— URBAN PLANNING PARADOXES AND SOCIOSPATIAL FRAGMENTATION: The Superblock Barcelona Case (2016–2023)

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Abstract

Barcelona is an interesting living laboratory for studying the role of the local scale in urban planning. Since the early stages of what is known as the Barcelona Model (1979–1994), analysis of Barcelona's urban planning based on the creation of public spaces at a local scale has become a priority. More recently, micro-scale urban planning has become dominant in addressing global challenges such as climate change within the framework of the New Urban Age paradigm. In this article we analyse the paradoxes between the ideology (local-centrism) and practices (tactical urbanism) of this paradigm, based on an original perspective of the Superblock Barcelona project, contrary to the criticisms levelled against this project so far, which emanate mainly from economic lobbies in Barcelona. While cities seek to tackle global-scale climate change, urban planning is being increasingly restricted to acting at local or micro scales. These paradoxes lead to sociospatial fragmentation and denial of other urban-phenomenon scales, such as the metropolitan/regional one. We frame this article within the critical urban studies perspective, following the planetary urbanization hypothesis. The analysis of the Superblock Barcelona project is based on the logic of 'making cities by making less city' and focuses on how the local scale, the districts and neighbourhoods 'burst against the city', questioning the very right to the city.

Introduction

The public and academic debate that centres on urban policies to adapt cities and other urban spaces to global change has been conducted from two different perspectives. The first one, which is dominant across public debate, is the approach applied to urban planning in the neoliberal era, which we here refer to as the New Urban Age. Its starting point is the existence of an urbanism that promotes the idea that a *smarter, greener, and healthier* city is capable of mitigating climate change (Florida, 2005; Glaeser, 2011) and of transforming the city from being a problem to being a solution. The second perspective is framed within planetary urbanization theory (Brenner, 2014) and identifies cities as merely another space of global urbanization. The latter perspective identifies climate change mitigation more within systemic and global actions and less in specific and symbolic actions within cities. In this sense, researchers question the capacity for change that can be exercised from within the territorial cut-off that cities represent when facing climate change with a global logic. We believe that planetary urbanization, the second perspective, with its more systemic view, questions the capacity of cities to face these environmental challenges.

In the first theoretical perspective, city-centric actions (Angelo and Wachsmuth, 2020) prevail—in which a comprehension of urban processes predominates, that focuses exclusively on cities as an empirical and delimited element—as cities are considered the basis of the solution, alongside the reduction of private means of mobility

as a dominant strategy. These actions intend to have global effects and emanate from a dense city approach and the criticism of the 1960s functionalist urbanism (Jacobs, 1965). Projects such as Superilla Barcelona[1] (henceforth Superblock Barcelona) (Rueda, 2016), or the 15-minute city implemented in Paris (Moreno, 2020), are examples of this internationally disseminated perspective that mixes proximity with global change based on the new Green Deal, embodied by the C40 network (C40 Cities, 2018; C40 Knowledge Hub, 2018; C40 Cities, 2020). Household landfill policies and social distancing linked to Covid-19 helped spread these kinds of approaches (Moreno, 2020; Buzai, 2021).

The Superblock Barcelona project aims to be a global dissemination urban model adding to the 1980s Olympic urban planning reforms that led to the widely recognized Barcelona Model (McNeill, 1999; Marshall, 2000; Monclus, 2003; Borja, 2009; Casellas and Pallares-Barbera, 2009) and the smart city of 2011 (McDonogh and Martínez-Rigol, 2018). The Superblock programme has been recognized by the United Nations as an innovative example of tackling climate change (Campbell *et al.*, 2021)—a concern that has connected the urban-environmental problems of the North and South for the first time (Angelo and Wachsmuth, 2020). The programme has also been widely reported on in diverse international media (see Hu, 2016; Burgen, 2019a; 2019b) and has been presented as a successful model at the C40 World Mayors Summit, the global network of cities that are united in action to confront climate change.

More than 250 cities showed an interest in the Barcelona Model and several have implemented measures that are directly related to it, including the neighbourhoods of Bogotá, the Supergrätzl neighbourhood in Vienna and the large Superblock in Rotterdam, as well as Park Blocks in Los Angeles and Kiezblocks of Berlin (Garcia, 2022). Superblock Barcelona is framed within the smart city perspective and green urbanism, which are believed to be capable of turning the city into a solution for contemporary environmental problems. This aim is evident in the highly local and segmented scale from which the project has been analysed, which focuses on issues such as mobility (Rueda, 2021; Staricco and Brovarone, 2022), health (Mueller *et al.*, 2020; Pérez *et al.*, 2021; Eggimann, 2022) or pollution (Rodriguez-Rey *et al.*, 2022).

Superblocks have been subject to numerous political criticisms that are restricted to the city's interiority. The Superblock Barcelona project has become an obvious instrument for the right-wing to erode municipal government authority, which is currently in the hands of the left-wing parties (Frago and Graziano, 2021; Zografos *et al.*, 2020). Superblocks were first approved in Barcelona under the conservative neoliberal CiU municipal government (the Convergence and Union electoral alliance, which governed the city from 2011 to 2015). However, when the left-wing parties were elected (Barcelona en Comú, which governed from 2015 to 2023), various right-wing pressure groups, such as Foment del Treball Nacional (the main Catalan employers' association; see Agència Catalana de Notícies, 2022), the Reial Automòbil Club de Catalunya (a leading motoring organization in Spain) (see Márquez, 2021) and Barcelona Oberta (a tourist shopping hubs association; Bermejo, 2022), spoke out against these initiatives. Criticism from these groups focused mainly on the loss of individual freedom to use private vehicles and the over-regulation of public space and economic activities. The only criticism in contrast to that of the pressure groups has focused on the increase in land price to which the implementation of superblocks may lead (Delgado, 2022).

What we propose here is a critique prior to previous critiques, which considers the urban planning principles behind this proposal. Our analysis of Superblock Barcelona from the perspective of planetary urbanization—that is, a critical critique—allows us to go one step further than the city-centrism pointed out by Brenner and Schmid (2015). Superblock Barcelona allows us to identify a local-centric ideology—a set of representations such as, greener, closer, healthier—and an urban practice through

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1   'Superilla' is the Spanish term for 'superblock'.

which the concrete manifestations of the New Urban Age paradigm, such as the 15-minute city or tactical urbanism, are reproduced. This relationship between ideology and practice clearly reveals the intention to apply to multifunctional and central areas (such as the Eixample district) the ideology typical of the suburb, where residential function prevails. We therefore identify a dynamic that has not yet been addressed.

Moreover, we identify various paradoxes between ideology and practice that lead to a triple fragmentation and confine current urban policy to the local scale. Thus, in this article we provide an original critique that precedes the critiques already levelled at Superblock Barcelona and that shows through which elements—ideology and practice—the New Urban Age reinforces its hegemony.

In this article we analyse the implications of the Superblock Barcelona programme from a planetary urbanization perspective based on the hypothesis that the city-centric perspective produces several paradoxes between discourses and urban practices. First, we examine the historical lack of metropolitan-scale urban planning in Barcelona. Secondly, we review to what extent the Barcelona's Superblock project ends up 'making city by making less city' (Angelo, 2021) and deepening sociospatial fragmentation in the city. The conclusion of this article is that historical incapacity in metropolitan planning promotes a city-centric discourse that becomes viable only in small, fragmented parts of the city amid a trend that we refer to as local-centrism.

Methodology

The main method we used for collecting information was participant observation via Lluís Frago's participation in the Consell Assessor de la Superilla Barcelona (Superblock Barcelona Advisory Board or SBAP), as an academic expert on urban planning (Barcelona City Council, 2021d). This board was created by the Barcelona City Council, chaired by the second deputy mayor (Ecology, Urban Planning and Mobility Area) and vice-chaired by the Barcelona City Council chief architect (2019–2023). A total of 14 board meetings were held.[2] Eleven meetings were held in person at the Lluís Companys Hall of the Barcelona City Council, two were held on-site at the Eixample superblock and one was held online. The first five meetings focused on the principles for structuring the Superblock Barcelona project, and the remainder concentrated on assessing the urban planning projects presented to develop axes and squares. The board comprised 18 members, all of whom were recognized experts in diverse fields, including urban planning, mobility, environment, health and economic activities. Its members included nine architects, three geographers, two civil engineers and four other members with diverse areas of expertise. The Advisory Board's stated objectives were 'to provide a space for reflection, guidance, monitoring and evaluation of the Superblock Barcelona proposal deployment', 'to advise the City Council' and 'to ensure the deployment of Superblock Barcelona incorporates a cross-cutting and comprehensive approach' (Barcelona City Council, 2021d). As a member of the Superblock Barcelona Advisory Board, Lluís Frago was able to raise the guiding questions discussed in this article in meetings with other board members and policymakers. Our methodology therefore lies somewhere between a focus group and participant observation, offering a hybrid approach to address the objectives and hypotheses of this article effectively. During meetings, the discourses of experts and policymakers supporting the Superblock project were clearly identified by the authors. In most instances, comments within these discourses were directly aligned with the tenets of the New Urban Age, while at other times, such support was implied. The comments ranged from proactive endorsements to reactive responses to the proposals put forth by Lluís Frago, who maintained a critical stance towards the Urban Age approach throughout these meetings.

