

# Career Sheet: Urban Planner; Director of City, Territory and Environment Area



**Patricia Molina (Urban Planner; Director of City, Territory and Environment, Tecnia Research and Innovation)**

I am an Urban Planner PhD and Architect from Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (Spain) with a Master's degree from the Department of Urban Studies and Planning of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (USA). Since 2022, I am the Director of City, Territory and the Environment at Tecnia, after 8 years being the Lead Researcher at the Urban Transformation Lab, having worked before for 6 years at an urban planning firm in Madrid. I currently manage a multidisciplinary team of 47 researchers, working with public and private organizations in helping cities and territories to deal with environmental, social and economic challenges, using data, technology and innovation to enhance decision-making and public policy. I also have teaching experience at graduate level, and I am co-directing 3 doctoral theses.



## OVERVIEW OF THE JOB

With my team, we work with cities and territories, as well as companies and organizations that support or give service to them, to support their efforts in addressing the entrenched and complex challenges they face, namely, the climate crisis, the need to decarbonize our cities and territories, the need to create inclusive environments and adapt our environments for an ageing society, etc. We explore with them how technology and advanced data analysis can help them make better decisions and enhance urban environments, taking into account that cities are complex ecosystems and therefore we need to apply an integrated, multidimensional approach.



## WHAT INSPIRED YOU

My grandfather was an engineer and urban planner, and although he passed away before I started thinking about my professional future, I think he inspired me somehow.

More than anything else, cities are places of human interaction, and I had a very humanistic education, so it came quite naturally to work on making cities better places. I have always loved cities, their diversity, the history they treasure in the layers of the urban fabric, buildings and public spaces. They are places of incredible opportunity for human creativity and interaction; in terms of sustainability, their density is key to protecting the territory from over-urbanisation, but they are centres of high energy

and resource consumption, making them a key player in global sustainability, which is another personal concern.



## TYPICAL WORKING DAY

I usually start early making a list of important things to do during the day, then I check my email, and after that, I start having meetings, mainly regarding the management and strategy of my Area. My current job entails a lot of guiding other people's work and making many strategic decisions, so meetings are very important, to listen, discuss and think together. I try to have some time to think, reflect, and write every day, to keep perspective on things, and most importantly, to distinguish what is urgent from what is important in the long term.

Apart from the management of my team, I also participate as a Researcher in several R&D projects, bringing in my expertise as an urban planner specializing in the governance of urban regeneration, and I am the PhD co-director of three people in my team, so I guide them in their doctoral research.



## STUDY & CAREER PATH

I decided to study Architecture since it seemed a very holistic degree, including technical as well as artistic and humanities skills, which matched my profile and interests. In my fourth year, I did an Erasmus year at the Joint Centre for Urban Design at Oxford Brookes University, where I had the opportunity to work on a multidisciplinary team and experience public participation in urban planning, something rare at the time in the Spanish context, but well established in the UK. Back in Madrid, I specialised in Urban Planning and co-founded a students' group interested in participatory urban planning, "Laboratorio Urbano", as well as getting a grant to work at the "Cities for a More Sustainable Future" UN-Habitat-sponsored e-Library. After finishing my degree, I started working at an urban planning office, while continuing to do advocacy work with Laboratorio Urbano and another organization, Observatorio Metropolitano, a critical research platform focused on the urban transformations of Madrid and its social and economic impacts. My interest in both research and practice led me to start my doctoral studies while working at the office, and when the real state crisis hit the economy in 2009, I decided to apply for a Fulbright grant to focus on my research for a while at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I stayed there for 3 years, completing a Master's degree and working as a Researcher for 2 years at the MIT Community Innovators Lab, while finalising my doctoral research on the governance of urban regeneration processes using Boston as a case study.

While at MIT, I got contacted by Tecnalia to offer me a research position in a technology centre back in Spain, a great opportunity, since it was unique at the time for such an organization to be interested in an urban planner profile.

Reflecting on my career path, I would not change anything. I am grateful that I have been able to follow my instinct several times and have taken uncertain paths, which have led me to very interesting professional positions.



## KEY SKILLS



### Analytical

- Critical thinking: needed to see the whole picture and push things beyond the status quo
- Problem-solving: needed to move forward in a constructive manner

### Business

- Business development: needed to imagine new business and development opportunities within our field
- Competitive Strategies: needed to be different from others in the same field

### Communication

- Active Listening: critical to get to know your team and help them grow
- Collaboration: needed to multiply your capacities and those of your team
- Nonverbal Communication: very important for building good relationships and communicating properly
- Social skills: very important to build good relations with clients and partners

### Management

- Coaching: needed to guide your team and help them grow professionally
- Delegating Tasks: important to empower your team
- Leadership: needed to inspire and guide your team
- Negotiation: important to deal with difficult situations entailing conflicting interests, within and outside your team
- People Management: important to build a good team and help them grow

### Marketing

- Public Relations: needed to build a good network of clients and partners

### Personal and Social Skills

- Openness towards feedback and criticism: needed to grow and do your work better, and to build confidence with your team
- Emotional Intelligence (EQ): critical for working with people

- Empathy: needed to be able to guide people and help them grow professionally
- Flexibility: needed to manage difficult situations
- Initiative: needed to be a good leader and open new paths
- Motivation: needed to try your best every day and inspire others
- Public Speaking: needed for marketing and dissemination of your work
- Self-confidence: needed to make decisions and trust your intuition
- Self-reflection: needed to keep your focus and balance, auto-evaluate your performance, and set personal goals
- Time Management: needed to organise well under pressure and be strategic regarding what is urgent and what is important.



## CAREER PROSPECT

---

With my skills and background, I can work not only in R&D, but also in the public and private sector, in the fields of urban planning, housing, territorial development, etc.



## CHALLENGES

---

The main challenge in my current job is keeping a good balance between a strategic long-term vision and the day-to-day matters regarding management and annual economic results. Also, the management of a very diverse team is challenging, since very different personalities and skills need a different approach and working under time pressure it is not always easy to find enough time for each person.



## YOUR ADVICE TO STUDENTS

---

My advice is to follow your passions and build a professional career related to that. We put so much time into our professional lives, that it is worth to be doing something that really matters to you, to have a sense of mission and enjoy it at the same time.



## YOUR ADVICE TO TEACHERS AND PARENTS

---

Teachers and parents should be open-minded and support students' search for their path. It might not be clear or easy from the beginning, but it is important to give confidence to students so they can trust their instinct. It is also important to provide references/ role models, to put them in contact with people in their fields of interest, so they can imagine their paths, even if those are not similar to what they have seen in their own families.



## LEARN MORE

---

This Career sheet has been provided by means of the URBANAGE project, in which I am currently involved as Technical Coordinator: <https://www.urbanage.eu/>

You can also find more information on my LinkedIn page: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/patricia-molina-costa-4b914919/>