

## 10. Plaça de la Palmera

District Sant Martí  
 Pedro Barragán, Bernardo de Sola  
 1985  
 17160m<sup>2</sup>

The square is located in the Verneda neighborhood of Sant Martí between Andrade, Puigcerdà, Concili de Trento and Maresme streets. It used to be a residual space whose sole distinctive feature was a palm tree. In a neighborhood with the typical isolated-construction morphology of the 60's, Plaça de la Palmera represents another punctual urban intervention of a place that lacked in urban identity. The site had been classified as a building land, destined to be the first Hilton Hotel but the project failed due to a breached building code due to an excess in legal heights, hence, the City Council managed to acquire the land.<sup>44</sup>

It is a wide area that seems to be divided into three parts and the only common element is the sidewalk in the perimeters outlined and unified with rows of plane and celtis trees, and concrete benches resting on 60x40cm concrete slabs.

On Puigcerdà street side, once stood an old factory dedicated to metallurgy and remained active until 1976. What is left of it nowadays is an industrial chimney standing on a new subterranean parking and sharing the space with 2 sandy rectangular playgrounds. Apart from the playgrounds, this area is paved in black asphalt and lined with rows of acacia trees, benches and two potable fountains on each side. The subterranean parking has two 'entrance/exit', on either sides of the square, with protecting bollards and signs, outdoor ventilators and a glass elevator access for pedestrians.

In the middle of the space is a significant sculpture, 'El Muro' designed by Richard Serra, transforming the whole space and providing it with different experiences. It consists of two concentric wavy laminas of reinforced concrete –2.98m high, 52m long and 25cm thick– located across the very middle of the space and opening on a vast sandy



Fig.64 Current view of the square and on the bottom right the same view before urbanization



Fig.65 The chimney left from the old factory (top). The lighting tower (bottom)

44. FABRE, Jaume. HUERTAS, Josep M. El Muro. *Web Art Pública* [online]. Departament Urbanisme. Ajuntament de Barcelona- Universitat de Barcelona [Accessed: 03 January 2012]. Available at: < www.bcn.cat/

esplanade where the palm tree is located. Richard Serra was employed by the mayor Narcís Serra during a visit to New York. The sculptor employed the same concept of “site specificity” and designed a paradigm of his ‘Tilted Arc’ located in the Federal Place of New York. Through ‘The Wall’ he created a particular perception of the space itself and provided passersby with a new spatial experience by obliging them to follow different paths, levels, curves, and perspectives transforming the area into a “transitive” space.<sup>45</sup>

Due to the slight difference in level, on Marseme street side, the open esplanade is reached through few gradual concrete steps. The palm tree is surrounded by two acacias and trapped in the dynamic duality of the wall. On one side of the esplanade is a basketball net and on the other is a small circular playground surrounded by benches, acacia trees, and a massive lighting tower that imposes itself on the space.

Between the playgrounds and Serra’s wall is a delightful garden or small forest lying in the middle of the space. It is a neutral zone of different

levels, paved in paths of black and white cobblestones aligned with the curve of the wall and separates it visually from the chimney area. Following the same alignment are a few benches, lighting, and rows of pine and Judas trees providing coolness and shade. A significant element of this area is a bandstand or kiosk standing among the pine trees.

In 1984, on the day of the square’s inauguration, the sculpture was not well received by the neighbors and political parties because it divided the whole space. In fact, on one Sunday it was about to disappear when a group of neighbors decided to demolish it but were stopped by the police.

