

Hidden Urban Geographies: The Case of Barcelona



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Abstract This chapter aims to epitomize some of the hidden dimensions of the cities, which in fact is a suggestion of the different processes required for their scientific analysis. The starting point is the various experiences in urban research, mainly in the case of Barcelona. From there, the path continues to the presentation of a set of different and complex variables, isolated due to the analysis' requirements but nevertheless considering relevant relationships between them. Firstly, the urban forms and planning are discussed. Secondly, all environmental aspects; important underground city; structures of land property; dynamics of the urban economy; domestic spaces and everyday life; urban segregation, both social and ethnical; urban marginal life; and political power are discussed. Finally, as a conclusive reflection, the debate on the limits of the cities is presented.

Keywords Barcelona · City · Social conflicts · Power · Urbanization

1 Introduction

The complexity of the urban in contemporary cities is positively proportional to the possibility of formulating many different hidden urban geographies. Even more so when the stimulating hypotheses of urban revolution and planetary urbanization (Lefévre 1970; Brenner 2014, 2019) are assumed. This contemporary urban complexity itself is the result of diverse overlapping of various visible and non-visible dimensions, qualities and forms on all analysis' scales, both spatial and temporal.

In fact, all scientific efforts to search for explanations deal with the development of different reality's hidden dimensions. In order to clarify this urban complexity and to facilitate the explanation of different elements and factors in contemporary urban geography, it is necessary to isolate some variables, in spite of their always complex and dynamic interrelationships. There is no clear hierarchy among these variables because complexity itself implies a certain deregulation of any kind of hierarchy.

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These variables are presented according to their level of apparent visibility, from the more to the less visible. It should be underlined that these variables are themselves dynamic and changing, thus increasing the complexity. Many of the examples presented come from the author's long experience in urban researches, mainly not only on the city of Barcelona but also on some other cities, such as Sarajevo in Bosnia or São Paulo in Brazil. The findings are partly a result of the author's many years of teaching urban geography at the university level. The final result is perhaps a sort of a brief abstract of urban geography in general, as the quoted bibliography reveals, in spite of its non-didactical presentation.

2 The Hidden Forms of the City Plan and Planning

One of the first elements important for a city's recognition and used in its definitional efforts is the visible compactness of urban landscapes, the so-called third dimension of cities. It comprises a more or less dense group of different buildings, streets, gardens and monuments that gather on the observer's horizon. Some techniques of contemporary popular urban marketing have succeeded to symbolize this complex third dimension and its volumetric impact with one simple, selective and artistic skyline.

The landscape impact of cities over the territory sustains the false image of a certain perpetuation of the country–city contradiction. High densities of several elements (population, activities, capital, knowledge or culture) and the material compactness currently offer the most popular definition of the urban, of cities in general, in opposition to the rural, the country: agglomeration.

Largely beyond all the different cityscapes, however, it remains very difficult to discern the formal plan of the city, which is only clearly represented in the city cartography.¹ The volume of the built environment, its massive character and verticalization, tends to hide the regular and to an even further extent the irregular plan of urban public spaces, its order and its structure. Only some baroque outlines and their postmodern copies allow the integration of certain comprehensive perspectives based on the model of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries *Piazza del Popolo* and its famous *Tridente* in Rome, and this can also be found in a few modern federal capitals such as Washington or Brasília.

Thus, knowledge of city plans requires a serious research on urbanistic evolution and its social consequences. It should be noted here that there is not always a direct correlation between the conceiving of a plan and its effective construction and urbanization. Fragments of the former outline or buildings could remain, explicitly or not, in the present landscapes, generating the well-known urban palimpsest (Huysen 2003). Another important hidden dimension remains and not only in historical cities—the overlapping remnants from different times.

¹ One of the consequences of this real invisibility is the great difficulty with which common people read and understand city plans, both in traditional, paper versions as well as in their digital form.

The study case of Barcelona gives many examples of the progressive concealment of its so self-apparent plan, with its three traditional historical sections: concentric medieval, gridded nineteenth century and irregular contemporary city (Fig. 1). The standardization of construction and the massive verticalization of buildings (Souza 1994) highly contribute to the homogenization of different neighbourhoods with a constant process of partial reconstruction. That is not the case for other European historical cities, e.g. the majority of French or Italian, whose historical centres have been relatively well-maintained.

