

Conclusion

CHAPTER 4



Fig.81 Plaça d'Islandia

The city of Barcelona has always been an important city dating back to the roman times. It has passed through many challenges, phases, and changes from the demolition of the old walls to the industrial revolution, the Cerdà plan and the democratic period reaching our present day. In the “transition” period of the 70s and 80s, vast improvements took place (preparing for the 92 Olympic Games) that affected the image of Barcelona and speeded up the urban regeneration process. New projects and forms of urban planning appeared forming the so called Barcelona Model. The Model gave importance to urban design, public space, society, culture, identity, heritage, economy, and tourism and focused on the interrelation between the social practices and the form and quality of public spaces.

The Barcelona Model has been a major agent in the regeneration of Barcelona

As a matter of fact, public space was, and still is the main protagonist in this model, a fundamental instrument for urbanizing, restoring, unifying and regenerating the historic centers and periphery in the city. The qualification of public space and the provision of urban facilities and services became a potent tool for cohesion in the degraded historic centers and peripheral neighborhoods.

The old town was being renovated and “opened up” while the periphery was being urbanized and connected to the center not only by these new public spaces but also by the special public art incorporated in them. “Se diseñaron ‘buenos espacios públicos

para la ciudadanía” (Remesar, 2008: 110).

However, the Barcelona Model was strongly criticized for many aspects. For example, too much focus on global markets, neglecting the needs of the local population, and its effects on the massive increase in prices and tourism. In spite of that, from a socio-economical standpoint, some of the punctual operations acted as an investment that reinstated to the neighborhood’s occupants much of the surplus and gain, thus reviving the district and its population (Bohigas, 1986). “*Por ejemplo, crear una plaza en el centro histórico ha tenido como efecto inmediato que las tiendas de la plaza –que antes solo tenían fachada a una calle estrecha y casi inaccesible- absorbieran un plusvalor cuyos réditos revirtieran a los mismos habitantes del barrio. De esta manera, una revalorización del espacio público provoca la mejora de todo su entorno, no solo de las tiendas sino también de todos los ámbitos de la propiedad privada. Y además ayuda a mantener en el barrio a una buena parte de la población autóctona (...) Esta solución de ‘spots de regeneración’ tiene otras dos ventajas: la facilidad de gestión de la primera actuación y la posterior participación económica y promocional de la iniciativa privada, con la cual se consigue, además, alentar la reeducación social y la solidaridad*” (Bohigas, 1999: 204).

Moreover, the model has still managed to improve and create positive and essential projects intending as much as possible to rely on the citizen’s participation. In fact, many of the squares were created and developed with the collaboration of the neighbors and the local movements. “*Estos espacios fueron*

concebidos también con la voluntad de introducir “cultura urbana y cívica”, tradición por el espacio de la ciudad que pertenece a todos y en el que puede producirse la mezcla social” (Alcalà, 2006: 86). Nevertheless, in spite of the citizen participation, each intervention is peculiar and is conceived as a “single project” with a clear and responsible authorship (Bohigas, 1987).

Therefore, despite the criticism and the less positive effects pointed out by the critics, the Barcelona Model has proven to be clearly successful. It has been a major agent on the regeneration of the city as a whole, both to the inside, to the neighborhoods and districts, as well as to the outside, playing an important role in positioning Barcelona as the leading touristic spot in the Mediterranean and as an important hub of architecture, urbanism and design.

From hygiene to acupuncture: tackling problems efficiently

During the 1980s, Bohigas and his team used the “hygienic” approach born in the 19th century –and also present throughout the different bylaws and new methods of urban planning reflected by projects such as Howard’s “garden city,” Haussmann’s plan for Paris, Cerdà’s plan for Barcelona, the GATCPAC’s Macià plan, and many others before reaching the recent PGM and the PERIs- but in a more advanced and up-to-date process by using the urban acupuncture or “metastasis” concept in their urban planning strategy. They centered their urban policy on public space. “*Es evidente que el protagonista de este proceso es el diseño del espacio público porque es la esencia de la urbanidad y el punto de partida formal y funcional, es decir, social*” (Bohigas, 1999: 200).