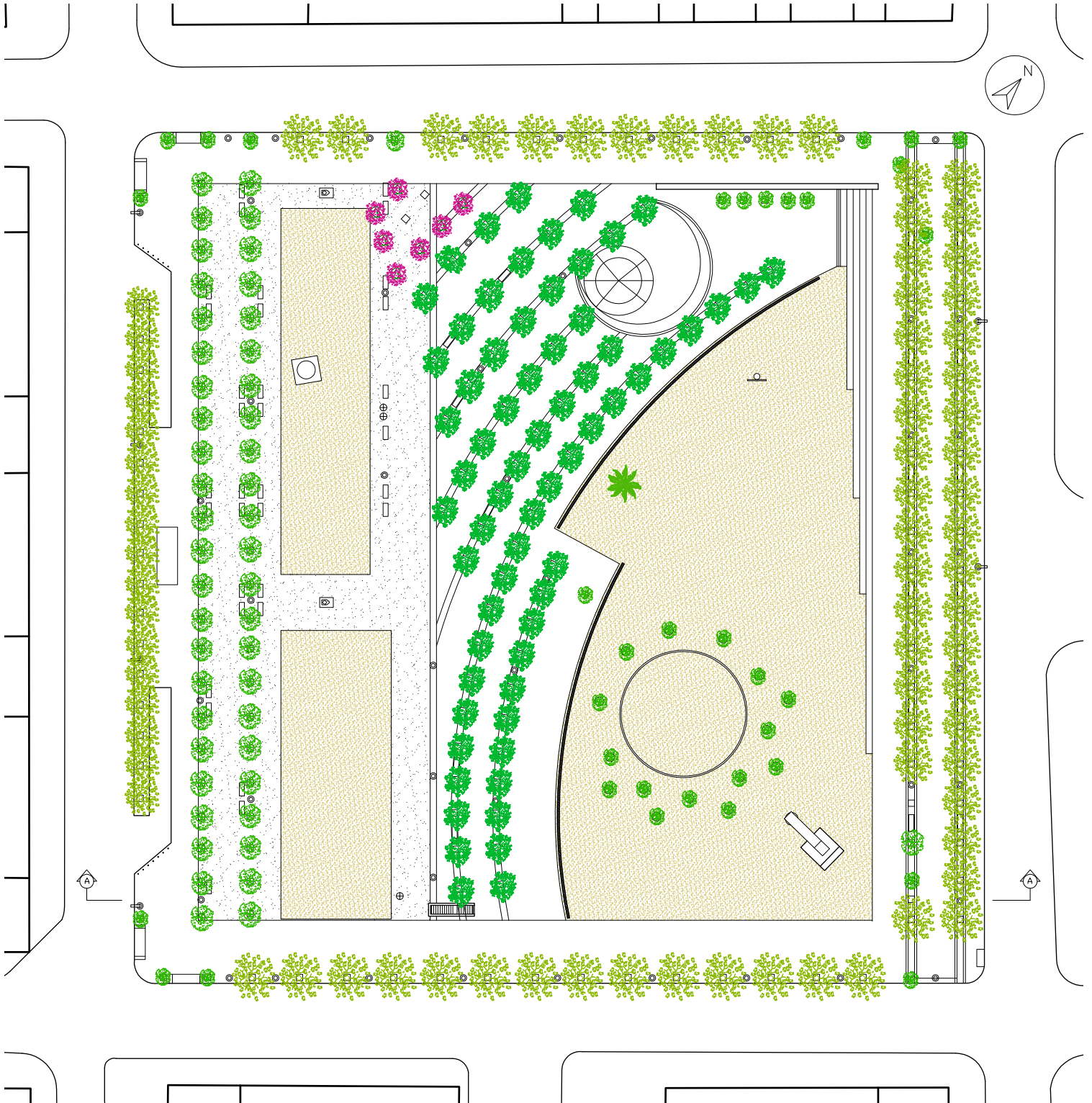
After the inauguration, Plaça de la Palmera fell into oblivion and signs of deterioration and vandalism started to appear. One of the neighbors recalls that his two children learned to play soccer kicking against Serra’s wall.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, nowadays everything has improved and settled down, the neighbors got used to the sculpture, and the area is always filled with people resting and children playing in the playgrounds.

