where noble equestrian bullfighting merged with other manifestations [4].

It is important to acknowledge the evolving social perceptions surrounding bullfights. During the Middle Ages, the well-known Siete Partidas "Code of the Seven Laws" condemned bullfighting if it was pursued for profit but deemed it a chivalrous activity when undertaken purely for enjoyment. Halcón (1996) describes this transition: "What until then had been carried out without order or concert, in indeterminate places and with the participation and protagonism of all the people began to separate from its popular roots (...) having the nobility as the main protagonist" (p.96). As the practice became increasingly specialized and the need for enclosed venues grew, social and architectural conditions began to favor the establishment of dedicated Main Squares [14].

Thus, the Main Square became synonymous with celebration and spectacle, where people gathered to witness bullfighting festivities from both the ground level and the surrounding balconies. A notable example is the Plaza de la Constitución in Arganda del Rey, Madrid, Spain, continues to hold bullfights to this day (Fig. 14).

Fig. 14. Plaza de la Constitución in Arganda del Rey, Madrid (2025). Source: Photo taken by the authors.

8. Conclusion

Main squares represent an urban phenomenon that encapsulates profound social transformations. From their origins as spaces for religious rituals and mass spectacles to their historical and architectural significance, these plazas illustrate the evolution from multifunctional urban centers to dedicated bullfighting venues. Serving as focal points for social life, they have hosted religious, civil, and military ceremonies, executions, and public celebrations. In some cases, their historical and architectural relevance led to their use for bullfighting events, marking the inception of specialized bullfighting spaces.

This study identifies patterns of adaptation in main squares, which historically functioned as multifunctional rectangular spaces, accommodating markets, bullfights, religious and military processions, executions, and proclamations. These adaptations often included temporary architectural structures—such as stands, boxes, and grandstands, typically made of wood—designed to facilitate bullfighting spectacles.

In Europe, main squares evolved from medieval plazas, often enclosed and irregular in shape, surrounded by noble residences, guild buildings, and institutional structures. In contrast, in Spanish America, the rectangular layout of main squares became a hallmark of colonial urbanism, integrating institutions of power such as the state and the Church alongside residential spaces. The primary distinction between the two regions lies in the prominent presence of the church in Spanish American squares, reinforcing their role as centers of religious and societal authority.

The presence of horses and bullfighting festivals in these urban spaces reflects a medieval and Arab heritage, particularly within Spanish culture. Initially, such festivities were organized to commemorate royal celebrations and later served as fundraising events for hospitals and other charitable causes. With the colonization of the Americas, these traditions were transplanted to the New World, where they became embedded in the social and urban fabric.

The Ordinances of Discoveries, New Settlements, and Pacification of the Indies (1573), issued by Philip II, played a crucial role in regulating the urban layout of Spanish-founded cities in the Americas. These provisions emphasized the centrality of the main square, or Plaza de Armas, as the heart of the city, reinforcing its function as a venue for equestrian festivals and public gatherings. This regulatory framework underscored the square's importance as a space of celebration, power, and social control.

Over time, the first bullrings emerged within historic centers but were later relocated to the outskirts due to concerns regarding security, sanitation, and public comfort. Initially constructed from wood, these structures gradually evolved into permanent arenas, many of which continue to uphold bullfighting traditions while also serving as cultural landmarks. Today, these bullrings remain integral to cultural heritage—both tangible and intangible—preserving traditional festivities and serving as venues for contemporary social events.

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