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2   Board meetings were held on 27 December 2020, 27 January 2021, 4 and 10 February 2021, 4 and 25 March 2021, 15 April 2021, 13 May 2021, 6 July 2021, 9 and 21 September 2021, 26 October 2021, 10 February 2022 and 13 October 2022.

In addition to Lluís Frago's participation in the Advisory Board, the authors carried out three non-structured interviews with specialists in urban planning in Barcelona. Interviewees included the president of the Catalan Association of Urban Planning Technicians (Interview 1) and the former Barcelona City Council chief architect (1999–2003) (Interview 2). Furthermore, business associations within the retail sector that were opposed to the project (Barcelona Oberta) were also interviewed (Interview 3). We complemented these observations and semi-structured interviews with an analysis of secondary materials and documentation, which included material ranging from political reports, urban planning projects and opinion articles to grey literature available through the Ecology, Urban Planning and Mobility Area of the Barcelona City Council, to which Lluís Frago had access by virtue of his membership of the Advisory Board.

In this article we present our analysis of the existing paradoxes between sociospatial fragmentation and urban planning from a planetary urbanization perspective (see Brenner, 2014; Brenner and Schmid, 2015), using Superblock Barcelona as a case study. First, we analyse the sociospatial fragmentation and its relationship with urban planning from a theoretical perspective. Secondly, we study Barcelona's sociospatial fragmentation case so as to focus—thirdly—on the specific case of the superblock at a metropolitan/regional scale. Fourthly, we address how dominance of the local or micro scale in Barcelona's planning undermines the right to the city idea (Harvey, 2003). Finally, we put forward some initial conclusions and perspectives for future research.

Sociospatial fragmentation and urban planning

In this article we use the perspective of planetary urbanization—a theory that follows the hypothesis launched by Lefebvre in 1970, whereby the complete urbanization of society would give rise to an urban society that breaks with the main consensus of the New Urban Age. The urban question therefore no longer materializes only in the city, which is merely considered a type of settlement characterized by its size, density and heterogeneity and is distinguishable from that which is alien to it (Brenner, 2018).

Urban society has been shaped by three major transformations. Since the counter-reform of capitalism in 1970, (1) new geographies of uneven spatial development have developed, producing (2) different natures of urban realities, which are not limited to the 'agglomeration' form. Finally, (3) new political and managerial regulations of the urban question have emerged (Brenner and Schmid, 2015).

The last of these transformations is a key attribute directly linked to differential urbanization. Differential urbanization is vaguely defined as the third constituent moment of urbanization alongside concentrated and extended urbanization (Brenner and Schmid, 2015: 169–72). We propose to understand differential urbanization through three attributes: implosions–explosions, the overcoming of the rural–urban contradiction and the crisis of territorial and urban planning (Morcuende, 2021a).[3] We focus now on the last attribute.

The multiscalar logic of differential urbanization leads to interpreting the planning crisis as a triple fragmentation, a concept that allows us to analyse recent urban transformations—the result of economic, political, social and cultural processes since 1970—in multiple dimensions (Morcuende, 2020; 2021a; 2021b; Legroux, 2021). Among them is the political-administrative dimension, which helps to explain the planning crisis through three types of political-administrative fragmentation. The first is the horizontal

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3   Differential urbanization unfolds from urban implosions-explosions (Brenner, 2014) and their successive waves of creative destruction (*ibid.*, 2015), which affect both the processes of agglomeration (implosion) and the reorganization of operational landscapes beyond the concentrated area (explosion). This moment affects multiple dimensions of the urban phenomenon, both in its morphology and in the administrative regulations that support it and make it feasible, as well as everyday life.

fragmentation of territory, which has been a subject of debate among urban planners, as jurisdictional divisions do not provide an explanation of functional areas, be they natural, or related to the consumption or supply of goods. As Harvey (1989: 153) argued, 'local jurisdictions often divide rather than unify the urban region, thus emphasizing segmentations (such as city and suburb) rather than the tendency towards structured coherence and the formation of class alliances'. The second is the vertical fragmentation of the territory which, through the various political-administrative scales resulting from neoliberal flexibilization, has allowed for bottom-up vertical relations without going through the central state (Santos, 1996; Jessop, 2002; Brenner, 2019). This type of relationship contrasts with the hierarchical perspective of metropolitan relations of the 1960s and 1970s, which was based mainly on vertical, top-down relations in industrial areas characterized by centre–periphery models. Finally, there has been a conceptual division in the interpretation of the concept of urbanization that has allowed for the creation of multiple explicitly regulatory departments that promote sectoral planning.

It is in this triple fragmentation that the New Urban Age has woven its hegemony in urban planning at an increasingly local scale. Horizontal and vertical fragmentation of the territory facilitated the adaptation of urban planning to the new spatial regulations of globalization. In this sense, 'administrative rationalization, inter-territorial equalization and efficient delivery of public services' (Brenner, 2019: 206) have been set aside and, in exchange, a profound polarization and competition between different municipalities has taken place. In this context of disintegrating metropolitan regionalisms, there has been a boom in development projects by individual municipalities aimed at improving their urban socioeconomic assets, attracting external capital investment and positioning cities in transnational economic circuits within a neoliberal city-region framework (Kanai, 2016).

The new spatial regulations developed by neoliberalism have allowed for the development of large-scale projects at the initiative of municipalities, both in central cities and at the edges of metropolitan regions (Bernardos *et al.*, 2020). However, since the Great Recession (2008–2012), projects have mainly shown local ambition and have mainly focused on the central city. Declining municipal finances and private investments led to the design of more modest projects that mainly focused on the renovation of existing public spaces and on environmental improvements (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2022). This resulted in further fragmentation of urban planning, based on the idea that the more local a project is, the better, and therefore the closer it will be aligned with the interests of the citizenry. This represents a step beyond city-centrism, namely, local-centrism—an idea that revisits the philosophy of 'small is beautiful' (Schumacher, 1999). The safeguarding of this kind of fragmented urban planning is nourished by ideologies that identify the functionalist urbanism of the Athens Charter, the document about urban planning published by Swiss architect Le Corbusier in 1943, as the source of all the city's ills.

Neoliberal deregulation has also given rise to urban ideologies based on localism that seeks to address global, especially environmental, challenges. Paradoxically, however, the more the local phenomenon has gained political appeal, the more heated the arguments have been in relation to larger supralocal formations such as globalization, the financialization of capital, the erosion of the nation-state and the intensification of interspatial competitions (see Brenner and Theodore, 2012: 342). From this perspective, municipalities are interpreted as places where the contradictions of the system can be reconciled, following the 'triumph of the city' proposed by Glaeser (2012) as the most important human invention to make us richer, smarter, greener, healthier and happier—representations that make up the local-centric ideology. Within this logic, the process of decentralization has progressively deepened, placing the space of opportunities for change at the micro level: at the district/neighbourhood level and even at the street level. This local-centrism generates increasing micro-fragmentation of the city, in opposition to a totalizing vision that neoliberal territorial design makes of the planetary territory (Kanai, 2016). These two scales of planning are the result of

the collapse of modern urban planning, which was primarily at the scale of the regional state (Brenner, 2019).

