

The City within the City: Infill Development Strategies in Barcelona, Paris and Rome

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INTRODUCTION

The process known as *Urban Sprawl*,¹ has particular characteristics within the United States of America; Nevertheless, it shares with the European metropolis the sub utilization of space, the raising costs of infrastructures and the disarticulation of the urban tissue due to the division of space in multifunctional and socially homogeneous sectors. The present essay aims to present and analyze a set of alternatives to deal with urban growth through infill strategies within the inner city, which strive for enhancing, articulating and strengthening the existing urban tissues.

Even though the strategies of revitalization of the inner city are by no means new, there is some recent evidence that they have been taken as equivalent of "smart growth",² or as a tool for urban competitiveness that aim to place the assets of a city within the global market of investments. Nevertheless, these strategies tend to privilege the economic reactivation of specific areas, leaving behind the creation of jobs, the participation of the residents in the formulation of the priorities of the project, as well as the mechanisms to create or enhance a sense of identity within the community.

The contemporary cities are immersed in macroeconomic globalization processes, in which the location of investments becomes a decisive factor for the future development of the metropolitan regions (Castells, 2000); Under this approach, the main goal for the local administrations³ would be to simply program a limited number of strategic objectives to fulfill, around which, the financial, technical and administrative conditions would be oriented in order to accomplish the economic strategies for the city.

However, this apparent virtuous circle of plans and programs that reach the goals and objectives of strategic nature, are at the same time generating *dual processes*, in which the economic,

social and urban differentiation, come close to the polarization of a shared reality.

Ever since the controverted article of Michael Porter on the competitive advantages of the inner city,⁴ the academic debate has been centered no longer on the convenience of redeveloping this part of the city, as much as the social dimensions of the operation. Without the intention to ignore the economic advantages of taking an entrepreneurial approach as a platform for the development of the city, it is essential that social, political, economic and environmental components would permeate into urban policies and strategies, in order to draw residents as institutions to participate as main actors who, after all, will be those that will sustain and shape the general initiatives.

Due to the configuration and compact structure that characterizes great part of the European cities, it is not surprising to learn that there exist some interesting examples of urban interventions that are concerned about the inherent complexity that implies the redevelopment of its inner areas as an alternative to the prevailing sprawl schemes.

We can suggest that in the great majority of the cases, it has become evident that the economic reactivation is not enough to sustain the social structure, specially when inherently, differences, fractures, and discontinuities within the territory are generated, which prevents the construction of firm foundations to guarantee a sustainable development of the cities.

Moreover, the economic dimension that the urban planning entails, is necessarily echoed in the concentration of resources, infrastructure and services in specific points in the territory, leaving behind from the general scheme of the development, vast areas of non-strategic land.

We can suggest that social sustainability is becoming a priority within the urban development strategies, as a mean to

anticipate and to prevent conflicts in the near future. The consideration of the social dimension as a point of departure for the urban policy-making has become the axis of the instrumentation of strategies in countries like France, Holland, Italy and Spain; where, without missing the new parameters of urban competitiveness, questions of comprehensive and sustainable character are considered in order to avoid economic polarization, and which promote the creation and strengthening of centralities, as well as the construction of a sense of *communitarian identity*.

The strategies of consolidation, infill strategies, urban recycling, and building the "city within the city", are among the most innovative initiatives over the last years, and include redevelopment projects for vacant land, as well as the redensification of the existing urban tissue. The strategies in most cases, aim to serve as an alternative to the sprawl patterns mentioned above, as well as embody an instrument for the local governments to draw the middle-class into the inner city, expand its base of contributors, as well as being able to support social housing in central areas. Nevertheless, in order to accomplish these goals, it is often necessary to deal with the existence of contradictory policies, which limit the operative feasibility of the interventions, since the objectives of equity and efficiency doesn't always match the real state markets dynamics.

On the next part, we will reassess three recent cases in which a comprehensive and inclusive approach is being used for the regeneration of the inner city: the program *Ciutat Vella* of Barcelona, the *Politique de la Ville* in Paris, and the *Piano delle Certezze* of Rome. The analysis will be centered on examining the overall strategies related to an inclusive approach of the city, the seminal ideas that structured this policies, and the preliminary results of this practices.

BARCELONA: THE CIUTAT VELLA PROGRAM

The city of Barcelona launched in the eighties a large scale program of integral renovation of the central district of *Ciutat Vella*, by means of a comprehensive process of urban, economic and social regeneration that revealed a strong commitment with a model of an inner city totally integrated within the urban tissue, maintaining the residential land use and privileging the quality of urban life.