Moreover, urban planning, officially established at the beginning of the twentieth century, is today present in almost every city in the world. Its diffusion through the International Style of rationalist architects after World War II was so rapid that it was applied in very similar forms as a response to explosive urban growth on the five continents. Since then, planning has become a unique technical discipline (Santos 1996: 151–170), decreasingly related to social sciences that take the responsibility for designing city plans, as already commented.

Planners and, in general, anyone involved in cartography production, tend to assume a demiurgic role over the territory and its societies through the map (Varanini and Ginevri 2012: 58–59). Inspired by gods from mythical times or by their specialized knowledge of modernity, they act as a sort of general landowner, deciding where to place housing, infrastructures, services and activities, with or without democratic control, depending on the political regime of each country and city. Ordinary people are generally not used to read in a proper manner and understand the cartographic

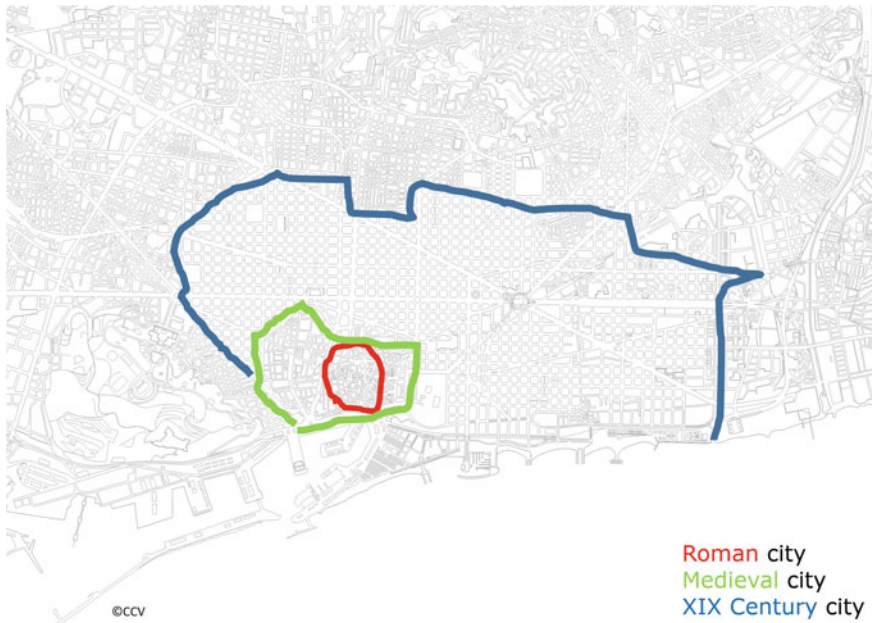


Fig. 1 Historic evolution of the morphology of Barcelona



Fig. 2 The automobile SEAT factory in Barcelona after the deindustrialization process (Author Carles Carreras)

language of planners, and that fact reinforces the power of planning. One of the most famous conflicts between planners and citizens was the fight of the North American journalist Jane Jacobs (1916–2006) with the New York official Robert Moses (1888–1981) during the ‘60 s (Flint 2009).

Even in the best-planned cities with sometimes highly creative forms, their planned character tends to be hidden, to dissolve under the vastness and compactness of its urban fabric. It happens in the Georgian Royal Crescent of Bath, as well as in the federal capital Washington, or in the original bird or plane form of Brasília. Only through tourist maps or satellite images, it is possible to restore the hidden planned character of such conceived spaces.

In more dynamic cities, the architects’ general plan tends to melt under the changes that economic and social life imposes on any part of the city. The changes in the planned land use distort many initial goals and directions. For example, since 2019, Barcelona’s general metropolitan plan, approved in 1976, has undergone 1,240 partial modifications (Avanç del Pla... 2019: 42). Even a large number of local regulations could contribute to the distortion of general planning, as in the Barcelona study case where, during the ‘60 s and due to several changes in its local regulations, it was allowed that four new floors be added to the nineteenth-century-planned buildings. The main central streets of this Mediterranean city appear today with two jagged edges of different architectures, and different periods and heights are

completely breaking the uniformity of the city's famous nineteenth century plan. That once happened to the French Hausmannian streets, and it indicates a feature of rapidly growing cities, as has mainly been the case in many recent Third World agglomerations.