Therefore, small-scale interventions were the first to be applied in zones and areas in need of renewal and rehabilitation. They were spaces limited by their scale, time, and investment but had a high impact on its surrounding environment. For this reason, it was necessary for Bohigas to choose the appropriate points or spots. “*Como en la enfermedad de la que proviene la idea de metástasis, cuanto más neurál-*

gico es el lugar donde actúa, más rápido y eficaz es su impacto” (Alcalà, 2006: 86). Hence, the success was in discovering the most significant places of the city and neighborhoods so that its great impact will not only affect the concerned area but the whole metropolis.

Enhancing the century-old concept of urban hygiene by assuming a more holistic, unifying paradigm inspired in Oriental Medicine, in particular “acupuncture”. From this vision, “left over” spaces were not considered as residual or useless spaces between buildings but as voids capable of structuring and defining urban structure with their own laws and orders (Alcalà, 2006). They were converted into spaces of better quality, environment, mobility, accessibility and more multifunctional. They have created a valuable image of the city, social identity, quality, security, communication, coexistence, and social cohesion. They have provided a better usage of space, and a positive relationship between the citizens and their environment. “*... la forma, el uso y el contenido significativo de los nuevos espacios libres son los elementos que a medio plazo actuarán como matrices de transformación del barrio de una manera natural -casi diríamos ‘popular’- sin dañar ni la morfología ni la estructura social. Actuarán directamente -higienización, lugar de vida y responsabilización colectiva, representación monumental- e indirectamente como ejemplos de exigencia de urbanidad*” (Bohigas, 1986: 42).

As a result, spaces were being selected and new interventions were realized in every neighborhood in the city. Apart from pedestrian streets, new small-scale squares, parks and gardens –including the spaces mentioned in the timeline and the ones selected as case studies- were created, designed, or restored.

They are a result of urban acupuncture, strategically selected to perform immediate impact. The analysis of the selected squares and gardens demonstrates that these punctual operations were developed through the process of interweaving that encouraged social interaction, and affected positively the population density, and the flow of ventilation and

sunlight into the houses. *“La posibilidad del control cualitativo de las intervenciones de pequeña escala es más factible y la suma de muchas acciones puntuales acaba cualificando el espacio en su totalidad”* (Acebillo, 1999: 241). Due to that, it was verified that this process has immediate and more radical results than the deductive path of large-scale systematic planning. *“That has in fact been one of the positive advances in planning method made in Barcelona: to start a series of specific developments that could act as focuses to regenerate the surrounding area in the conviction that this practical activity often has more immediate and radical results than would be obtained in consequence of exclusively using systematic large-scale planning”* (Bohigas, 1987: 11).

Clearly from this perspective one of the main successes of the model has been in terms of efficiency. The interventions have been able to identify specific areas with a potentially greater impact in the whole of the city, notably providing a much more manageable system to deal with density problems.

Unifying the districts

One of the main positive aspects is the existence of a set of criteria and principles that unify all the interventions, providing a common paradigm under which is carried out the regeneration of the city. Whether in the center or the periphery they have common characteristics defined through their quality, accessibility, construction, materials, and the standardization of the street furniture locations and the use of different materials. They have specially selected designs of benches, bollards, lighting, fountains, pavement, colors, trees, protectors, greenery, garbage bins, etc.

These characteristics have resulted in a qualitative and quantitative homogenization of the city that has allowed, at the same time, the historical differences between center and periphery. *“La homogeneización pasa por un equilibrio de significaciones y usos -calificar en sentido urbano los espacios de la periferia y hacer habitables los espacios calificados del centro- en el ámbito de cada barrio, aunque subrayando también la representación unitaria de la ciudad en los mismos sedimentos históricos”* (Bohigas, 1986: 23).

This affected one of the model's main goals in unifying the public spaces in Barcelona and connecting, through the common standards and norms, the center to the periphery. Bohigas adds that *“son elementos indispensables, que ejercen una evidente fuerza centrípeta en las diversas comunidades. En Barcelona, por ejemplo, se podría estructurar la historia de los núcleos sociales y de los cambios en la formalización arquitectónica a partir de análisis de las plazas”* (1986: 84).

