

### ***Abstract***

Barcelona is a bimillennium city that was first settled at the foothills of Montjuïc, when the Romans created the colony of Iulia Augusta Faventia Paterna Barcino, which was to form the nucleus of the city. In medieval times, Barcelona was the flourishing capital of an economically and militarily active kingdom that grew in wealth and assets. New walls were created to include the expansion, the last ones going up in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. When growth resumed as a result of industrialisation, the city struggled to get the State to allow the walls to be pulled down and for building to take place nearby, in the area known as the ‘strategic mile’. Following the demolition of the walls in 1855 and with the Cerdà Plan in place, a new Barcelona began to take shape. The historical centre lapsed into a long period of decay and progressively lost value.

In 1980, Barcelona embarked on a period of social and economic renewal, which in 1984 materialised in the restructuring of the city’s administration, with the decentralisation of municipal powers. Under these changes, the district known as Ciutat Vella came into being and the historical centre of Barcelona recovered its unity and took greater control of its destiny. The district measured 4.3 km<sup>2</sup> and at the time had a population of 118,000 inhabitants. It was made up of four neighbourhoods: Gòtic, Casc Antic, Raval and Barceloneta.

In spite of the long period of decline, the historical centre of Barcelona was still an important public and administrative centre. It was home to the regional, municipal, State and religious authorities and the site of many corporate headquarters. A number of its areas were noted for their great vitality in trade and tertiary industry. Ciutat Vella was home to the port, the economic engine of the city, until the 1960s, when it began to be progressively moved south, leaving the wharves to be subsequently converted into areas for recreational, commercial and tourist activity. The great variety of activities that Ciutat Vella hosts today ensures it is still a very mixed district that does not specialise in any particular sector but features a coexistence of various uses, including residential (locals and foreigners, young people, adults and the elderly, wealthy and poor, etc.) and economic (commerce, small industry, restaurants, cultural facilities, universities, offices, etc.), as well architectural heritage and urban renovation, new infrastructure and streets, pedestrianised squares, etc.

Development projects to renovate and revitalise the historical centre of Barcelona jostled with proposals to expand the urban space, and unfortunately some of

the ideas that were approved but then did not go through became a latent threat to areas crammed with buildings, people, activities and history.

The first urban development project was an adjunct to the plan for the nearby Eixample district designed by the engineer Ildefons Cerdà in 1859, and included extending a number of Eixample streets into the old part of town. However, only one such development eventually went ahead, many years later. This was Via Laietana, which first opened in 1908. Cerdà's Plan was followed by other development projects that involved introducing changes, modifications or new approaches. One such plan was drawn up by urban developers from GATCPAC during the time of the Republic and introduced the concept of the selective demolition of buildings to reduce the density of the historical centre. The Metropolitan General Plan approved in 1976 supported some of the previous plans to open up major roads through the area and included a number of new spaces to free up.

As the construction of the Eixample progressed, the new part of the city attracted numerous residents keen to escape the historical centre, with its old passages and inadequate buildings lacking in modern-day conveniences. The extension of Via Laietana was an aggressive rehabilitation process that would go on to spark widespread argument and which concentrated marginalised populations, encouraged prostitution in a number of areas around the port and fostered the pernicious effects of a rise in drug use. The harmful effects of the Via Laietana project became apparent during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and constituted an increasingly dangerous cocktail that hindered the present and threatened the future.

The value of the buildings nose-dived, throwing their maintenance and renovation into doubt. Low-income families, the only people prepared to forgo decent living conditions in exchange for low rent, moved into the unsanitary buildings that were sometimes dangerous and nearly always shared by more people than building regulations recommended. When people's economic situations improved, they would leave the neighbourhood, thus making it hard for synergies to be formed with residents. Economic activity was also affected by the process of decline, with additional problems such as the abandonment of small family-run businesses that were barely able to make ends meet and were forced to close. Ciutat Vella aged and its streets were filled with the most marginalised sectors of society.

When the new political period began in Spain at the end of the 1970s, Barcelona considered solving the problems of the historical centre and carried out a fact-finding

mission into the situation. The report detected a lack of public spaces, the non-existence of green areas and tree-lined streets, access problems with regard to the rest of the city and internal areas that were practically impenetrable. There were not enough neighbourhood facilities to guarantee a minimum quality of life. Infrastructure needed overhauling and in some cases implementing. Cars had colonised the public spaces and there was no network of car parks either for residents' vehicles or those of other citizens of Barcelona who had got used to driving into town to carry out transactions in a city that had promoted private transport for decades. The concentrated use of some areas of Ciutat Vella, added to the lack of association many residents felt with their neighbourhood, generated a counterproductive level of pollution.

Faced with this state of affairs, neighbourhood associations, which were strong and well coordinated, began to demand public action to turn the situation around. Their demands centred firstly on the modification of the development plans in force and then on getting the government to commit to policies that would support the residents.

