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Abstract

The crisis that modernist urban planning went through in the mid-seventies led to the appearance of different new formulae both in Europe and other parts of the Western world. Globalisation and the breakdown of the Eastern Bloc in the 1990s gave rise to a new approach in the discipline which, despite its obvious internationalisation, remained linked to important cultural traditions specific to each country. This chapter explains how after the ‘golden age of planning’ new cultural and environmental sensibilities emerged that gave rise to a more complex urbanism that dealt with the changes experienced by cities, paving the way for the rise of the strategic urban projects.

Keywords

New paradigms • Urban planning • Urban design • Strategic urban projects • Urban cultures

The coexistence of different urban planning traditions and strategies during the growth of the 1950s and 1960s was not incompatible, as seen in the previous chapter, with the validity of the paradigm of modernist urbanism at that time, including a large number of disciplinary and cultural alternatives. That paradigm, however, entered a profound crisis after the 1970s, when the recession of 1973 put an end to an economic cycle, as well as to a long period in which the principles of functionalist urban planning had been adopted even while their validity was being questioned.

The crisis that modernist urban planning went through at that time led to the appearance of different formulae both in Europe and other parts of the Western world. Globalisation and the breakdown of the Eastern Bloc in the 1990s gave rise to a new approach in the discipline which, despite its obvious internationalisation, remained linked to important cultural traditions specific to each country. Some hypotheses point to substantial changes in the cities themselves,

particularly European cities, which were no longer seen as “degraded forms of modern cities” but rather as “contemporary cities” (Secchi 1999). In this sense, it is important to understand how, at the end of the 1970s and as a result of this crisis, once the ‘golden age of planning’ was over, urban planning and cities underwent substantial changes, particularly in Europe. The modern functionalist urban planning that was valid internationally gave way to a renewed architectural, strategic urbanism in which urban projects acquired the importance that general plans, based on zoning, had during the boom of modernist urbanism in the years of great urban growth. Parallel to the economies of the information era, other cultural and environmental sensitivities emerged, linked to different views on sustainability and the quality of the urban environment. With all the contradictions stemming from the changes in the role that public and private agents played, the ‘new urban planning principles’ were imposed, corresponding to the ‘third age of modernity’ to promote new urban quality for a very differentiated society (Ascher 2001).

The relationships between the different urban planning formulae and the economic dynamics or real estate cycle is another aspect that has played a relevant role in the changes

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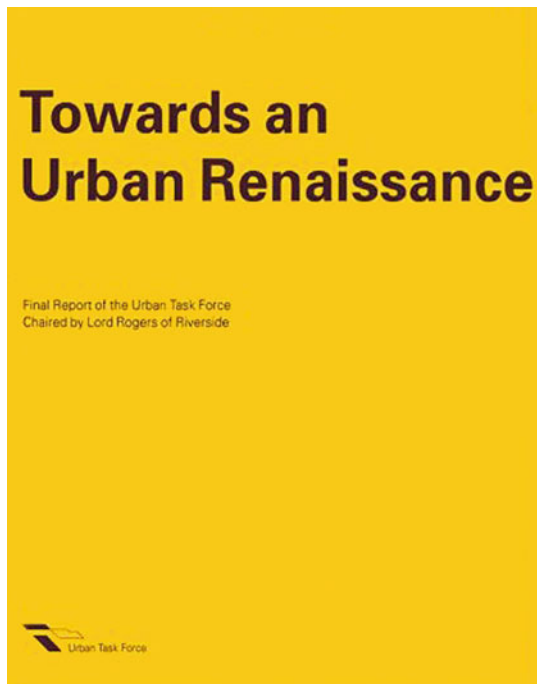


Fig. 11.1 Cover page of *Towards an Urban Renaissance*, prepared by the Urban Task Force headed up by Richard Rogers, Spon, London, 1999