This local-centrism is articulated on the basis of the idea of district/ neighbourhood self-sufficiency and rooted in a supposed communitarianism (Barcelona en Comú, 2019; Torrens *et al.*, 2022), where citizens act as counterparts for new urban governance (Sareen and Waagsaether, 2022) in a context of economic austerity (Blanco *et al.*, 2020; Thompson, 2020; Janoschka and Mota, 2021). These new municipalist movements, initially supported by the Porto Alegre World Social Forum, faced constraints related to the competencies of municipalities and the multi-scale conflicts of the urban phenomenon in governing (Ponniah, 2004). These scale conflicts led to what Purcell (2006) calls a 'local trap' (see Russell, 2019; Thompson, 2020).

This trap has been accentuated in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Domiciliary confinements have paradoxically helped to deepen, on the one hand, localism within cities and, on the other, intensify the hyper-connection of people worldwide through telecommunications, remote work, online commerce and digital entertainment platforms, creating 'a city of bubbles' (Buzai, 2021). Following the confinement related to Covid-19, there has been a wave of creative destruction of urban uses (Frago, 2021). Differential urbanization has acted in the densest areas, converting residential spaces into work offices and massively extending bar and restaurant terraces into public spaces. For some authors, such as Florida *et al.* (2023), the massive implementation of remote work may have threatened the very viability of central business districts (CBDs), a dynamic reinforced by the 2022 energy-saving policies in public and private workspaces. In this technological context, the urban proximity thesis associated with Jacobs's proposals against the functionalist urbanism of the 1960s (Jacobs, 1965) has gained relevance, and the slogan of the 15-minute city (Moreno, 2020) and self-sufficient districts (Guallart, 2014) have acquired significance.

This perspective has found important support in tactical urbanism or tactical actions (Lydon and Garcia, 2015). Tactical urbanism in Barcelona has worked to increase green areas in streets and intersections, an aspect that can be related to the ideology of sustainable urban planning and its fight against climate change. These actions have been beneficial for residents near the new landscaped areas, but can hardly be interpreted as an effective way to combat the impacts of climate change or to fight neoliberalism (Brenner, 2016). The paradigmatic policy of this type of urbanism is undoubtedly the Superblock project, a pioneering policy in the case of Barcelona, which has been disseminated around the world, as we show in the next section.

The discourses of the New Urban Age and the practices of tactical urbanism lead to three paradoxes, which allow us to reflect on the benefits and deficiencies of tactical urbanism in general, and of superblocks in particular, which is the objective of this text. The first paradox is the local-centrism resulting from horizontal fragmentation, in which municipalities must compete by attracting capital (Brenner, 2019). The second paradox relates to the contradictions between the increasingly local discourse of proximity and local-level planning for the mitigation of global social and environmental challenges (Purcell, 2006; Buzai, 2021). The third paradox is closely related to the second: in the face of the increasing functional complexity of urbanization, local-centrism-based planning focuses exclusively on the residential function, of which the residents of a neighbourhood are the main beneficiaries.

Sociospatial fragmentation and urban planning in Barcelona

The growing importance of Barcelona's urban planning at the local scale needs to be understood in relation to metropolitan management supra-municipal bodies' incapability and outdated planning approaches. This process also occurs in many other European cities, such as London, Madrid, Rotterdam and Manchester (Brenner, 2019). In 1974, the Metropolitan Corporation of Barcelona was created to

manage the 26 Metropolitan Municipal Entity municipalities. Amid an industrial context, the Corporation approved the 1976 General Metropolitan Plan (or PGM-76, a consolidated version of the 1974 plan). In 1987, the Corporation was dissolved into three different institutions (the Metropolitan Waste Entity, the Metropolitan Corporation and the Metropolitan Transport Authority) as a result of increasing politicization of the governmental services agency (Capel, 2005; Degen and García, 2012).

The decentralization of the municipal government must also be considered as a factor in the design and implementation of this kind of urban planning and of urban policies at a local scale in Barcelona. The decentralization of local urban planning, alongside the city's social and cultural programmes, was implemented by creating ten districts (from 1983 to 1986) and took place during the period spanning from the first democratic mayor taking office (1979) to the Second Strategy Plan and the approval of the New Centralities Project (Bohigas, 1986; Barcelona City Council, 1987), which integrated the major Olympic urban planning reforms (Busquets, 2004; Serra *et al.*, 2011). This process enabled the approach of making the city on top of the city, based on general consensus among the city's cultural, social, political and business-sector leaderships (Borja, 2020) to place city governance at a local rather than a municipal scale (Borja, 1988).

A second stage began from 1994 onwards with the new central areas approval, when part of the focus on building public spaces for urban integration was diluted. From this moment onwards, urban planning was based increasingly on business architecture and real-estate development, hitting rock bottom with the Diagonal Mar operation and the Forum of Cultures of 2004 (Borja, 2009; Delgado, 2007). It was an urbanism made by renowned architects who generally had little respect for the existing urban fabric and disregarded the integrating function of public space at a district scale and thus deepened the city's morphological and social fragmentation (Capel, 2005). Following the strong pushback and criticism these projects elicited (Unió Temporal d'Escribes, 2004), an urban planning approach focused on districts resumed, which was aimed at reducing the social unrest this disapproval had produced. From then on, Barcelona City Council's local policies and urban planning followed a strategy based on proximity and participatory urbanism.

The strategy of bringing politics and urban planning closer to citizens continued (Subirats, 2006) in response to a context of social conflict (Delgado, 2007), and in 2006 the municipality of Barcelona was divided into 73 neighbourhoods (Serra *et al.*, 2011), many of which overlap with various neighbourhood associations that were particularly active during the 1970s and 1980s (Fabre, 1976). Where Barcelona's new neighbourhoods (which represent territorial units of around 30,000 inhabitants) correspond with earlier municipal boundaries, they are socially heterogeneous. These new neighbourhoods were designed to better distribute public facilities across the city (nurseries, schools, hospitals, primary care centres) in view of the deficit the city was experiencing. This is why neighbourhoods that at the time had little identity, such as Fort Pienc, were delimited. Nevertheless, the division was not made without conflict, as some social movements regarded the creation of a council for each neighbourhood as a way of putting up a wall from which citizens' demands would bounce off to diminish citizenship political participation (Borja, 2009).

In 2006, Barcelona hosted the Mobile World Congress for the first time. During Jordi Hereru's term as mayor of Barcelona (2006–2011), Barcelona's project was reformulated on the basis of what is generally known as the economy of knowledge and culture (Degen and García, 2012). During Xavier Trias's conservative-right term (2011–2015), smart city and sustainability ideas were advocated as models for urban development (Coll-Martínez *et al.*, 2019) and as the preferred strategy for making Maragall's[4] Barcelona heritage invisible (Benach, 2021). This strategy peaked when the

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4   Pasquall Maragall Mira served as mayor of Barcelona from 1982 to 1997.

European Commission awarded the European Capital of Innovation prize to the city in 2014. The orthogonal bus network, for example, was developed under this umbrella (2015), breaking up the traditional network, which was strongly rooted in the neighbourhoods and linked to the city's historical growth process (Rueda, 2021). This new network would subsequently enable the development of the first superblocks (in the Poble Nou and Sant Antoni neighbourhoods), planned on the basis of what is known as ecosystemic urbanism (*ibid*., 2020).

The ecosystemic urbanism promoted by Barcelona's Urban Ecology Agency is a paradigmatic example of a shift from a cause-of-environmental-problems city to a driver-of-solutions city to reflect the 'transition from an industrial society to the digital information and knowledge society' (*ibid*.: 730). With the 2011 change in government, the agency became more prominent (Interview 1). This is evident in an increased number of urban planning measures implemented at the local scale aimed mainly at transforming the various modes of transport that had access to public space, specifically the bus network. These transformations were based on a human ecology perspective and the ecosystemic urbanism driven by Salvador Rueda, Director of the Agència d'Ecologia Urbana de Barcelona (and who holds degrees in psychology and biology), in contrast with the dominant approach of the architects of Barcelona Regional Agency (ABR), who had managed the city's main urban planning projects both technically and politically during Maragall's (Interview 1) term. During this period, former City Council chief architect, Josep Acebillo, who was very critical of the Superblock Barcelona project (Acebillo, 2021), had a strong influence.