The solution arrived in the form of the Special Plans for Interior Reforms (PERIs) in the neighbourhoods. The plans had been developed by public consensus and were designed to give Ciutat Vella the public space and facilities it needed, the new houses that would allow families affected by the renovation processes to be relocated and the renewal of infrastructures.

Between 1980 and 1983, PERIs were drawn up for Barceloneta, the eastern part of the historical centre and for Raval, while Gòtic was subject to particular operations. A plan for comprehensive actions was created in 1984, prioritising the renewal of Ciutat Vella, and the greatest possible number of powers was conferred to the Mayoral team charged with promoting and coordinating rehabilitation activities in the district. Two years later the plan was legally classified as a Comprehensive Rehabilitation Area (ARI), which brought the Generalitat of Catalonia on board in the transformation of Ciutat Vella and increased citizen participation in decision-making through the ARI Management Committee, an agreement and coordination body where neighbourhood associations could raise concerns and ideas and public administrations could coordinate activities.

One of the main instruments that arose from the ARI classification was the Office for the Rehabilitation of Ciutat Vella (ORCV), a framework for activities that supported the incorporation of owners and tenants in the rehabilitation of the 5,000 buildings in the district. The ORCV, today part of Foment de Ciutat Vella, SA, handled

subsidies, controlled habitability documents and developed campaigns and agreements. Throughout its existence it facilitated the rehabilitation of half the buildings in the district.

In 1986, an event occurred that was to be very positive for the development project: Barcelona won the bid to host the Olympic Games. This woke people up to the potential of carrying out a project that was as ambitious as it was costly. At around the same time, a grassroots campaign spearheaded by the Casc Antic Neighbourhood Association and entitled *Aquí hi ha gana* (Here There Is Hunger) sprang up demanding steps be taken as a matter of urgency. The campaign had a major social impact and was the definitive argument for the need to take action.

Promoció Ciutat Vella, SA (Procivesa), a management instrument that took the form of a joint venture with City Council, was established in 1988. The company was created to carry out expropriations, the relocation of families, the demolition of buildings, the development of new spaces, the construction of homes for rehousing purposes, the creation of facilities and the achievement of support from civic and economic organisations. Such a costly programme required a significant initial outlay, and in line with the legislation in force could have a maximum legal existence of 14 years (1988-2002). During this period, Procivesa obtained the following results:

- 106,048 m<sup>2</sup> of land was freed up, with 64,355 m<sup>2</sup> earmarked to new public spaces or roads, 16,322 m<sup>2</sup> to the creation of facilities and 25,371 m<sup>2</sup> to the creation of public housing for rehousing residents.

- 2,725 public houses were developed: 715 by Procivesa, 1,321 by Incasòl and 689 by the Municipal Housing Board.

- 43 neighbourhood facilities (15 social, 4 cultural, 9 sports, 10 educational and 5 health facilities) were developed, as well as 33 new city amenities (8 universities, 9 social facilities, 7 cultural facilities, 7 museums and 2 health facilities).

Between 1988 and 2002, Procivesa invested a total of €195 million in the rehabilitation projects. A further €298 million came from Barcelona City Council, €300 million from the Generalitat of Catalonia, €173 million from the Spanish Government, €39 million from the European Union and €142 million from other investors, bringing the total to €1.147 billion.

In the year 2000, as the time for disbanding Procivesa drew near, Barcelona City Council began to reflect on the future of Ciutat Vella and found it was necessary to continue to make a special effort to improve and consolidate the historical centre. The

work that Procivesa had begun was thus continued under a new joint venture with the municipal authorities called Foment de Ciutat Vella, SA., charged with developing new projects, generally on a somewhat less radical scale, to improve areas that had yet to bear results. In some cases it had to intervene in areas where the renovation process had not arrived, despite the existence of functional problems.

Ciutat Vella has been the object of a transcendental urban transformation that has provided it with instruments to help ensure its future success. Today the district is in a position to develop its own capacities under equal conditions with the rest of the city, making the most of its strong points such as the historical and architectural heritage, its character, centrality, its intense cultural and recreational life, its proximity to the port and the sea, etc. With these tools it will have to face the main challenges that lie ahead. These include:

Consolidating its position as a residential area with a varied housing supply that ranges from homes for nuclear families (parents with young children) to specific developments for the elderly and the young and a good supply of average- to high-quality homes to guarantee the presence of all sectors of society.

Integrating the many migrants who have arrived in the past few years into the district's daily life. This requires specific facilities and active policies to promote mutual understanding and respect among all the inhabitants of Ciutat Vella.

Upholding and, if possible, increasing the range of economic activities developed in the district by promoting and consolidating the different sectors currently present, particularly those that give Ciutat Vella its special nature.

Realising the development operations that will facilitate the rehabilitation of areas still to be transformed.

Fostering the improvement and conservation of the architectural and landscape elements that define the historical centre, procuring to halt the proliferation of models foreign to its own dynamic. To do this, it will also be necessary to consider the views of grassroots organisations concerned with conserving the district's historical heritage and to accept their contributions to a debate that is always open to finding new ways to act in an area as sensitive as the historical centre.