3 The Visible Environmental Invisibility

Urban landscapes currently appear as the biggest human artificial product. They are opposed to nature, and in popular thought urban is considered nature's negation. Even many contemporary environmentalist approaches consider the natural features of cities as something external to them. It is a great misunderstanding especially because the planetary urbanization since the last decades of the twentieth century has thoroughly revolutionized the traditional contradiction of artificial—natural and the capitalist contradiction country—city (Lefévre 1970; Brenner 2014).

The more hidden natural urban feature are human beings, the citizens themselves. People tend to ignore their own natural essence trying in vain to forget or ignore illness and death² because of their confidence in technological progress. In the same way, all natural processes in their perpetual dynamics normally remain hidden in the majority of cities' inhabitants and urban researchers. It is only when external threats appear, such as serious earthquakes and floods, that they are considered natural disasters.

Increasingly less hidden is the atmospheric pollution. The consequence of industrialization and the constantly growing use of energy, especially in urban transportation, is the diffusion of respiratory illnesses and cancers. Intense smog visibly covers the majority of urban skies, especially in anticyclonic days, even after the temporary success of the symbolic Clean Air Act of London in 1956. However, many dangerous polluting particles could be hidden in more or less blue skies. The visibility of these environmental facts, in general, is a proportional function of their negative character. In this sense, bright blue or impressive cloudy skies, marine shores or snowy mountains are managed more as urban sceneries than as real and significant environmental elements.

Urban vegetation is much more visible. The historical precedent of the 1847 Birkenhead Park in Liverpool had influenced the development of a new landscape architecture, with the diffusion of gardens and parks in many cities around the world. Historically, only imperial and royal cities had big royal gardens and parks, but modernity expanded urban and public green spaces. The traditional planting of trees along the cities' streets has pioneer examples such as the *Unter den Linden* promenade in Berlin from 1647. However, the widespread planting of trees began with the construction of Parisian boulevards in the second half of the nineteenth century. Very symbolic are, for instance, the palms of Los Angeles, planted for the occasion of the 1932 Olympic Games. The massive use of cars and the urban explosion with

² The last corrections of this chapter were made during the terrible pandemic of Covid-19, which has dramatically ruptured our ordinary life.

its transport infrastructures after the Second World War has challenged many of these green spaces (Jacobs 1961). The civil protests and the hippie revolution in the 1960s vindicated green spaces for people, and a real process of urban greening started to appear around the world (Nicholson-Lord 1987). Numerous present-day cities probably have a greater number of trees than many natural forests. Surely, however, many of these trees are exotic to the city climate, their environmental effects remaining hidden under the aesthetic goals.

Relatively concealed among this urban vegetation lives a variegated fauna. The traditional nineteenth century zoos are today almost disappearing because of the environmentalist critics. Nevertheless, many urban animals inhabit the cities. Various bird species, not always very well adapted to the local climatic conditions, live in trees, as do squirrels and monkeys, depending on the latitude. The majority of hidden urban fauna consists of numerous rats that invade sewer systems, together with newer, exotic specimens, such as crocodiles. Even more numerous are all kinds of insidious insects, for example, flies, mosquitos, ants, or cockroaches, as well as every kind of more or less dangerous bacteria and viruses. They have nothing to do with the visible and important domestic animals, the enormous amount of all kinds of pets, from conventional cats and dogs to the increasing number of exotic species that generate segments of the public spaces and a variegated number of economic activities.

The artificial buildings' construction materials, with interior air conditioning and general lighting, are so apparent that the environment seems to be external to the city. However, nature is always there, hidden above and under the city, all around and inside the buildings.

4 The Evidently Hidden Undercity

The underground parts of the cities are at the same time notorious and hidden. The urban underground growth has started very early in mainly domestic buildings as oil or wine cellar, or as stores for a wide range of materials and items or as prisons and refuges³ for people. Sometimes, these underground areas violate the public space of squares and streets because of their hidden character. In some cases, the expansion of these cellars transforms a city into a real ant's nest, as the champagne production in the Catalan village of Sant Sadurní d'Anoia did (Valls 2009).

The rise of urban infrastructures has expanded and diversified the underground of many public spaces. Sewer systems, drainage, energy, communication, subways, car parks, tunnels and so on make the hidden undercities each day more complex and complete (Pike 2005). Some parts are open to public access and many others are not, except for some kind of alternative tourism. From the early Rome's sewage system, the *cloacæ*,⁴ to contemporary Paris, considered "*la cité des cataphiles*"

³ The most famous are probably the Roman Christian catacombs.