Smart city and ecosystemic urbanism discourse continued during the subsequent governments of Barcelona en Comú (from 2015 to 2023). Although conservative and left-wing governments followed the same strategy regarding city transformation and promotion, Barcelona en Comú adapted its discourse to the demands arising from the 15M movement (Charnock, 2021), which related to significant effects of the Great Recession of 2008 to 2012 on neighbourhoods (Pradel-Miquel, 2021), in particular by criticizing massive tourism and the resultant increase in housing prices (Palomera, 2018). This led to the emergence of what is known as urbanism for neighbourhoods, based on the greater role middle-class residents played in decision making (Pradel-Miquel, 2021) via citizen participation platforms such as Decidir Barcelona (Decide Barcelona). Under the slogan 'Il·lustrísims veïns i veïnes' ('Distinguished residents') (see Barcelona City Council, 2020b) participatory municipal budgets were made available for input into the city's budget and investment allocations within an austerity context (Martí-Costa and Tomàs, 2017)—a type of citizen participation that became mainly virtual with Covid-19 (Graziano, 2021).

This type of urban planning always happens at the local scale—unlike in previous periods—and in two dimensions. The first dimension, based on neighbourhood plans, follows the traditional logic of intervening in the most disadvantaged peripheral areas to achieve a similar urbanity index to that of the city centre (Nel·lo, 2009; Foment de Ciutat, 2022) The second is based on a redevelopment of public space that allows for 'the production of proximal space, which is essential for fostering social involvement, and the generation of environments that promote citizenship health and wellbeing' (Barcelona City Council, 2023a). The reorganization of already built public space, encouraged via the smart growth idea (Downs, 2005), implied increasing space for pedestrians by reducing space devoted to private cars and by widening sidewalks (namely the Avinguda Diagonal, Avinguda Paral·lel and Passeig de Gràcia)—measures that led to complaints from private-car advocates—or by developing streets with more green areas that resulted in the almost total removal of cars, as in the superblocks.

All these urban planning interventions were carried out through partial modifications of the PGM-76, which is not logically adapted to the economic, social, political and technological structure of today's city. The sociospatial fragmentation in

the city-region of Barcelona can be seen in the 887 specific modifications of the PGM-76 (Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, 2014) made by the various city councils between 1976 and 2009. This figure rose to more than 1,600 at the beginning of 2023, according to the director general of Territorial Planning, Urban Planning and Architecture (Serra Monté, 2023). Despite extensive and indiscriminate use of specific modification of the PGM-76, the implementation of the Superblock Barcelona project in the Eixample district without resorting to these amendments resulted in a judicial ruling in September 2023 that compelled the reversal of the intervention (Blanchar, 2023). Since 2015, a new master plan in line with Green Deal principles is being drafted. This was to have been approved in 2021, but was only approved in a preliminary form in March 2023 (Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, 2023).

Making city by making less city: the Superblock Barcelona case

In Barcelona's historical urban planning, the Superblock programme served to promote a horizontal rescaling of the city under a metropolitan and regional vision of Barcelona. However, the concept of the superblock from the twenty-first century onwards has been used for the opposite purpose: an eminently local-centric intervention in the city.

– The precedent of superblocks: a regional vision of Barcelona (1932–1934)

Barcelona's Cerdà Plan (1859) envisioned a city seven times bigger than it was at the time, incorporating the railway network and integrating into the city other adjacent historic nuclei. The Macià Plan (1932–1934), designed by Josep Lluís Sert and Le Corbusier, opted for a metropolitan urban planning approach, including for the first time the use of private cars and holiday and leisure spaces in areas far from the municipality of Barcelona (Tarragó, 1972). At that time, this change of scale was proposed on the basis of a 400 by 400 metre modular grid, known as a superblock. These superblocks, which were centred on hygiene principles, were proposed to correspond to nine Cerdà blocks and based on open buildings to do away with the traditional Cerdà conception of the street (GATCPAC—Pla Macià, 1934) and its density (Muñoz and López, 2010). The plan aimed to retain the city's population density but free up large spaces through verticalization, as in the case of Casa Bloc in Sant Andreu.

– Superblocks of the twenty-first century: from a historical regional vision to a local-centrism perspective (2014–2019)

From 2014 onward, the superblock idea was revisited by the municipality but interventions at the time were focused on improving already built public space at the expense of vehicles and to the benefit of pedestrians and cyclists at a local or micro scale—a scale that is also fragmented in the rest of the city (Barcelona City Council, 2014). While the superblock was initially conceived as an urban planning tool aimed at urban expansion, since 2014 it has been used to upgrade public spaces to correct the density effects of urban planning actions and to fight climate change and minimize its effects on the city. In this sense, the narrative of the superblock's inception combines the micro-scale approach with the fight against climate change, thus merging the contributions of Jane Jacobs with those of Richard Florida.

The Sant Antoni and Poble Nou superblocks are the ones that best fit the 400 by 400 metre modules, as opposed to the Horta or Hostafrancs ones, for example, which comprise irregular plots that do not correspond to the Eixample grid. The role the inauguration of the refurbished Sant Antoni market and the 22@ project in Poble Nou played, articulating centralities and supra-district-scope clusters, has also been ignored. The success of the Poblenou superblock is explained only on the basis of the project dimension itself and remains isolated from the rest of the city's functions and centralities (Frago and Graziano, 2021).

– Superblocks in times of Covid-19: replacement of streets and crossroads
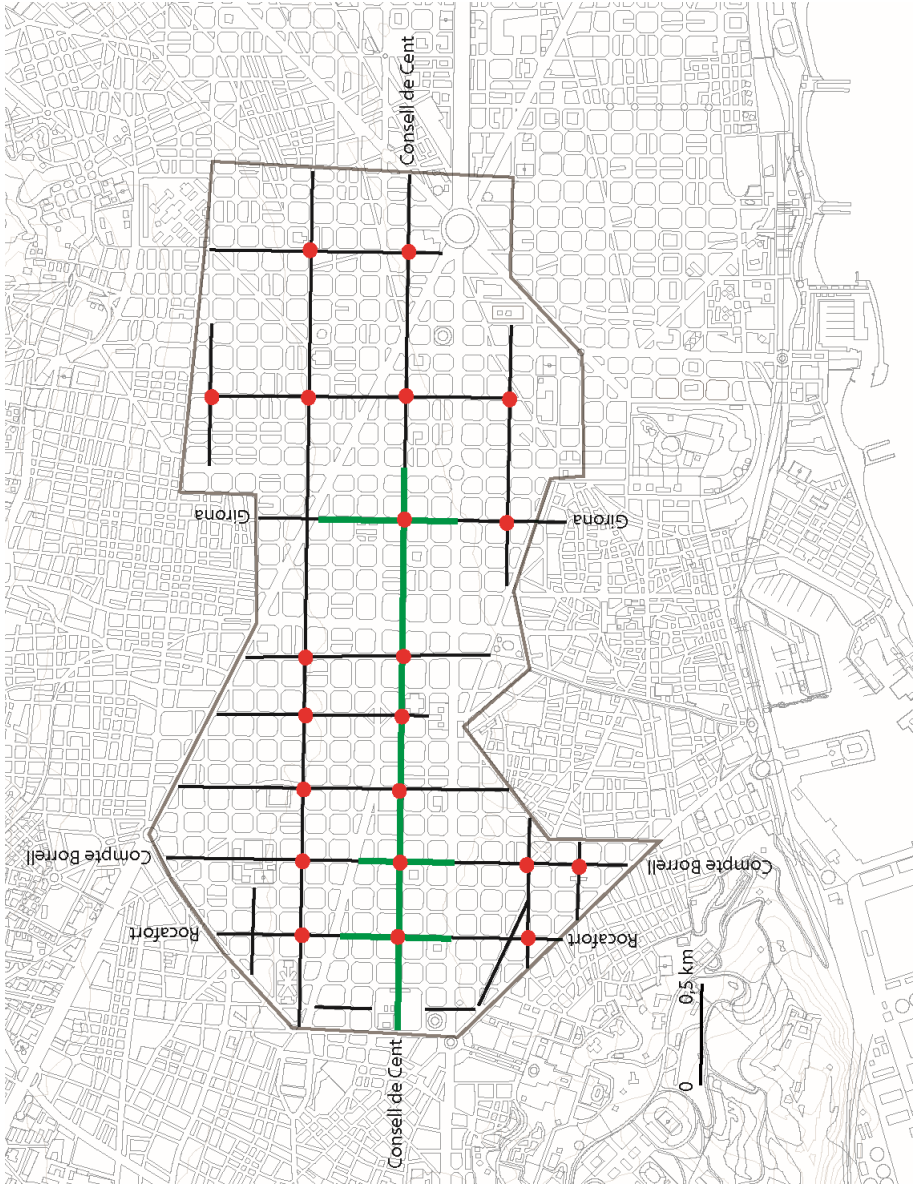with axes and squares

From 2021 onwards, the superblocks concept no longer used 400 by 400 metre
modules. Instead, it is now being used to designate all actions aimed at reducing the
space of private cars in public space. It includes both tactical urban planning for and
permanent improvements of Via Laietana, integration of the tramway along Avinguda
Diagonal, and the upgrading of Plaça de les Glòries, Pi i Maragall, Sants railway station,
Avinguda Meridiana and La Rambla) (see Figure 1). This change in superblock purpose
produced some disagreement between the government team implementing the project
and the contemporary superblock ideologist (Rueda, 2020) (see Figure 2).

