



**Ciutat Vella**  
The historic centre of Barcelona



Ajuntament  de Barcelona

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## **Barcelona. Two cases of good urban practices**

Barcelona presents two cases of good urban practices that are encompassed within the thematic area of **Livable Cities**.

- Ciutat Vella. The historic centre of Barcelona.
- Poblenou-22@Barcelona. The district of innovation.

These two cases fulfil the characteristics necessary in order to opt for being exhibited in the Urban Best Practices Area of the Shanghai World Expo in 2010. They are two specific cases affecting territorial areas which are very well defined and easily identifiable within the city's fabric.

They constitute two transformation processes at a developmental stage in territories with a significant strategic value within the city and its metropolitan area: the historic centre, the city's real administrative, political, cultural and tourist centre, which is fighting to preserve its residential nature; and Barcelona's old industrial district par excellence, which aims to become part of the liveable city without losing its productive nature.

The action carried out in Ciutat Vella has arisen as a result of the extreme deterioration of the living conditions of its residents, while the Poblenou action forms part of the city's economic strategy. The two areas had been excluded from the city's dynamics, since the former had lost urban values while the latter had never attained them.

The two processes come together in the common objective of attaining the conditions that characterise liveable cities:

- An attractive setting that is respectful towards the environment.
- An economically viable urban model that enables people to be offered opportunities.
- A socially cohesive community.

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are needed to see this picture.



## Exceptional cases, things in common

The Ciutat Vella and Poblenou 22@ Barcelona Projects share some of the features that make them exceptional:

### Territorial area

Both are territorial areas with **very clear boundaries**, made up of morphologically **identifiable structures** within the city as a whole (Ciutat Vella is a mediaeval structure that stands out within Cerdà's *Eixample*, a grid-structured urban extension, while Poblenou forms part of this grid with very powerful boundaries).

Another common element is their **large surface area**. They are areas that carry significant weight in respect of the city's total surface area. The 9 km<sup>2</sup> surface area of the Poblenou area represents almost 10% of the city's surface area, while that of Ciutat Vella represents 5%. The transformation processes in each of them are of special merit and significance for this reason.

The two cases also constitute examples of how to intervene in **highly central territories** of the city with the aim of recovering or redefining their civic role.

## Strategic actions

The two interventions are included within the set of plans and projects being developed in Barcelona which have strategic value due to their capacity to influence the city's evolution in the medium and long term.

This set of actions, which is carried out by means of a range of instruments includes, amongst others, actions for the transformation of basically industrial structures, such as in the case of the Poblenou-22@ operation; structuring actions that aim to establish new urban links; the planning of large open spaces as elements for rebalancing the compact city; the refurbishment of facilities in districts; or the implementation of the Housing Plan.

In addition to constituting a basic element in Barcelona's economic strategy as the central city of the Metropolitan Region, the **Poblenou-22@Barcelona** operation is also a new city-making model and has led the way for large operations in the transformation of industrial land in the city of Barcelona.

The **Ciutat Vella** operation is an extreme and exceptional case within this group of strategic works due to its historic, cultural and political importance, as a catalyser of centrality.









### Features of the process

The cases that Barcelona presents are long-term processes which are currently at a **developmental stage**. They make it possible to take stock of the results. They have a significant background and stretch into the future following their own logic of development.

Another element they have in common is that they are examples of how to **manage urban complexity**, the pinnacle of urban development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The complexity partly stems from the clustering in the same territory of a variety of urban systems that sometimes lack coherence in respect of each other and may generate conflicts. The management of urban complexity requires the use of a series of instruments regarding urban development, social action, economic and cultural measures, etc.

The two operations are led by the public sector in conjunction with the collaboration of private initiative. They also have a **specific management body**, a public or joint venture with the private sector, in order to promote and coordinate the various kinds of actions.



### **Correspondence to Barcelona's general strategy**

Both cases are prime examples of the city's general development strategy, which pursues the improvement of its citizens' quality of life and which has adopted the following values as action criteria:

- **A compact and dense city.** An efficient city with a large range of uses and urban functions in a small space, which reduces necessary mobility and encourages social cohesion while guaranteeing greater efficiency in the management of the territory.
- **A Mediterranean city.** A city paradigm for strolling and coexisting, which pays special attention to public spaces, the meeting points par excellence where city life takes place.
- **A complex city** that opts for a whole range of uses as opposed to specialisation. A city in which to live, work and enjoy oneself. Also complex from a morphological and sociological point of view.
- **A sustainable city.** A city that is developed according to sustainable mobility criteria, which incorporates energy-saving measures and which is concerned with reducing pollution.
- **A productive and innovative city.** A city which fosters economic activity as a factor with a bearing on the improvement of people's quality of life and which opts for technology and the creative economy.
- **A city of integration.** A city that searches for its identity, cohesion. An open city that is concerned with the creation of new epicentres for culture and social relations.