⁴ Many other Roman cities have their cloaca system, like Naples, where it is a tourist site; the same goes for Barcelona and its 19th century sewer system.

(Glowczewszky 1983), there is a long history of engineering. The underground transport systems, especially the fast ones, have been an object of general attention, gradually becoming the more public and non-hidden part of the big cities (Ovenden 2003, 2019). Because of their homonymy, especially in the Roman languages, many people consider metropolises as only those cities with underground transportation. Furthermore, many writers settled their novels into this underground world; for example, Argentinian Julio Cortázar (1914–1984) and his *Manuscrito hallado en un bolsillo*, dedicated to the metro of Paris' passengers (Cortázar 1974).

No less remarkable is the underground duplication of some central areas and streets, with their shops and offices, due to comfort reasons. Possibly one of the most spectacular examples is the case of the winter cold Canadian city of Montreal (Deglise 2008). Even central Barcelona had an underground commercial street between 1940 and 1990: the paradoxically called Light Avenue, in spite of the mild climate of the city (Carreras et al. 2016). Many of these underground premises are connected to the transportation networks. The famous Moscow metro, inaugurated in 1925, could be considered an urban expansion of the communication needs.

5 The Hidden Dimensions of the Urban Land Property

Because of its theoretically immaterial character, the land property, which is one of the most important elements in the structure of the cities, remains totally hidden. When almost the entire Earth's surface belongs to someone, the impact of urban land ownership is as strong as it is invisible. In fact, it is evident that the general outline of urban streets and squares mainly corresponds to the legal delimitation between public and private urban properties. Only a few founded cities, from Miletus to Brasília, and some urban renewal plans based on the Haussmannian Paris, have been able to partially avoid this private property weight. The legal instrument used to achieve it is the expropriation law, which of course, at the same time, always protects the rights of private property. Even during the short twentieth century experience of the socialist city, especially in the case of the Soviet Union, the private land ownership was attacked, but they never succeeded to entirely destroy it.⁵ In addition to that, many urban renewal works have had an important impact on the revalorization of the affected lands, as was first demonstrated by the pioneer historical reform of Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century (Suttcliffe 1970). In this sense, it is possible to assume that many planning interventions finally only succeed in increasing the private land rent (Lefévre 1972; Hall 1982).

During the city's history, the land ownership structure was maintained along the slow process of transformation from the big former rural plots of land to the more expensive urban little ones. The common urbanization process consisted of self-fragmentation of plots of land, mainly along the main ways of communication, and sometimes opening new streets—with or without a general plan. Landowners were

⁵ In this regard, Sarajevo was one of the study case cities (Carreras and Moreno 2007).

usually local or regional, at the same time supported and encouraged by local credit banks. Urban planning and local financialization started almost simultaneously at the very beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century. Since the beginning of globalization processes, from the capitalist restructuring crisis of 1973, a global urban land market has developed, with huge consequences for the local inhabitants.

Today, international individuals and big foreign corporations are investing in many cities of the world, besides the little local owners, both with no visibility in the urban landscapes (Bernardos et al. 2014). In spite of this material invisibility, the urban property structures are today the most significant variable in the dynamics of contemporary cities, with profound consequences for all other economic activities and social inequalities.

6 The Hidden Dimensions of the Urban Economic Life

The traditional medieval commercial city was dramatically transformed by the sprawling of factories and workshops in the industrial city since the second half of the nineteenth century in some European regions. Big brick buildings with high smoking chimneys, surrounded by large, poor working-class neighbourhoods formed the Mumfordian Coketown and their Dickensian social landscapes (Mumford 1961: 446–480). However, the growth of the manufacturing processes both disseminated and concentrated new factories during the twentieth century. The first step was the peripheralization of manufacturing after World War II, and the second was the deindustrialization process at the end of the century. Production is mainly concentrated in a few Asian cities, and the entire global economy is involved in the so-called tertiarization. This concept implies the multiplication of service activities, directed either to consumers or producers and the fragmentation and specialization of all economic processes, progressively hiding the real base and structure of urban economies (Fig. 2).