The district of *Ciutat Vella* covers the historic perimeter that includes the Gothic, Raval, Casc Antic and Barceloneta quarters, each one with its own processes and specificities, and which had been on decline during the last decades, the economic activities had been constricted, and the urban environment reflected the abandonment and the lack of investment on the built environment.

It is important to acknowledge the dimensions of the physical conditions of the housing stock in Barcelona at the time: almost three quarters of the fifty thousand buildings were constructed before 1900, and among them seven thousands did not count on bathroom,⁵ whereas the provision of amenities and public spaces were not doing much better.

Following the decentralizing tendency of the early eighties, the regional and local governments promoted in 1986, the designation of *Ciutat Vella* as *Area de Rehabilitación Integral*⁶ (ARI), which had as a central objective, the maintenance of the *complexity* of the urban system, through the mixture of uses and the diversity of users; It was also a major goal to strengthen the local identity of the historical center and to be consistent with the principles of sustainability and low-energy consumption; Moreover, the participation of an wide range of social actors throughout the process, allowed to guarantee the continuity of the program avoiding, as far as possible, the conflicts of interests.

The program permitted, among other things, the creation in 1988 of the corporation *Promocio Ciutat Vella S.A* (PROCI-VECSA), as an independent unit to manage the urban transformation. The corporation starts to operate as a joint-venture company of mixed capital (which, nevertheless, was mainly municipal), and had as a main task to release about twenty-five thousand square meters of new spaces, to promote new housing with public and private capitals, to reactivate the local economy and to rehabilitate existing public spaces.⁷

For instance, in the district of Raval, they were demolished a considerable number of degraded buildings in order to create the new "Plaza central de Raval", a square that also contemplated the creation of a cultural pole that included the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Cultural Center of Catalonia.⁸

It can be pointed out four methodological elements at management level that allowed the coordinated accomplishment of the project:

First, the program took advantage of the administrative decentralization policies in which the city would be structured into urban districts, and where *Ciutat Vella* played a prime role within the strategy. The second element has an operative nature, and consists of the decision to carry out the interventions in a short period of time, in order to address the progressive degradation of the district. Thirdly, and as a product of the intensive action plan just mentioned, the combination of urban renovation and economic promotion for the social welfare stand out.⁹ A fourth element within the definition of the project was the participation and intervention in the processes of decision on the part of the associations of residents.

The program assumes its main axes of action through six thematic plans: urbanism, housing, mobility, economic revitali-

zation, cultural and social promotion, and security. The physical renovation is orchestrated by means of the *Planes Especiales de Reestructuración Interna* (PERI),¹⁰ which required the participation of the residents to define the renovation criteria, as well as the redefinition of uses in areas within a limited extension.¹¹

With the intention of endorse the rehabilitation of privately own buildings, the *Office of Rehabilitation of Ciutat Vella* is created in 1990 (ORCV), with the mission to inform and to advise to the individuals about rehabilitation schemes, as well as to administer the resources assigned to this program: the works included the rehabilitation of the houses as well as the common areas, and as a result of its operation, near to 17,000 houses were rehabilitated with an average cost of 842.340 pesetas (4,000 USD), and 10.800 pesetas per square meter (50 USD).¹²

The impact of a large-scale and complex plan as it is Ciutat Vella, is by no means easy to evaluate. Nevertheless, it stands out that the conceptualization and promotion of the project was in charge of the public sector (more than eighty billion pesetas), which permitted the private investors to participate in the initiatives and, moreover, start to shape the socioeconomic consolidation of the historical center.

If we are to evaluate the improvement of the urban quality of life, we can suggest from the actions undertaken in new housing, in urban amenities and public spaces, that the general trend has gone in ascent, without generating extreme processes of *gentrification*,¹³ and has even come to generate a renovation tendency from the proprietors of old housing.

With regards to the citizen participation, although variations in the different stages from the project may always exist, is possible to affirm that the city is more vital, and its public spaces more used after the interventions.

The transformation of the *Ciutat Vella* has caused important qualitative changes in the urban quality of the city, and has triggered an economic revitalization, that despite that it has also affected the real estate market: Therefore, we can suggest that the change of population derived from the regeneration program in Barcelona can be considered as a product of the centrality generated by the numerous educative and cultural amenities, that are attracting young professionals, students and artists who are migrating into the rehabilitated houses with the consequent lost of the social diversity.

PARIS: LA POLITIQUE DE LA VILLE

The *Politique de la Ville* represent a set of specific policies for the city that started also on the eighties, aimed to create an ensemble of programs, practices and proceedings to target urban problems in high priority districts, in order to integrate

them with the rest of the city. Even though these areas were defined with statistical criteria, the policies were oriented to reach a concerted and progressive solution to the social, economic and urban difficulties of the citizens.