Ciutat Vella,  
the historic centre of Barcelona

## Presentation

The Ciutat Vella project is encompassed within the great recent transformation processes of the city of Barcelona, from new areas of centrality to the recovery of the seafront. The project has been up and running for twenty years and leads the way for new policies on districts in the city of Barcelona. It is one of the first experiences to be implemented in the historic centre of a large city in Spain.

In the urban transformation project of the Barcelona Historic Centre, **recovering the residential function** is the leitmotiv. As opposed to the traditional approach, where economic development means expansion, the project is tackled on the basis of the conviction that economic development is also possible in conjunction with the improvement of living conditions in run-down districts.

Transformation, the constant metamorphosis of which the history of our cities forms part is our changing working environment. Transformations generate new challenges but also **new contemporary values**.

### 2.1. The place and its background

What is today known as Barcelona's historic centre, Ciutat Vella, is located between Montjüic Mountain and Ciutadella Park, delimited by the line of the seafront with the old port and Gran Via, the main thoroughfare of the Eixample, the grid-structured city extension of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sant Jaume Square stands out as the symbolic, political and institutional centre and Catalunya Square as a communications hub, with La Rambla acting as the main unifying axis of the entire structure.

Until 1858, the city of Barcelona experienced the industrial revolution encircled by its own walls. When they were demolished and Ildefons Cerdà's Eixample project was developed, an expansion process of the city got underway that has led to today's metropolis. Ciutat Vella had slowly ceased to be *the City*.

After decades of an expansive approach, the city's attention began to focus on this urban area, which was very run-down at the time and required social, cultural, urban and economic restoration plans and projects.



In 1986, Ciutat Vella was declared an Area of Integrated Rehabilitation (ARI) and the foundations were put in place for a determined and continuous intervention in Ciutat Vella. The ARI was a mechanism that made it possible to implement a joint action by Barcelona City Council and the public and associated agents involved, with a single political-administrative reference and a public programme encompassing the various urban development operations.

Today, Ciutat Vella in its entirety is recognised as the Historic Centre, with the mosaic of districts that compose it as a value with more potential, and with a new positioning as a central metropolitan benchmark.



## 2.2. Objectives

The old city, one of the most run-down areas in the city, with clear heritage values, had lost residential interest. An integral project was called for, approached together by institutions and citizens, an **integral action plan** encompassing everything from urban development actions to social programmes and which focused on an intervention model that required coordination between the various agents.

The leitmotiv of the project is the recovery of the residential function, by means of implementing clearing operations in order to obtain new public space and facilities: a qualified sponging up, where the road allocations of previous planning operations are minimised, with a new idea of mobility that focuses on environmental values, and paying attention to scale, to the dimensions of the place where the intervention takes place.

With the following aims:

1. **Residential rehabilitation.** In order to improve the living conditions of dwellings, the aim was to achieve the recovery of the residential function, to make the city liveable again, undertaking co-responsibility with residents and owners. The pilot operation of setting up the first territorial housing office and a public company to manage urban development operations has made it possible to guarantee the rehousing of those affected and, consequently, avoid the social dismantling of the districts that make up the historic centre, amongst other problems. The housing policy could not be aimed at correcting demographic imbalances or at responding to the increasing demand for housing but rather at ensuring the feasibility of a programme that was based on rehousing residents affected by urban development, i.e. tailor-made rehousing, which depended on the balance between the number of dwellings affected and generated by the development; an agreement that was reached according to a basic starting point and consensus between the residents' associations and the Authorities.
2. **The renewal of district facilities.** Provision of public facilities containing new activities, within a metropolitan, city or district setting with services of proximity. Public facilities that act as urban milestones in public space, either through the singling out of buildings that form part of the itinerary and become places of reference or through new public buildings that enable the appraisal of public spaces.







3. **The recovery and reappraisal of public space.** Renovation of infrastructures, new public spaces for intergenerational and intercultural coexistence, reinforcement of the urban structure and urban itinerary, through the identification of historical traces and new continuities. A public space not only understood as an empty space to be redeveloped but as the argument for transforming, for establishing continuities, from more collective spaces to more private ones.