Within this general project, the most controversial transformation is the
upgrading of the Eixample district's streets, namely the conversion of streets into
pedestrian axes and the crossroads into squares, given their density and functional
complexity, which is far higher than that of Poble Nou (which places less emphasis on
residential uses) or Sant Antoni (which is squeezed between Ciutat Vella and Poble
Sec).

Between 2020 and 2030, the Superblock Barcelona project aims to convert 21
Eixample streets into green axes (one in three streets, with a total length of 33 kilometres)
and 21 crossroads (covering 3.9 hectares) to provide additional 33.4 hectares of pedestrian
space and 6.6 hectares of urban green space to ensure that Eixample residents have a
place the administration considers a square or a green axis within 200 metres of their
homes (Barcelona City Council, 2021a).[5] The first phase of this ambitious project started
in July 2022 and was completed in May 2023. This phase focused on Consell de Cent from
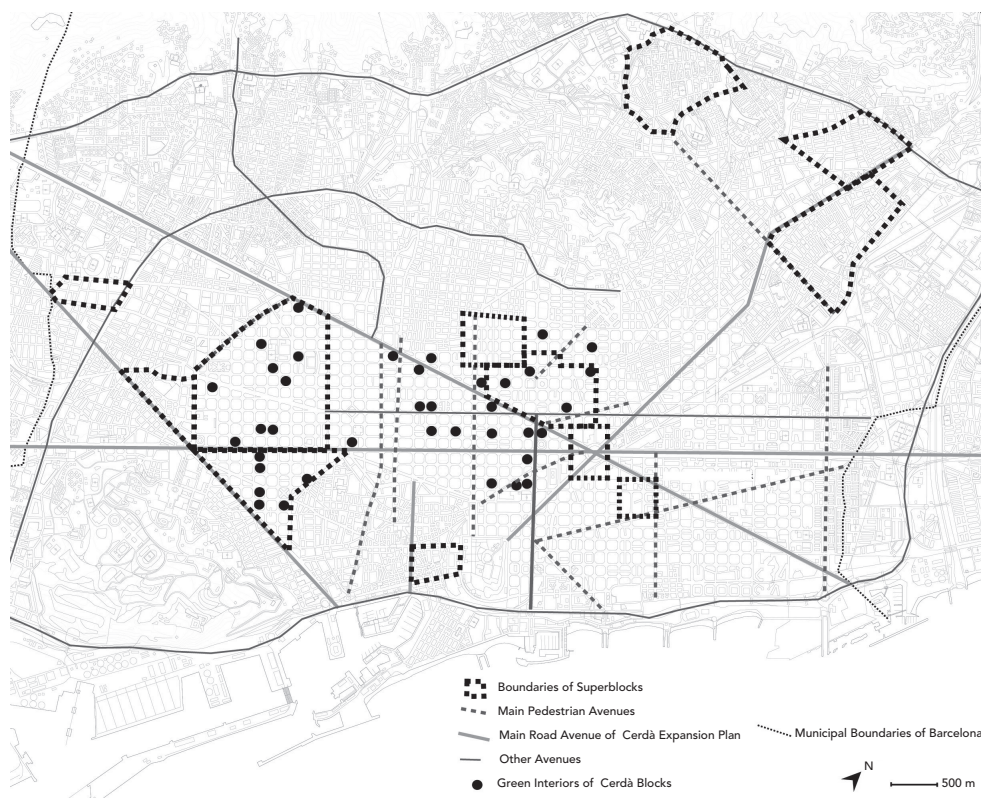
FIGURE 1 Public space interventions in the Superblock Barcelona project, 2021
(*source*: authors' analysis; map drawn by authors)

FIGURE 2 Green axes and squares the Superblock Barcelona project intends to implement in the Eixample district (*source:* authors' analysis, based on information from Barcelona City Council, 2021c)

Vilamarí to Passeig de Sant Joan (2.8 kilometres long, covering 64,540 square metres) and involved three other streets: Rocafort (0.6 kilometres and 12,797 square metres), Compte Borrell (0.5 kilometres and 10,010 square metres) and Girona (0.75 kilometres and 16,244 square metres). In total, 4,680 metres of street were turned into green axes where 'cars will be guests'. There are also four squares of approximately 2,000 square metres: Consell de Cent with Rocafort, Comte Borrell, Enric Granados and Girona.

– The superblock in the Eixample: local-centric discourse of proximity in a functionally complex and central area

The greatest controversy of the Superblock Barcelona project centres on the green axes and squares that were planned for Eixample, as these are being implemented in a functionally complex and central area. On the one hand, it seems logical to intervene in this area, as it has been recording the city's highest levels of atmospheric pollution owing to road traffic (350,000 vehicles are believed to circulate in the Eixample every day); high volumes of pollutants have been documented,[6] accompanied by noise pollution and a rise in temperature (Carreras *et al*., 1990; Mueller *et al*., 2020). On the other hand, the centrality, functional heterogeneity and demographic density of the area produce more problems among urban actors than if this intervention were to be applied in a purely residential and suburban area—a complexity that, in the name of smart urban planning, is being simplified through the use of specific quantitative indicators.

According to several researchers, Barcelona's Eixample, from a functional point of view, acts as a downtown, although it is morphologically horizontal and not vertical as is the case in the United States (Carreras, 2003; Acebillo, 2021). A detailed exposition on the expansion, both in terms of scale and functionality, of the Eixample district was presented by Lluís Frago during two sessions of the Advisory Board on the Superblock project and corroborated in various interviews (Interview 1, 2 and 3). However, these views were met with objections from several board members who exclusively focused their interest on the area affected by the superblock from a residential perspective and denied the centrality conditions of the space and its territorial influence capacity (Advisory Board meetings, 4 and 10 February 2021).

Eixample is the district with the largest population in Barcelona (269,349 residents, representing 16.2% of the city's total). It stands out for its highly educated population, and its percentage of university-educated residents (45.1%, a figure more than 11 percentage points higher than the Barcelona average). The median wage (34,770 euros per year) is more than 3,500 euros higher than the city average, a difference that is even more pronounced when analysed at the metropolitan scale (see Figure 3). While it should be noted that there are socioeconomic dissimilarities within every district, the western-sector areas are less wealthy than areas in the central sector. It is also the district with the highest economic activity levels in Barcelona: it is the central business hub and main engine of the city's economy—especially the Passeig de Gràcia and Avinguda Diagonal axes. In 2020, a total of 51,665 economic agents were located in the district, representing more than a quarter (27.3%) of the city's economic agents. The district thus leads rankings in terms of number of activities, and its weighting is far above its population weighting of 16.2%. Additionally, more than a quarter (27.1%) of strategic economic agents in the city (the tech sector, the traditional creative sectors, non-traditional creative sectors, health and biology, tourism and commerce) are located in the Eixample district. The health and biology sector (Hospital Clínic and Hospital Sant Pau), tourism (which includes emblematic buildings such as the Sagrada Família)