It is important to acknowledge that traditional policies of urban renovation in France accomplished the disarticulation of the different sectors of the city, setting off a total rupture within the urban context and generating a traumatic effect from the aesthetic and urban points of view; Moreover, the State handled the housing interventions through large national organisms,¹⁴ which prevented the municipalities from the control of the urban development of their jurisdiction.

As a result from the policies of decentralization arisen in the seventies, the *Operations Programmée pour l'Amélioration de l'Habitat* (OPAH)¹⁵ are released, and over the last twenty years they have operated on more than six hundred thousand buildings, on the rehabilitation of vacant houses, as well as on the qualitative improvement of urban amenities and public spaces.

Endorsed with a strong social component, the program articulates in different instruments that, within a general framework, could program their actions in specific contexts. In the last twenty years of operation, the OPAH have maintained a social objective ever since they undertake one of the main causes of the segregation that is the *degradation* of the habitat.¹⁶

Different evaluations have been conducted about the OPAH program in recent years,¹⁷ from which we can highlight that the policy has stressed the human dimension of housing, trying to be more persuasive than authoritarian, and that it has served as an alternative to the large urban renovation projects as the only instrument of transformation of the city. The remarkable thing of this policy, is that never before the private owners had become the engines of transformation by means of a social-oriented scheme of intervention.

Thanks to the mobilization of human and financial resources, the OPAH have been able to promote neighborhood-scale integral projects, leaning on preliminary studies, in the project more than the procedures, as well as the follow-up of the operations.¹⁸ The success of great part of the interventions relies on the social organization of the community, a wider approach than just secure the lodging, and the tailor-made instruments and procedures. Regarding the social link with the community, the participation of the National Federation of Centers PACT-ARIM¹⁹ has been decisive in all the stages of rehabilitation process and the recycling of districts,²⁰ becoming the first operator of the program all over the country.

On the other hand, the creation of the OPAH matches the release of the *Fonds d'Aménagement Urbaine* (FAU), which at the time allowed by means of its multiple credit lines, to

synchronizes the financial, social and urban aspects of the rehabilitation: These resources were part of the initiatives of decentralization of the State in which it was decided to support the cities to be in the position of being in charge of the complementary actions for housing, such as the creation of urban amenities and public spaces.

Other concurrent financings for the improvement of the habitat were addressed to the privately own houses as well as rental housing; On the first case, the State decides to supply up to 50% of the renovation works made, according to the level of income of the applicant, whereas the second case, benefit from a subvention of the ANAH with the condition for maintaining the building in rent during the following ten years (that is to say, without sale possibility), as well as to establish a maximum level of rent increase, accomplishing then the generation of a large supply of housing at reasonable prices.²¹

Through the OPAH program, the rehabilitation of the built environment was set in motion on a significant way: in twenty years of operation three thousand operations have been made which include close to 600,000 houses intervened; nevertheless, at the present time the challenge would be the establishment of parallel financial procedures addressed to promote the creation of urban amenities, public spaces and to foster social diversity.

ROME: THE PIANO DELLE CERTEZZE

Italy has one long tradition in the development of instruments of intervention within the urban fabric of the inner city, and even a further complexity is added if we considered the significance of the urban, historical and architectural heritage underlying most of its cities.

The debates on the kind, the scale and the suitable instruments of intervention is therefore, not new within the urban and social arena, and have been under discussion ever since the creation of the first specific plans and programs.

From the time when the intervention scale changes from the focal building to renovate, to the definition of the *poligoni d'attuazione*²² (in which urban environments are defined as primary intervention units), and the policies approach starts to be centered on the preservation of physical structures that support the activities within the city.

Nevertheless, from the '60s and the '70s, the inclusion of the social dimension within the planning process becomes essential, where the local residents become actors with a decisive participation within the construction of strategies for urban development.

The inclusion of different dimensions and subtle detail within the urban planning, aims towards the revaluation of the physical and environmental quality of the territory within an integral and complex perspective,²³ where new definitions of the compact city, urban sustainability, and comprehensive strategies start to get shaped.

As a product of a new generation of Master plans, arises the Piano delle Certezze (PDC), as a general variant of the *Piano Regolatore* of 1965, aiming to be a general framework of reliable and safe guidelines for the short and medium term, from which other regulating and strategic plans can be developed.²⁵

Due to the specificity of the subject discussed on the present chapter, we will briefly mention the different dimensions contained on the plan (environmental, administrative, constructive, etc.), in order to concentrate on the strategies that touch the inner city, and that can be summarized as: the new definition of the compact city, the programs on urban regeneration,²⁶ as well as the initiatives aimed to revitalize the inner city.