The architectural pattern of productive buildings has also changed, progressively hiding their content and function. With the diffusion of rationalism, the pattern that has proliferated is a set of similar geometric containers, adaptable to different kinds of manufacturing productions and to various commercial functions or a wide range of services (museums, air or railway or marine terminals, hospitals or universities). The artistic creativity of some famous starchitects conceived different styles but similar and expensive buildings around the world (La Cecla 2004), in a sort of a hard, competitive race between cities for possessing their own famous and symbolic building. Apparently, beautiful and modern containers for disparate functions, in a process of sparing and making form independent of its content, hiding both, their economic use and their fabulous costs.

The economic dimensions are perhaps more evident in monofunctional urban buildings (petrochemical factories, cathedrals and temples, jails...). However, in compact cities, such as Barcelona or the majority of the Mediterranean (Carreras



Fig. 3 A present skyline of the city (Author Sergio Moreno)

2018), or in the downtown of disperse cities, with their predominance of plurifunctional buildings, the mix of uses increases the invisibility of their economic activities (Fig. 3). The complexity and heterogeneity of functions shades the economic specialization and the real land use of large urban areas. Furthermore, the economic relations among different cities that could explain urban hierarchies and the global life of entire regions have also become progressively hidden in the present territorial complexity. We are very far from the important Christallerian modelling that dominates geographical research between 1930 and 1970 (Berry 1967).

Cities are becoming more homogeneous everywhere, with the same typology of buildings, similar types of shops and commercial centres, as well as similar leisure districts. The case of many recent Chinese cities, with poor copies of some occidental cities' buildings, could be considered the peak of this homogenization process. As already remarked, the present-day urban landscapes symbolize the city of the capital, which is the form in the financial period of this late capitalism. The cities themselves appear as simple goods to be sold in a very competitive global market (Ashworth and Voogd 1990). Their landscapes and their skylines become marketing wrappers, while the real economic base⁶ of every city remains hidden from both their inhabitants and visitors and even from political administrators and social researchers.

In the case of Barcelona, for instance, the organization of the 1992 Summer Olympic Games had great touristic success and complex results. It created several economic activities, especially in the service sector, but it also had a more relevant hidden consequence in the urban land market, with huge benefits for the owners of buildings in the city centre, many of them foreign corporations.

⁶ The concept corresponds to the old methodological debate of the 1950s around the basic and non-basic urban economic functions (Alexander 1954).

7 The Paradox of the Eclipsed Domestic Spaces and the Everyday Life in General

The currently visible and generally studied city is above all its public spaces: squares and streets, bounded by architectural façades and with few, more or less accessible buildings only; public administration buildings as well as markets, stations or commercial centres. Even many public buildings lack open access to people, for example, jails and military or government premises. However, the main part of the urban space, the residential one, is the domestic space. It remains hidden in the majority of citizens and visitors, including social researchers. Architects and interior designers deal with prototypes of apartments with an almost uniform distribution of rooms and their functions, especially after the definition of Le Corbusier (1887–1965) of *La machine à habiter* (Le Corbusier 1923). Only the increasing use of glass façades and big windows and balconies allow some partial glimpses in the night time.⁷

Of course, there are many cultural differences in how this visibility of domestic spaces to outsiders is handled. In Mediterranean urban homes, the combination of culture and climate that uses the closure of domestic life prevails. The Islamic houses are organized around their interior, with no windows at all on their façades. Similar is the Catholic ones, where the windows normally remain closed behind blinds that only allow the vision out of the interior into the exterior. The Protestant houses, on the other hand, usually have open windows, with the lighted interior at night. In history, human society has evolved from tribal and communitarian values and habits to individualism and privacy rights. This process partially explains the progressive confinement of domestic spaces.

The special patterns in which citizens organize their own domestic spaces is a much-hidden dimension that few anthropological studies have fragmentarily analysed. A significant example of this is the relevance that the British writer Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) gave to a room of one's (women's) own (Woolf 1929).

Even more difficult to analyse are the different processes of appropriation of the space by people in their everyday life. The American urban planner Kevin Lynch (1918–1984) elaborated a pioneering method in order to know, understand and explain the different processes of individual appropriation of the cities (Lynch 1960). He conducted an empirical study of Boston, Jersey City and Los Angeles, designing the mental map techniques in order to understand the ways that citizens read the image of their cities and how they behave in consequence. The relevance of that method is directly proportional to the enormous amount of constantly changing information. The analysis is very useful on a large scale, but almost impossible for general and larger studies, where this important aspect always remains hidden (Brenner 2019).