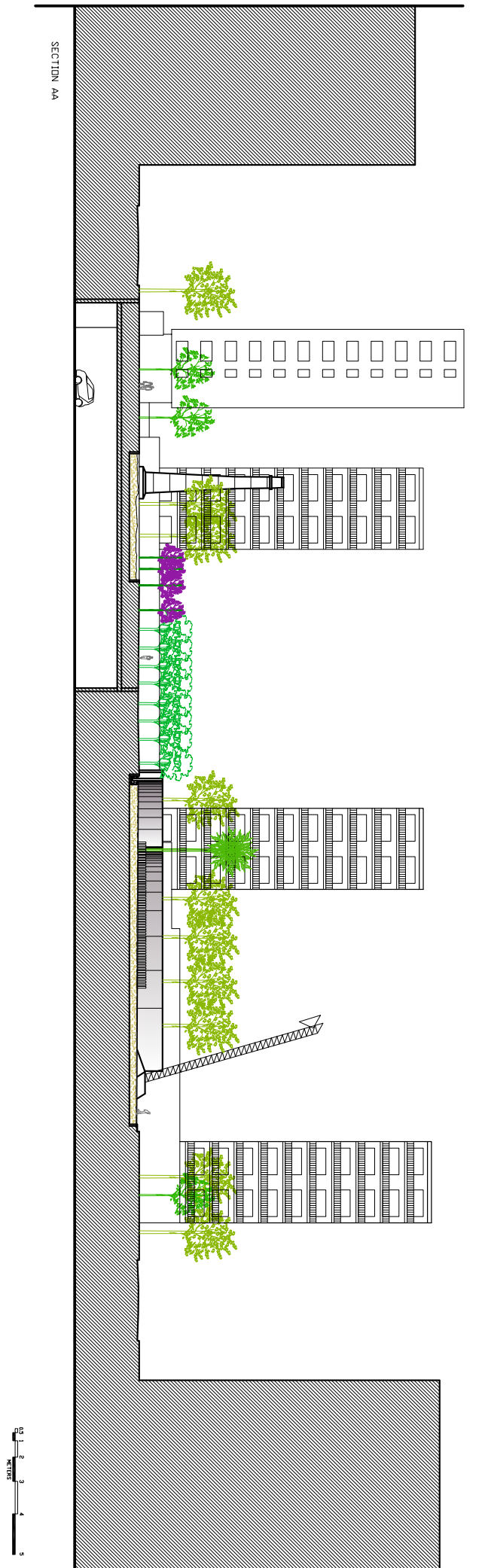


Fig.66 Panoramic view of the square showing the esplanade, Serra’s wall, and the pine forest with the band stand.

45. GUASCH, Anna Maria. *El Muro*. *Web Art Públic* [online]. Departament Urbanisme. Ajuntament de Barcelona- Universitat de Barcelona [Accessed: 03 January 2012]. Available at: < [www.bcn.cat/artpublic](http://www.bcn.cat/artpublic) >

46. MONTAÑÉS, Jose Angel. *El muro de la Verneda, en pie*. Reportaje [online]. El País. Barcelona, 08/08/2010 [Accessed: 03 January 2012]. Available at: <[http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cataluna/muro/Verneda/pie/elpepiespcat/20100808elpcat\\_7/Tes](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cataluna/muro/Verneda/pie/elpepiespcat/20100808elpcat_7/Tes)>





## 11. Plaça Can Robacols

District Sant Martí  
 Pedro Barragán, Bernardo de Sola  
 1987, remodeled in 2006  
 821m<sup>2</sup>

Can Robacols is a square in the neighborhood of Clot - Camp de l'Arpa in the District of Sant Martí. Formerly the space had been a rural setting with a group of whitewashed, low, one floored houses located between Besalú, Josepa Massanés, Ripollés and Pistó streets.<sup>47</sup> They were owned by one of the most important families in Sant Martí, Cases family, who had further properties in the neighborhood and who held the nickname after which the square was named.<sup>48</sup>

The small constructions were in bad conditions, therefore, in 1982, the City Council decided to demolish them and instead of constructing new buildings, declared the place as a public space designed by Bernardo de Sola y Pedro Barragán. The square was inaugurated in 1987 with the presence of Mayor Pasqual Maragall.