Consistent with the theoretical tradition of the plans that precede it, the PDC examine the predisposition on adopting the prevailing "strategic planning", which does not consider the urban dimension inherent to middle and long range plans. It also argues that, even if the transformation of the economic base of the cities is imminent and desired, the strategies as means to conquer hegemonic spaces and roles within the territorial hierarchy at world-wide level, were mostly based on a philosophy of competitiveness; Therefore, the PDC assumes a critical position in relation with urban plans that become simple plans of *economic* strategy, and recovers the urban dimension of the city as a central point.

Although strategic planning has served as an instrument for the local governments to negotiate the private investments, as well as specific economic objectives, it is also true that it has generated economic, social and urban *dualism*, as a result of the extreme elasticity that key decisions have experimented. Therefore, the creation of a general framework that would established the criteria for an urban, social and environmental compatibility became mandatory, as a *previous condition* to economic competitiveness, and represent an "organizational structure" that would frame a major political project.

In this context, the PDC arises as an *structural* kind of plan, that would determine the invariants of the organization of the city, in which diffuse policies of urban regeneration could be assembled and coordinate in a comprehensive way. Therefore, the new Plan assumes, in the name of wider support and feasibility, the subordination of economic competitiveness goals to the definition of maximum operative efficiency in order to fulfill the objectives aimed to improve the daily life of the citizens. Under this approach, even though the public adminis-



Fig. 1. Rehabilitation of the Piazza Navona, Rome.

tration is actively trying to revitalize the exiting urban dynamics, it is also committed with the stimulation of investments by the private sector in public infrastructure works that benefit a wider range of people.

Therefore, the PDC intends to render the objectives, times, rules, and procedures within a panorama of middle and long ranges, aiming to provide the entrepreneurial sector with a reliable framework to program its strategies with absolute confidence in its decisions.

Another element of particular interest is the decision to organize the plan on the basis of urban tissues, leaving behind the traditional functional zoning,²⁷ and permitting a great flexibility for the urban projects, with the sole condition that the interventions would contribute to "enhance the qualities of a place through a concrete, and visible project which would be evaluated by the community".²⁸

In general lines, the PDC aims to delegate all the process of promotion, evaluation and approval of diffuse policies, and even the executive projects themselves to the local governments, with the intention to open spaces for an active participation of the residents in the overall process.

The PDC has permitted the transformation and upgrading of different areas of the city, while revitalizing some districts economic activities; nevertheless, we can suggest that the planned interventions in Rome are meeting a shortage of amenities and the rescaling of infrastructures, rather than responding to a comprehensive strategy for extending the benefits of urbanization for the whole city.

CONCLUSIONS

The redevelopment strategies such as building "the city within the city", represent an alternative to the suburbanization of the territory, a notion that is widely shared by most of the European countries nowadays; However, stands out the need to consider a comprehensive planning strategy that will take into account the differences within the urban tissue, and that would create the instruments to operate the integration of the territory under equal bases. From the three cases examined in this essay, we can say that even if they may have achieved different degrees of success, the focus is leaning toward social inclusion, socioeconomic mixture, and the articulation of the territory through new centralities.

We can suggest the following considerations as an overview of the present revision:

- 1) The social mixture is a recurrent element that emerge back in the French planning from several decades, and which has as its main objective the integration of the territory on its social, economic and spatial dimensions.
- 2) The sustainability is a key element in the Roman strategy, since the intention to preserve two third parts of its territory as a "green belt" is a key element; moreover, the PDC is based on the redevelopment of the built environment.
- 3) A general conviction on the necessity of restructuring the economic base of the city is being shared; however, the policies are not clear enough on the limits of renewal strategies in relation with their economic, urban and social impact.
- 4) In all three cases prevails an active participation and a genuine interest on the part of the citizens to preserve the built environment, to strengthen their identity, and to improve the quality space of its surroundings.
- 5) A social commitment to promote the urban renovation by means of an economic promotion is being also expressed; however, the processes and mechanisms to get the

- projects done are rather vague, which at some point prevent the citizens to understand the limit and impact of the intervention.
- 6) It also exists a consensus on the three cases, to maintain the urban mixture of the population, as well as balancing the market-oriented tendency of the strategic plans (more explicit on the *Piano delle Certezze*).
 - 7) The strategies leave behind the schemes of traditional functional zoning, and propose an organization by urban tissues (Rome), public spaces (in the three cases), or by means of the redistribution of urban amenities, services and socioeconomic groups (as in the case of Paris).
 - 8) Regarding the nature of the building rehabilitation programs, the support goes to the privately own social housing (Paris and Barcelona) as a fundamental element to accomplish the strengthening of a sense of belonging and identity of a population group that demands accessible housing.
 - 9) In all three cases, the necessity to generate strong, connected and well equipped centralities is explicit, as well as the convenience that they would be structured like poles of attraction within the general scheme of the city.
 - 10) Finally, the strategies stress the importance of considering the perspective of the territory as much as the one of the inhabitants, as their participation and integration are essential for the success of the policies.