⁷ Alfred Hitchcock's (1899–1980) film *Rear Window* from 1954, based on the short novel of Cornell Woolrich (1903–1968) *It Had to Be Murder*, dramatically remarks this paradox between domestic and public life.

Citizens, tourists and visitors, even urban analysts have always had the possibility to capture some information about the domestic and quotidian urban life by reading the façades and the external display of buildings and houses. It is an imperfect method. The urban palimpsest in general and the complexity of plurifunctional buildings and condominiums and plurifamiliar residences make the task very difficult.

Urban geography has generally dealt with the city as a material object, an abstract place, mainly public, mainly static, mainly masculine and mainly at the working hours of the day. It is the majoritarian productivist point of view. The consumer's city's diversity, difference and dynamic remain always evasive if not hidden.

8 The Hidden Processes of Social and Cultural Segregation

City in general and each of the concrete cities with their unique toponyms tend to be a relatively homogenous object. For this reason, the city and each of its toponyms are used as a subject of various actions in order to impose group or class political options to the majority of their citizens. For example, during the Summer Olympic Games in 1992, the slogan *Barcelona turns its back to the sea* became very popular. Barcelona, like any city in the world, has neither back nor face; moreover, its harbour has been used for commerce or fishing at least for the last 2,000 years. Researchers and Barcelonans need to examine who faces the Mediterranean Sea and why. For this reason, urban social and cultural diversity often remain hidden under a supposed or imposed general interest.

Urban social and cultural structures are always very complex and dynamic, and the political projects often tend to unify the class, gender, cultural, ethnic or age differences. The nation state implemented the first big modern program trying to unify all of its citizens, who were not any more mere subjects, under a general concept of homeland. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) created the modern German university as one of the strongest bases for reunifying Germany. The German as well the French first schools of geography were asked to scientifically enrich this unification process. Cities are also very effective tools for the unification of their inhabitants, who are citizens both in a political and locational sense. Cities already existed in premodern times, before the state, at least in the Mediterranean world (Braudel 1949). In postmodern times, cities have once again achieved a homogenization role in their competition in the international market.

However, during their history, cities have created several ghettos, even homogeneous preindustrial cities. Jewish ghettos in the Christian world, the Forbidden City in Beijing, Chinatowns in the Philippines or Hispanic America are just a few examples. The development of capitalism has multiplied this kind of ghettos due to the increasing international migration and the expansion of colonization overseas. Overall, social segregation has been the most significant feature of capitalist cities, often combined with the cultural and ethnic ones. The first examples analysed were Little Ireland in Manchester or Little Italy in Chicago (Engels 1845; Park and Burgess 1925). The combination of the laws of the urban land market and the zoning principles

of urban planning has morphologically organized and consolidated the contemporary fragmented city. The culmination of this fragmentation process could be the desired segregation of rich people living in closed condominiums; this process is thoroughly diffused in Brazilian cities (*condominios fechados*) and in general, around the Latin American urban world (Bellet and Sposito 2009; Sposito and Goes 2013).

In spite of the general awareness of this widespread social and cultural segregation, the main part of its empirical materialization in the cities remains hidden to citizens and visitors, to politicians and even many social researchers. The best-known areas and neighbourhoods of the cities are always their centres and tourist places that hide the majority of other urban spaces. Only a few social ghettos or ethnic neighbourhoods could attract particular interest, as the favela tours in Rio de Janeiro, or many Chinatowns everywhere, or the Raval in Barcelona (Martínez-Rigol, Carreras and Frago 2015; Wong and Tan 2013).

9 The Not-So-Hidden Marginal Life

During the nineteenth century, the fact emerged progressively in the Western cities that the capitalist progress generated inequalities and that the cities' space was shared between rich and poor people, mixed even with misery, vice and crime. The first Marxist analysis categorized that social reality into three social classes: the bourgeoisie, the proletariat and the lumpenproletariat. The nineteenth century philanthropists, such as doctors, priests, engineers or writers and even some industrial entrepreneurs considered the health and social degradation in the industrial cities as an illness that could be treated with hygienic urban planning and social policies, reformists or revolutionaries. Examples are numerous in many countries: Charles Dickens (1812–1870), Charles Fourier (1772–1837), Leo XIII (1810–1903) or the Barcelona's planner engineer Ildefons Cerdà (1876).