Some of the characteristics of the square is that, first, the architects took advantage of the existing slope to design an oval space leveled with the lower part of the square and is connected with the upper part through two slides, creating by that a concrete wall and a sandy floor.

Second, in the center of the square, stand two pre-existing palm trees lying in circular cement protections one of 3 meters in height and the other of 2 meters. The rest of the space is filled with tipuana trees.

Third, the space is lit by colorful metallic structures with colors of blue, red, and yellow reminding us of the "agit-pop".<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, it has a kind of three-dimensional hollowed sculpture starting in the upper level and ending in the lower part causing a hole in the wall and creating by that a visual connection between the two levels.

Surrounding the square are many stores, garages and patio entries.

However, the space did not remain the same since the modernity of the design was not compatible with its surroundings. *"Lo cierto es que la modernidad del diseño no puede contener su propia arrogancia respecto a las actividades que se desarrollan a su alrededor. Las de Can Robacols son las formas de una modernidad utópica desafiada por la heterogeneidad de construcciones y actividades que la rodean."*<sup>50</sup>



Fig.67 The square before being remodeled (top). Hollowed sculpture (bottom).

47. BARCELONAV. *Accions veïnals que han canviat Barcelona*. Sant Martí. [online]. [Accessed: 03 January 2012]. Available at: <[http://www.memoriaveinal.org/pl\\_can\\_robacols-sant\\_marti.php](http://www.memoriaveinal.org/pl_can_robacols-sant_marti.php)>

48. ROMANÍ, Daniel. *La Plaça Can Robacols, renovada completament*. Suplement del Districte i dels Barris [online]. Diciembre 2006. pp.3 [Accessed: 03 January 2012]. Available at: <[http://www.bcn.cat/publicacions/b\\_barris/arxiu/06\\_desembre/Sant\\_Marti.pdf](http://www.bcn.cat/publicacions/b_barris/arxiu/06_desembre/Sant_Marti.pdf)>

49. FABRE, Jaume. HUERTAS, Josep. M. *Plaça can Robacols*. *Web Art Públic* [online]. Department Urbanisme. Ajuntament de Barcelona - Universitat de Barcelona [Accessed: 03 January 2012]. Available at: <[www.bcn.cat/](http://www.bcn.cat/)>

50. GUERRA, Carles. *Plaça can Robacols*. *Web Art Públic* [online]. Department Urbanisme. Ajuntament de Barcelona- Universitat de Barcelona [Accessed: 03 January 2012]. Available at: <[www.bcn.cat/artpublic](http://www.bcn.cat/artpublic)>

It became a dry and grey place especially that it lacked in greenery and playgrounds. The different levels and the hollowed sculpture created a kind of insecurity and an unpleasant experience.

*“Desde la parte más baja, recubierta de arena, los usuarios se convierten en objeto de las miradas de aquellos que se asoman por la calle más elevada. La forma de esta plaza, muy parecida a la de un contenedor, hace que los movimientos de los ciudadanos se conviertan en una producción espontánea y observable.”<sup>51</sup>*

Therefore, in 2006 the whole square was remodeled. The difference in level was eliminated and the metallic structure and hollowed sculpture were removed. The oval was filled with red asphalt and the rest of the pavement was renewed with rows of 60x40cm and 60x8cm concrete slabs placed diagonally with respect to the corners of the square’s irregular rectangle. The palm trees were kept and three new playgrounds were incorporated along with benches and tipuana protectors all aligned in the same direction as the pavement. In addition, there are new litter bins, a potable fountain, and bollards on the sides to protect the square from vehicles.