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6   The Eixample was the only district in Barcelona with air pollution levels exceeding the legal limit during 2022, according to a report by the Barcelona Public Health Agency (ASPB). Specifically, the maximum set by the European Union for nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), set at 40 µg/m^3, was surpassed—the district recording 41 µg/m^3, a value that is ten points above the city's average.
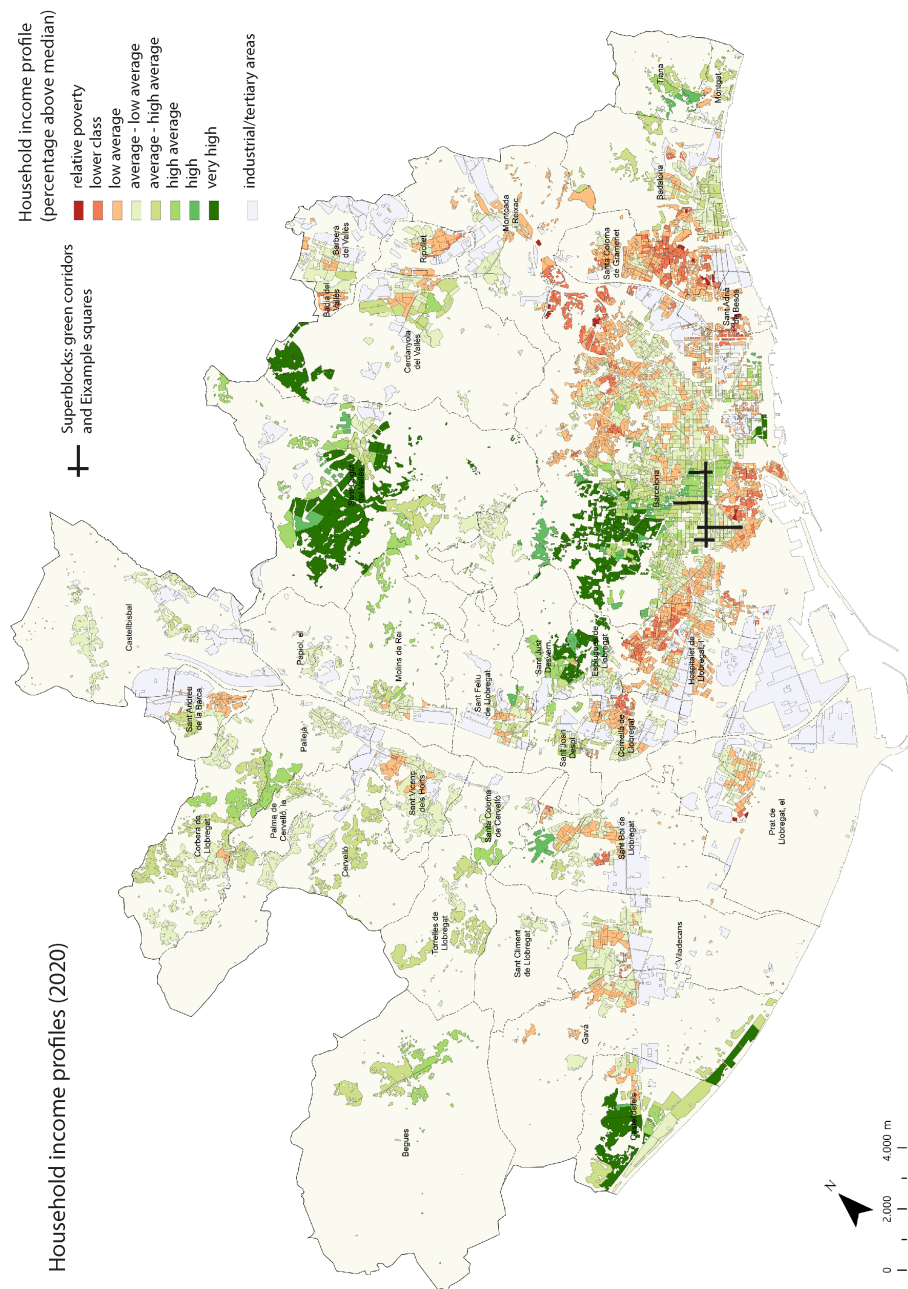
FIGURE 3 Superblock Barcelona green axes and income in the metropolitan area of Barcelona (*source*: authors' analysis, based on information from Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, 2022)

and educational facilities (Universitat de Barcelona and Escola Industrial) are cases in point. In absolute terms, commercial activities dominate, representing 20.3% of total Eixample activities (Barcelona City Council, 2021a). It should be pointed out that the Eixample district's centrality results in a lower weighting of cadastral properties for residential use (55.9% compared to the average of 56.9% in Barcelona or 67% in Nou Barris), and a higher weighting for retail (7.2% compared to the average of 6.6%) and offices (4.6% compared to the average of 2.3%) (*ibid.*). These data indicate that the Eixample is a multifunctional and complex area and that its uses are not limited to residential functions. In this context, it is less logical to apply proximity-based policies.

–   Critical analysis of discourse: the contradiction of local-centrism in addressing global challenges

The Superblock Barcelona project approved in 2021 is based on three ideas: (1) promotion of street life, with citizens at its centre; (2) design of an innovative environmental infrastructure; and (3) economic reactivation based on stimulating local commerce (Barcelona City Council, 2021c). The street calming measures around schools and the increased number of children's play areas complemented the project markedly. Certain interventions were undertaken in collaboration with various schools' parent associations within the ambit of the Pla del Joc a l'espai Públic Amb l'Horitzó 2030' (Plan for Play in Barcelona's Public Spaces) (Barcelona City Council, 2019; Frago and Graziano, 2021; Guijarro, 2022).

The Superblock Barcelona project seeks to 'build a model of city that has a safer and healthier public space, that favours social relations, promotes local commerce and puts the needs of children and the elderly at the centre' and to create public spaces that give 'priority to pedestrians so that streets can be spaces to meet and play' (Àrea d'Ecologia Urbana, 2020: 6). The interventions fall within the logic of smart urbanism, aimed at turning expansion into an 'urban laboratory' (Advisory Board meeting, 15 April 2021) through the establishment of a 'Plan of Indicators for the actions of the Superblock Barcelona' (Advisory Board meeting, 13 May 2021). From the perspective of planetary urbanization, the plan is based on a predominantly fragmented interpretation of the city. The collected indicators focus primarily on the proximity of various activities and services to residences, including green spaces, children's play areas and bike lanes. Nevertheless, we contend that it is precisely this fragmentation that enables the reproducibility of urban planning techniques. From the perspective of the Urban Age approach, this aspect facilitates the exportation of the Superblock Barcelona model to other cities worldwide as a strategy to address global urban challenges. This idea also guided the proposal for Barcelona as the World Capital of Architecture in 2026.

From a city-centric perspective, the plan aims to achieve zero CO_2 emissions. This is why old materials such as cobblestones are reused or purchased from nearby quarries (Advisory Board meeting, 13 October 2022). From the perspective of planetary urbanization, Lluís Frago questioned the significance of the city-centred vision that some members of the Advisory Board attribute to Superblock Barcelona to address climate change. As a result of these assessments, the Barcelona City Council chief architect (2011–2015) labelled Lluís Frago a climate change denier.

Barcelona Municipality stated that Superblock Barcelona is a project to 'transform 100% of the public space in Barcelona' and that it is 'scalable throughout the whole city' (Àrea de Ecologia Urbana, 2020: 7)—a 'project for the city and not only for the Eixample' (Advisory Board meeting, 10 February 2022). This project makes Cartesian and geometric use of the concept of scale, while neglecting the systemic and more complex view of the city's functioning. Its conceptualization of scale is used only for the model's technical and isomorphic reproduction, and not in the sense of the differential spatiality at diverse scale levels introduced by Yves Lacoste (Lacoste, 1977). A critical assessment of the concept of scale was already executed by Lluís Frago when

he identified the project's lack of a multi-scale perspective (Advisory Board meeting, 7 June 2021).

The promotion of streets as places for meeting up and passing time at the expense of access to private vehicles is probably the aspect that is most frequently used to justify the Superblock Barcelona project. This aspect was already identified in the first projects (2016), but it acquired greater significance in the wake of mobility restrictions during the Covid-19 lockdowns. On the one hand, this approach can be associated with the spread of the proximal city idea (Moreno, 2020), which became evident during the Superblock Barcelona conference titled 'The City after Covid', when Raquel Rolnik stated that 'During the pandemic time, we rediscovered the importance of proximity'. We have become more local and need to be able to offer all the city functions at each neighbourhood scale. We need a sense of community around us to enjoy our daily lives as well as the surrounding environment, under the motto 'The city for those who live in it: building the rights in the city' (Barcelona City Council, 2021e). Ideas that are directly related to local-centrism are presented in this text. On the other hand, many other trends that had spread massively during the pandemic related to virtuality, such as remote working, e-commerce, virtual classes or entertainment platforms, were overshadowed by the proximity discourses dominant during the conference. In the case of Barcelona, this commitment to the neighbourhood scale is also related to a local response against global housing speculation (Barcelona City Council, 2021c).