Within the frame of the urban reformism stream, some writers were interested in the description of the underworld of great cities. Urban marginal world, normally hidden from everyday life, became popular through journals and books creating a new literary genre, the thriller. Starting as serial literature, the genre was first published in the most popular journals and has had a big success, multiplied by the cinema, throughout the twentieth century.

Probably the first populist novel of mystery and crime was *Les mystères de Paris*, published in 1842/43 by the French writer Eugène Sue (1804–1857). The scandalous success of the book resulted in national and international imitations; at least 14 mysteries happening in different European cities appeared between 1849 and 1970. Until today, every year, every city has had books written about its secret life, although finally, results are not that secret.

This literary genre has the advantage of its popularity because such novels are read not only by learned intellectuals but by everyone. It would be possible even to identify different national types of this genre based on the detective protagonists of the serials.

For example, the British Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930) or Agatha Christie (1890–1976), the Americans Dashiell Hammett (1894–1961) or Raymond Chandler (1888–1959), the Belgian Georges Simenon (1903–1989), the Spanish Manolo Vázquez Montalbán (1939–2003), the Italian Andrea Camilleri (1925–2019) or the Swedish Hennig Mankell (1948–2015) (Carreras 2013).

10 Urban Hiding of Political Power

Materialization of power, political as well as religious and economic, has an enormous significance for the birth and development of cities. Castles and palaces, temples and markets have organized the first human settlements that are known under the generic name of cities. During the long process of formation of the nation states since the seventeenth century in Western Europe, some cities became symbols of the new political power in the form of capitals. Paris, London, Saint Petersburg or Berlin compete in their representative role. The twentieth century multiplication of states also multiplied the number of capitals, with more or less brilliancy.

However, with the increasing process of economic capital accumulation, non-capital cities take primacy in many countries and regions, for example, Barcelona in Spain, Milan in Italy, Frankfurt in Germany, New York in the United States or São Paulo in Brazil. In the process of globalization of the economy, through the diffusion of new information and communication technologies, some cities, capitals or not, acquire the global category, especially New York, London and Tokyo (Sassen 2001). Their stocks exchange activities play an important role in the definition and conception of the global city.

The increasing influence of the city that is visible in the concentration of the headquarters of different corporations at all the scales, in parallel contributes to hiding the organization and the functions of traditional and real political power. In this sense, the great architectonic creation of the twentieth century has undoubtedly been the skyscraper, which symbolizes everywhere the real power of the economy in the capitalist cities (Gottmann 1966).

11 Progressive Hiding Process of city's Limits, a Kind of Conclusion

In geography, the delimitation of the city is usually also an exercise of definition. Many preindustrial cities were clearly delimited by different kinds of walls, inside which even the rural population took its shelter during war periods. The separation between the country and the city was clear, although many rural landowners and peasants could live in the city. Barcelona has three different historical circuits of walls, and in the first half of the nineteenth century, all the gates still closed at 9

p.m. except one that closed at 10 p.m. By night, the city remained closed and safe (Carreras 1993).

The diffusion of capitalist industrialization ended with the material limits of cities at the same time that urbanization started to occupy more and more territories. The traditional compact city was overflowed by a diffuse new city composed of large suburbia everywhere. Huge communication infrastructures completed an impressive and progressive land occupation. Furthermore, agricultural and natural areas were totally subordinated to the city. The contradiction between the country and the city has been completely reverted in favour of the city.

However, during the last expansion of capitalism around the world, since the big 1973 crisis, and the hegemony of financial capital and all types of new technologies, many differential processes of urbanization have been developed throughout the world. The traditional contradiction between the country and the city has been overcome by the investments of capital and knowledge everywhere. The cities are not anymore a bounded object as hypothesized by the French philosopher Henry Lefébvre in 1970, with the combination of the process of implosions and explosions of the cities (Lefébvre 1970; Brenner 2014).

Urban geography today, therefore, covers all territory due to the process of planetary urbanization. This requires a new definition of the cities and a new point of view to be able to explain the wide and deep changes of contemporary human society.

These and other important contemporary trends that characterize our post-truth times claim for a new scientific approach to the urban that our research group includes in a vindication of a renewed classical political economy. The main goal must be to allow the explanation of the urban totality against the mainstream fragmentation of the anecdotic and fetishist discourses in much scientific literature.

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