### 2.3. Key concepts

The Ciutat Vella project is a public project that incorporates sustainable urban development, led from the territory itself on the basis of the following strategies:

- a. **Municipal decentralisation:** policy of proximity based on the twofold objective of becoming closer to citizens and gaining exhaustive knowledge of the territory.
- b. **Public mentoring:** Public management with a sustained action which tackles an integral management project, which generates its own dynamics and credibility, involving the hierarchical structuring of the overall strategy and agreeing the pace of intervention and interests.
- c. **Institutional and citizen involvement:** citizen participation with new communication channels in a changing social fabric in the middle of a process of transformation, with intense cooperation between social, cultural and economic agents.

The Ciutat Vella project is an integral management model, put together on the basis of the coordination and co-responsibility of the public and associated agents.

The project proposes:

1. **A compatible urban development model** between the management or services centre of the metropolitan area and the historic centre as a set of liveable districts. Within a new framework of territorial positioning, recovering the historic centre as a residential space, and at the same time as central space of the city and of the metropolitan area.
2. **The appraisal of the constructed city:** moving on from the idea of heritage associated with a "monumental centre", a new understanding acknowledges the heritage of each district, with a polyhedral vision of the territory, discarding previous approaches based on inappropriate zoning and scales.





3. **The urban heterogeneity** that shapes the historic centre, with a marked polycentric character, with an acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of districts, not as an accident but rather as a quality, a basic premise for acknowledging the "historic mass".
4. **The legibility and complexity of the urban form** that characterises consolidated urban areas, according to social, economic, cultural and urban unifying logics. Where public space and building go hand in hand, not acting as autonomous and autistic projects but rather in mutual benefit, with linking plans and projects.

**Social cohesion:** The historic centre is a space that is very sensitive to potential imbalances, susceptible to uncertainties and tensions, linked to the effects of reappraisal. The period where many residents fled from the deterioration while other remained trapped in marginalisation has ended. The historic centre is once again a space of arrival and opportunities, which has taken in the latest wave of immigration, constituting the most complex period from the multi-economy to multiculturalism.

## 2.4. Taking stock and challenges for the future

Having achieved residential rehabilitation, Ciutat Vella is one of the recent experiences carried out in our historic centres which aims to contribute to reflecting on the criteria and methods employed. However, it also represents a new panorama, a social fabric with new interlocutors, new challenges that require new participation mechanisms and channels of communication.

The urban improvement of our cities requires public mentoring by the Administration. Institutional coordination policies, the cooperation and co-responsibility of public, social, cultural and economic agents, in short, collective participation, is a key factor in the success of the action. Ciutat Vella is an example of this.

Ciutat Vella, Barcelona's historic centre, is a project based on participation and integrated management, led and mentored by public initiative, understood as encompassing the entire historic centre, with open planning, paying heed to economic events and the pace of execution, to the more general planning of the city, and verified day in day out.

Today, faced with the challenge represented by the phenomenon of the globalisation and transformation of our cities, reappraisal and centrality are both added values and threats. The intensive use of public space, the monoculture of activities with the explosion of tourism and leisure, amongst other things, have broken the historic balance of districts that run the risk of losing their identity and expelling their most fragile population, affecting liveability in a very direct way.

As such, good practice nowadays enables the recognition of values that are of application to other urban practices, generating an effect of innovation and potential transferability, such as:

1. **Transversality** is possible and is presented with intersectoral coordination mechanisms. Administrations are responsible for finding solutions and therefore for finding the instruments, involving the community in the participation process by means of the coordination of sectoral policies with common objectives. Objectives based exclusively on physical recovery have given way, in the case of sectoral policies, to giving priority to transversality between fields.



2. With the aim of determining the qualities each district, the **historic city is no longer appraised as a whole** but rather heritage is considered as an added value, involved in the process of social, urban and economic recovery. The idea of the "monumental centre" has given way to a new understanding of heritage with the aim acknowledging it in each of the historic centre's districts.
3. It is necessary to **foster the districts' heterogeneity**. It can be stated that a historic centre redefined as a space of centrality in an environment of symbolism and communications has given way to fostering heterogeneity with a clear polycentric nature.
4. It is necessary to **take into account the urban and unifying logic** of the whole, being aware of the fact that the legibility and complexity of the urban form defines the character of consolidated urban areas. The plan and the urban project must be approached on the basis of the public space and itinerary, as well as on that of the accompanying construction.

The Ciutat Vella project has given us a much more thorough knowledge of the history of the city, providing guidelines for future interventions. This knowledge must be used as a tool of the **multidisciplinary urban project** and must find compatible intervention criteria, taking into account the city's history.

Some data on investment in Ciutat Vella:

#### Investment distribution according to type of intervention and public agents involved

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