The Superblock Barcelona project, despite the fact that 'it is a project about climate' (Second Deputy Mayor, Advisory Board meeting, 26 October 2021), can be understood as an intervention aimed at synthesizing part of the 'distrust towards the urban phenomenon' that the new rural–urban interactions encouraged in light of the pandemic (Acebillo, 2021: 439). This is evident from the fact that the Superblock Barcelona project was conceived of as a way to attain the 'right to a quiet life' (Advisory Board meeting, 4 March 2021), based on the disappearance of the concept of the street and the notion that these 'will not be roads to connect places' (Second Deputy Mayor, Advisory Board meeting, 26 October 2021). This distrust is blended with the projection of rural imagery in the city. There has been a massive introduction of vegetation, traditional elements such as cobblestones are being used to create single-level streets, and the discourse used by the majority of Advisory Board members conveys a sense of security and social control over public space similar to the lifestyle of people in a small rural town (Advisory Board meeting, 4 March 2021). This interpretation is related to the similarity that the deputy mayor had established between the Superblock Barcelona project and Ebenezer Howard's concept of the Garden City—an example of scientific urban planning that aimed to address the issues of the capitalist city in the early twentieth century by integrating the values of living in a village within the city (BIAU, 2022).

The construction of a city based on making less city is also noticeable in the design-of-public-space dimension, which is evident in the approach's strategic bet on the disappearance of transcendental elements of urban integration, such as streets, and their conversion into linear gardens (Advisory Board meeting, 10 February 2022), rather similar to the Eixample blocks' inner courtyards (Advisory Board meeting, 11 February 2021). The same Advisory Board meeting (4 February 2021) considered that the winning proposals 'fall into over-design, over-manage the permitted and non-permitted uses, and determine down to the last detail what this space would be like, leaving no room for error, conflict, needs or improvisation'. This contrasts with the will to 'respond to the everyday use functions, in anticipation of the specific uses that would arise from citizens as generators of activities'. The points related to the winning projects' over-design and disconnection from the urban-space reality where these are planned meant that various adjustments needed to be made at a technical level. These were already evident in the March 2023 developments (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4   The winning project for upgrading the Consell de Cent as part of the Superblock Barcelona project had to be adapted for uses that were not considered in the original design. These modifications included goods loading areas, placement of garbage containers, parking spaces for delivery vehicles, and bar and restaurant terraces. The resulting landscape contrasts with the initial rendering (photo by Lluís Frago, October 2023)

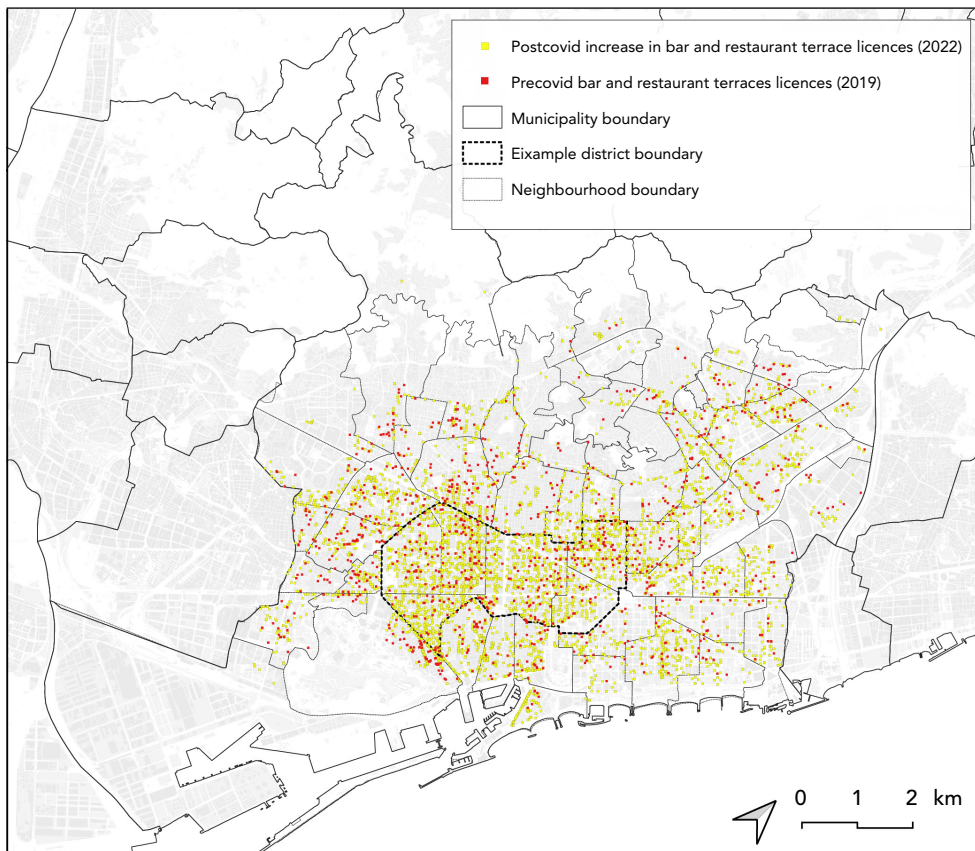**TABLE 1**   Bar and restaurant terraces in Barcelona between 2019 and 2022

	2019	2022	2019–2022
Licences	4,217	6,501	+54.2%
Number of tables	18,774	30,427	+62.1%
Terrace area (m²)	44,496	75,802	+70.4%

SOURCE: authors' analysis, based on Barcelona City Council (2022)

—   The unstoppable global logic of consumption
        The interventions' progressive adjustment to public-space reality had already occurred by means of tactical urbanism, with the removal of 2,000 problematic concrete blocks (known as New Jersey blocks) and middle-of-the-street bollards during February and March 2023. These blocks had helped to boost the massive spread of bar and restaurant terraces in Barcelona between 2019 and 2022 (see Table 1), the Eixample district being the area where this increase had been the highest (see Figure 5). When Covid-19-related exceptional measures were discontinued in 2023, 495 'platforms'— street-level areas used as bar or restaurant terraces—were consolidated in spaces that had been occupied by cars before Covid-19. This meant that Covid-19 measures had led

FIGURE 5 Bar and restaurant terrace licences between 2019 and 2022 (*source*: authors' analysis, based on information from Barcelona City Council, 2022)

to 1,131 new terrace licences and the addition of 5,528 new tables and 21,537 new chairs, which brought the total number of permanent terrace permits to 6,375 (a total of 28,858 tables and 114,056 chairs) (Barcelona City Council, 2023b). The strong relationship between traffic-restricted streets and number of terraces, measured by number of chairs, can be seen in the Eixample in the areas around Avinguda Gaudí, the Passeig de Sant Joan between Passeig de Gràcia and Enric Granados, and in the Sant Antoni market area (see Figure 5). According to the authors, this fact anticipated that the Superblock Barcelona project would support the spread of bar terraces in streets where their presence had not been significant.

Residents against the city

Barcelona's urban planning over the past four decades was conducted without considering the rest of the metropolitan area's functioning, and vice versa. This was also true for peripheral municipalities such as Viladecans (Bernardos *et al.*, 2020). Environmental policies and the fight against climate change are important aspects of such fragmented micro-scale housing initiatives, since these are based above all on proximity to urban green areas, despite affecting the city-region's centrality system. Some of the urban planning principles on which the Superblock Barcelona project is based are already present in contemporary fragmented urban planning, for example, gated residential areas in the urban peripheries of many cities. The conception of places

as self-sufficient, accompanied by notions, such as the return to nature, security, serenity, environmentalism, health, community, proximity and space for children's playgrounds, are part of these residential areas' values (Sposito and Góes, 2016; Morcuende, 2021a), although on the face they seem to be distant from city areas in terms of social values.