The square nowadays is more compatible with its surroundings than the former design. It is cleaner, safer, simpler, more organized, sustainable and well used by the citizens living in its surroundings. The playgrounds are full of children especially during the weekends and afternoons. The benches are used by old people during the day and young people during the night. Unlike the difference in levels of the former design that divided the people, this new leveled space created an equal sense of unity and connection between the individuals sitting in the square and passersby.

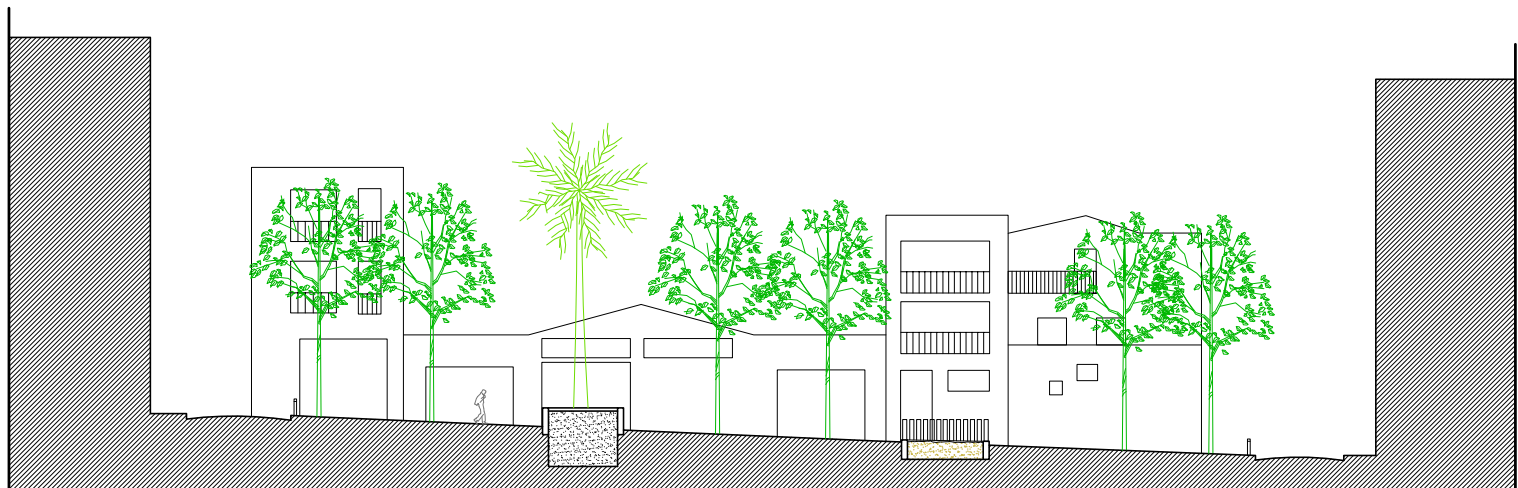
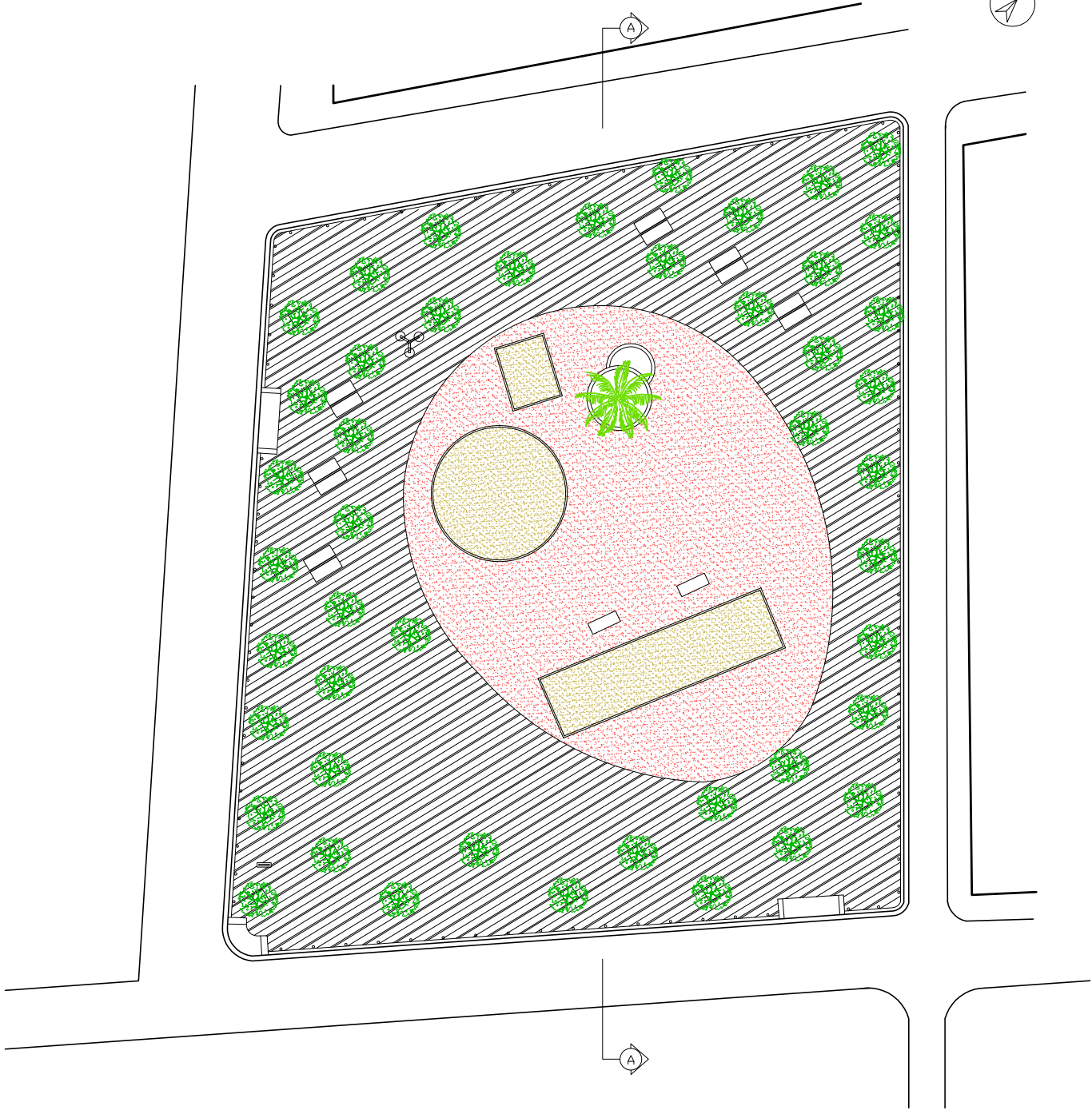
Plaça Can Robacols along with Rogent, a pedestrian street located near the plaza, are fundamental elements for binding and improving the life of the neighborhood.<sup>52</sup>



Fig.68 The square after being remodeled

51. Ibid.

52. District de Sant Martí. El Camp de l'Arpa del Clot [online]. Ajuntament de Barcelona [Accessed: 03 January 2012]. Available at: <[http://w110.bcn.cat/portal/site/SantMartí/menuitem.05848ae0b20f8a9a2d852d85a2ef8a0c/?vgnextoid=647e4dc8c633a210VgnVCM1000074fea8c0RCRD&vgnnextchannel=647e4dc8c633a210VgnVCM10000074fea8c0RCRD&lang=ca\\_ES](http://w110.bcn.cat/portal/site/SantMartí/menuitem.05848ae0b20f8a9a2d852d85a2ef8a0c/?vgnextoid=647e4dc8c633a210VgnVCM1000074fea8c0RCRD&vgnnextchannel=647e4dc8c633a210VgnVCM10000074fea8c0RCRD&lang=ca_ES)>



SECTION AA