NOTES

- ¹ As the concept *Sprawl* has many interpretations, we will concentrate on a definition that relates this pattern with segregation of land uses, spatial fragmentation and the decline of diversity.
- ² As it has been emphasized by Al Gore in its presidential campaign of the 2000.
- ³ Following the economic approach, the local governments disappear and they are replaced by administrations with a productive and efficient approach.
- ⁴ Michael Porter, "The competitive advantage of the inner city", *Harvard Business Review*, May-June (1995): 55-71.
- ⁵ ARVHA "La Ciutat Vella: un aire de rehabilitation integrée", *Les Cahiers de l'Anah*, No. 94 (2000).
- ⁶ Area of integral rehabilitation.
- ⁷ PROCIVECSA at some point buys near to 140 buildings to lodge the displaced residents but also to offer them for sale.
- ⁸ It was also programmed the reconstruction of the *Casa Antic*, by means of its "urban ventilation" through the opening of pedestrian streets, promenades and new housing projects.
- ⁹ The district of Raval is mainly inhabited by immigrants, and even when an inclusive approach had been taken, the plaza project derived into a simple promenade known as the "Rambla del Raval".
- ¹⁰ Special Plans for Inner Restructuring.
- ¹¹ From these plans, the demolition of buildings for the creation of spaces public, the construction of proximity services, and the new housing projects for the local residents could be anticipated.
- ¹² Carlos Gotlieb, "La transformation de la Ciutat Vella", *Diagonal* No. 139, sept-oct 1999.

- ¹³ Ajuntament de Barcelona, *Barcelona New Project*, Barcelona: 1994; and Ajuntament de Barcelona, "La rehabilitación de la Ciutat Vella" en *Barcelona metropolis mediterranea*, Cuaderno Central No.1 (1988).
- ¹⁴ SEM, HLM, and various renewal agencies.
- ¹⁵ Programmed Operations for the Improvement of the Habitat
- ¹⁶ Only recently, the *Loi Solidarité et Renouveau Urbains* (SRU), comes to strengthen the line of urban policies that supports social cohesion, the articulation within the city and that seek to improve the supply of rental housing.
- ¹⁷ National Evaluation of Recent OPAH's , 1987-1994, ANAH, May 1997.
- ¹⁸ Catherine Foret y Francoise Porchet, "La rehabilitation urbaine", *Dossier Documentaire*, Paris: Centre de Documentation de L'Urbanisme (2000).
- ¹⁹ Federation Nationale des Centres PACT-ARIM, *L'Action du mouvement PACT-ARIM en Copropriété*, Paris: Pact Arim, 1999).
- ²⁰ The PACT-ARIM association is devoted to the improvement of privately own rental housing for low income, becoming one of the main operators of the OPAH.
- ²¹ This system, which is current today, was complement with a financial mechanism destined to favor "social upgrading to property" with zero-interest rates on loans for purchasing the renewed dwellings.
- ²² It is been said to the area that is delimited in order to pre-serve or renovate, and which considers the urban qualities of a place and not only the single building.
- ²³ Bernardo Secchi, *Un progetto per l'Urbanistica*, Torino: Einaudi, 1989.
- ²⁴ Comune di Roma, "Relazione del Piano delle Certezze". Risoluzione del Consiglio Comunale (delibera C.C. n.92 del 1997).
- ²⁵ Although a new Piano Regolatore is on its way to be approved, it is based on the PDC guidelines.
- ²⁶ In Italian known as *riqualificazione urbana*.
- ²⁷ It considers the urbanized continuum of existing tissue as a primary unit, which allows locating the interventions of urban regeneration, without an a priori designation of functions.
- ²⁸ One of the programmed actions that has had excellent results, has been the launching of a program of improvement of the public space denominated *Centopiazze* (one hundred squares), in which by combining diverse financial resources as well as the opening for international competitions of urban design, it has been achieved the intervention in over a hundred spaces, other 40 are in the process of construction, and another 70 area in charge of the Municipal Service of Gardens and Public Works.

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