In this article we introduce the idea of how residents rise up against the city by alluding to the process of claiming the city or acting on it from a neighbourhood scale and for their own benefit. This uprising marginalizes all other urban-phenomenon scales and functions other than the residential one. Residents act as the main interlocutors in this process, which is based on the notion of private ownership of rights related to housing property. Residents demand proximity to all activities that improve environmental quality and reject any activities that provide services on a supra-neighbourhood scale and which frequently generate environmental nuisance—a kind of 'not in my back yard' approach. They are therefore claiming 'the right to live in the city' (Moreno, 2020: 77–100), in contrast to the earlier concept of citizens being linked to the political dimension and to their right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 2003; Merrifield, 2011). The contemporary right to the city goes beyond the Paris Commune conception and is associated with the right to live in the centre, also by integrating work, mobility or leisure—functions that need to be considered from a planetary urbanization perspective. Five recent urban reform projects in Barcelona show how residents have risen up against the city, or how the residential function role becomes dominant to the detriment of other functions: the 'Partial Modification of the General Metropolitan Plan for a More Sustainable and Inclusive 22@' in 2022; the revision of uses for the Montjuïc Fair in 2021; the new facilities planned for the former Modelo prison located in the Eixample district in 2022; the park in Plaça de les Glòries in 2015 and the Hospital Clínic transfer approval in 2023.

The 'Partial Modification of the General Metropolitan Plan for a More Sustainable and Inclusive 22@' was approved in May 2022 and included adjusting the ratio of 90% for economic activities and 10% for housing to a ratio of 70% and 30%, respectively, to provide easier access to economic services (Barcelona City Council, 2020a). It is linked to the Plaça de les Glòries project, which aims to transform Barcelona's most accessible space through the development of numerous neighbourhood-scale facilities, based on the 2007 'Compromís per Glòries' (Glòries Compromise): a primary care centre, a secondary school, a neighbourhood library, a nursing home and a social centre, as well as a large green area integrated into the Superblock Barcelona project. In the Plaça Espanya area, the Montjuïc Fair modification was approved to allow for the current scenario—which sets aside 100% of space for trade fair uses—to be amended so that almost half is now allocated to 'housing, neighbourhood facilities, local commerce, green areas and promenades'. The same trend in the projection of the neighbourhood scale can be observed in the recent approval of the Hospital Clínic transfer from the Eixample district to the outskirts of Barcelona. This change would allow for the development of new neighbourhood facilities and more green areas in the Eixample. A similar strategy was followed with the Modelo prison transfer from the Eixample to Zona Franca. A nursing home, a park and a school are planned for the former prison space.

Conclusions

In this article we show how the political and administrative fragmentation of Barcelona's municipalities, districts and neighbourhoods has made urban planning on a neighbourhood, local or micro scale possible at the expense of urban planning with a metropolitan scope and perspective, under the New Urban Age paradigm. We used the case of the Superblock Barcelona project to illustrate, with examples, how this urban planning approach deepens the political-administrative and sociospatial fragmentation at the local scale.

We detected three paradoxes between the ideology represented by the New Urban Age and its urban policies. The first paradox relates to horizontal fragmentation, which leads to municipalities competing for resources and hindering planning at any scale other than the local scale. This horizontal fragmentation has not been overcome by the recent wave of new municipalism governments. Governments such as Barcelona's, and the rest of its metropolitan municipalities, have not been able to generate the alliances necessary to make the required leap in scale that metropolitan planning demands. On the contrary, policies such as Superblock Barcelona embody an insistence on the existence of a supposed new Barcelona Model that can be replicated in any sociospatial context. Once again, the ideology of the New Urban Age embraces these policies, suggesting that the city is an empirical, delineable and replicable artefact to which the same policies can be applied throughout.

Presenting Barcelona's Superblock as an internationally disseminated model seems to be more a result of the city's urban planning tradition (Pla Cerdà, Pla Macià, and the Olympic Games reform) than an innovative intervention itself. Public space reform, which entails including more urban green areas and reducing the space allocated to motorized transport, is a form of intervention that has already been implemented in the past. The novelty of the Barcelona intervention lies in its narrative and its discourses, which we have discussed throughout this article and which we show justify it as a sustainable urban plan that is capable of addressing global challenges.

Despite the frequent use of the term 'Barcelona Model', which seems to encompass various related policies, the term refers to a specific moment and a particular set of characteristics. The Barcelona Model emerged in the pre-Olympic phase and enjoyed broad citizen consensus—although not without contestation and resistance—as an approach to strategic planning at the metropolitan and regional scales, based on a centre–periphery vision that proposed the necessary revitalization of a crisis-ridden centre—gentrification—and the beautification of popular peripheries, aspects that were crucial for generating consensus. This model no longer exists, and the Superblock Barcelona cannot in any way be 'sold' as a new version of the Barcelona Model, as it lacks all of its characteristics.

The second paradox concerns the intention to address global challenges through strictly local-scale planning. As we show in this article, the Superblock Barcelona project clearly aligns with this purpose. The tactical urbanism in which this policy is circumscribed highlights that the more a project appeals to global challenges, the more local or micro interventions are carried out in metropolitan areas, such as those related to climate change. However, alongside tactical urbanism, other narratives inherent to the New Urban Age, such as technical-scientific urbanism or sustainability urbanism, reinforce local-centrism by recognizing the city as the origin and solution to numerous global challenges. An assessment of the solutions these interventions offer can only be done from a perspective that entails a more integrated understanding of the urban.

Thus, the Superblock Barcelona project becomes a paradigmatic example of how contemporary urban planning is articulated on the basis of global-local dialectics. The project not only neglects the regional/metropolitan scale, but also the sociospatial history rigour and position of each place within the system. Under the umbrella of a global strategy to solve local problems, or local strategies to solve global problems, urban planning today does not address the structuring dimensions of cities that also operate on a global scale, such as the land market and the progressive concentration of real-estate ownership in ever fewer holders. The criticisms levelled at the Superblock Barcelona project so far potentially deny global challenges such as pollution in cities by promoting the use of private cars as the main mode of mobility, as well as street-level parking.

The third paradox, which stems from the other two, points towards functional fragmentation, which entails the residential function overlapping with other urban functions. This is what we termed 'residents against the city', a process in which Superblock Barcelona plays a significant role and goes beyond the city-centrism proposed by the New Urban Age, which could be called local-centrism and leads to the 'trap of the local'. The identification and definition of such local-centrism is a contribution the perspective of planetary urbanization can make to the analysis of tactical urbanism, based on the case study of Superblock Barcelona.

The importance of the residential function in city planning is clearly evident in many other policies implemented in Barcelona over the past few years, as well as in international policies, something the 15-minute-city slogan, which has spread widely since the pandemic, attests to. Placing the burden of the city governance scale on residents, in many cases housing owners, has specific consequences for public space and is always related to public space in close proximity to homes. Criticisms levelled at the Superblock Barcelona programme so far tend to focus on consumer-business-entrepreneur subjects rather than on residents-neighbours. These criticisms also have an impact on city-region functioning, as was evident in the case of Barcelona's Eixample district. At the same time, the very construction of the concept of neighbourhood does not really seem useful for explaining the contemporary world. Thus, paradoxically, the more the proximity discourse is articulated, the higher the number of people who live increasingly hyper-connected to the world via information technologies, also through global logistics-supply chains. We also identified contradictions between the local and global scales, i.e. when public space for private transport is reduced and privatized through the proliferation of bar and restaurant terraces, thus determining the restricted use of such public space.

This growing role that proximity and the local scale have in urban planning paradoxically also contrasts with the unquestionably increased role of the land market, which operates on a multiscalar logic and cannot be regulated solely by land use plans. Current criticisms of the Superblock Barcelona project seek to eliminate any type of regulation of economic activity, as the case of terrace licences indicates. Real-estate lobbies might also be interested in the growing importance attributed to the residential function in planning, since this will guarantee the profitability of their investments in cities such as Barcelona, where other urban activities are not as profitable or are in crisis. An example of this process is a flat sold for 40 million euros in the former Passeig de Gràcia Deutsche Bank building in November 2022.

We can therefore conclude that Superblock Barcelona, and the urban principles associated with it within the framework of the New Urban Age paradigm, reinforce the exclusive association of the urban with the city form, and the city form with the resident subject.

Finally, we critique all urban projects that are aimed at solving global challenges based on eminently local-scale urban planning interventions—namely, actions that are more local-scale than that of the city. We identify in this process how residents, in the name of a smarter, greener and closer city, can come to deny the very existence of the city and its associated functional complexity—a functional complexity that goes far beyond the simple residential-demographic function, which ends up reproducing the basic ideas of the New Urban Age and often undermines the entire meaning of the 'right to the city'. This tendency clearly shows the contradictions between the 'right to the city', with its strong political dimension, and what may be called the 'right to live in the city', with its more individualistic connotation.

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