Another fundamental aspect in “unifying” the squares is public art or in other words Bohiga's “monumentalizar la periferia”. According to Camillo Sitte each city has a number of squares but one square or a group of related squares at its center is the most important, and it is there were the public art, great sculptures, fountains and obelisks are placed (Moughtin, et al. 1999). However, the “monumentalization” process undertaken in Barcelona negates Sitte's opinion and gives importance not only to that main square in the center but to all the main sites in the city. A large wave of important artists placed their art in Barcelona, especially in the periphery, giving them importance, monumentalizing them, and integrating them into the city. In the beginning some of the public art and squares faced great reactions and were not well received, but generally with time, the neighbors became acquainted with them and got used to them (Alcalà, 2006).

Where to go from now

Still in our present day constant punctual operations are being created in Barcelona. As for the existing squares, parks and gardens, they are constantly being improved, restored, maintained, or updated to accommodate the new social changes and requirements of our modern times especially that the majority existed since the 1980s. For example, due to lack of space many squares are being improved by the construction of subterranean parking as in Plaça Salvador Allende, Plaça de la Palmera and Plaça Navas, some are being changed such as Plaça George Orwell, and others are being maintained such as Plaça Molina and Plaça d'Anna Frank.

Last but not least, these squares and gardens are punctual points that play a fundamental role in providing new facilities and reconsidering public space as an element whose quality can play a vast role in re-qualifying and regenerating an entire sector including its privatized elements (Bohigas, 1986). The 1980s has been the most fruitful of Barcelona's recent urbanism. These small punctual actions are still performed and met the intended goals of redevelopment and improvement of the urban landscape. *"...actualmente en Barcelona existe una cultura y una exigencia, en cuanto al espacio público, que asegura su calidad"* (Acebillo, 1999: 225).

The use of urban acupuncture through these strategic small-scale public interventions, provided the neighborhoods – historic centers and periphery- in a positive energy; replaced deteriorated buildings and residual spaces; renewed the spaces; rehabilitated the area; revived social life; improved salubrity and health; and connected fragmented areas resulting in a catalytic effect, a metastasis that spread throughout the neighborhood, the sector, the district, the city and into the whole metropolis until finally reaching to what is known as "urban regeneration".

"La nube de proyectos urbanos de pequeña escala desarrollados en Barcelona evidencia que desde el control de los pequeños intersticios se pueden lograr objetivos de gran alcance, como la regeneración urbana, a partir del espacio público" (Acebillo, 1999: 241).

Some cities such as Los Angeles or Berlin are starting to replace the macro-projects and master plans by applying urban acupuncture on small-scale or micro-interventions (Kaye, 2011). Many proponents (including Bohigas, Acebillo, Lerner, etc.) argue that large-scale revitalization projects are less effective, less feasible, and failed to meaningfully involve their surrounding communities in their planning and development (Miller, 2011). Los Angeles architect John Southern states that "urban acupuncture is a surgical and selective intervention into the urban environment instead of large scale projects that involve not only thousands of acres, but investment and infrastructure that municipali-

ties can no longer provide" (Kaye, 2011).

During this era of difficult economic climate, constrained budgets, and limited resources, urban acupuncture is the alternative and may be applied around the world especially in third world cities with tight municipal budgets. It creates countless opportunities of green public spaces with low-cost, low level of expropriation, efficient energy and sustainability.

Urban acupuncture starts from within the neighborhood and the community where it requires small changes, simple materials, and recycling processes in order to convert the pinpointed areas into public spaces of good quality. With its ripple effect it expands from those communities to the whole metropolis. It provides a better quality of life to the citizens, as long as it does not seek the over qualification of the soil and its inflation effects.

As mentioned before, properly selecting the strategic "sick" spaces is very important for urban acupuncture to be successful. During the 70s, urban architect Gordon Matta-Clark took 3 years to select 15 sites in order to perform his famous "building cuts" on special abandoned buildings and street corners. However, nowadays, technology is playing a successful role in urban acupuncture and a new "mapping software" has accelerated the identification of urban spaces that are in need of renewal and regeneration. This new software from companies such as JAS Digital and Autodesk can locate several thousand ruined or abandoned sites by using geographic information systems (GIS) to map unused spaces throughout big cities. Thanks to this technology Nicholas de Monchaux, in his project 'Local Code', was able to locate 600 sites in San Francisco (Kaye, 2011). These technological improvements make it easier for urban acupuncture to be efficient and applied in every city especially in a time in need of urban regeneration and more economical, sustainable and ecological developments.



TRAIADOR: FINS

Fig.82 Fossar de les Moreres

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