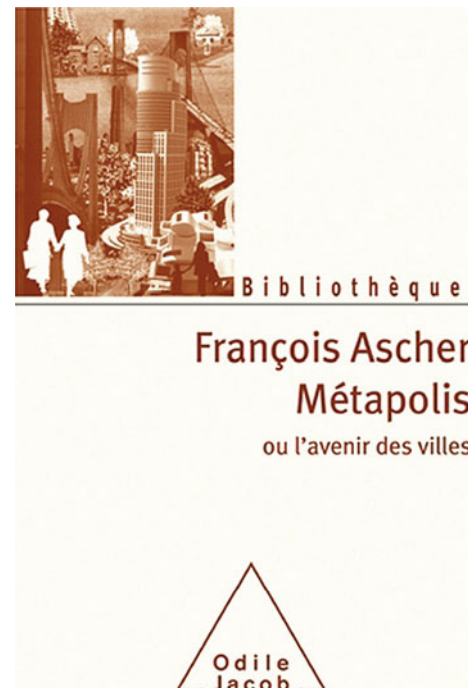


Fig. 11.2 Cover page of some publications reflecting recent paradigm changes François Ascher, *Metápolis*, 1995

in the paradigm and ‘recoveries’ of urbanistic traditions. Some authors, such as Anthony Sutcliffe, have managed to relate oscillations and changes from some paradigms to others with economic cycles and the construction ‘booms’: it could be said that in times of growth “urbanism is ambitious, innovative, passionate about execution”, whereas in times of recession “urbanism is somewhat deceptive in execution but induces a new generation of creative ideologies and artists who pave the way for the new stage of growth” (Sutcliffe 1981). Logically, this outlook should not be understood as literal economic determinism but rather as a way of relating cultural moments with economic cycles. This type of hypothesis leads us to consider the interest in cultural urbanism emerged in the past decades that emphasise intervention, with a renewed attitude, both as a fresh impulse for cultural tradition, as well as a reaction to the accelerated urban growth in the 1960s and 1970s and the inadequacy of the responses afforded by conventional urban planning.

On the other hand, in order to understand the complex process of consolidation, crisis and the consequent reformulation of contemporary urban planning culture, we need to consider the connections between the different national traditions and their specificities, each of them with its own strategies. The fact that concepts such as ‘*Urbanisme*’, ‘*Urbanistica*’ or ‘*Urbanismo*’ used in the Latin-European field have persistently maintained their meaning parallel to Anglo-Saxon town planning is proof of the strength and



Bernardo Secchi
La città del ventesimo secolo

 Editore Laterza

Fig. 11.3 Cover page of some publications reflecting recent paradigm changes Bernardo Secchi, *La città del ventesimo secolo*, 2005

marked identity that has brought these traditions to fruition since the beginning of the twentieth century in contemporary urban planning (Monclús and Díez Medina 2017). Paradoxically, some approaches made by those southern European countries, where the discipline of Planning

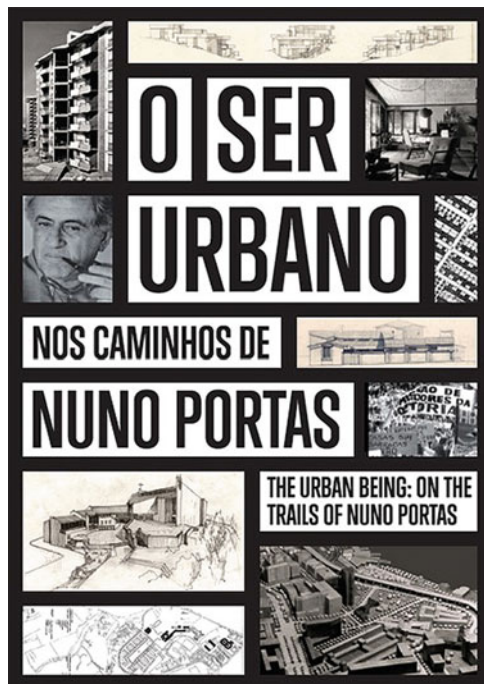


Fig. 11.4 Images of the cover pages of some publications reflecting recent paradigm changes Nuno Portas, *O ser urbano*, 2012

arrived later—therefore, labelled as ‘late comers’—, began to be considered successful paradigms (Hebbert 2006). Hence, in contrast to canonical Town Planning, Urbanism, with its architectural roots that are reformulated as ‘urban project’ since the 1980s, can be considered a reinterpretation of traditions that had persisted more strongly precisely in those cultural contexts. Doubt as to whether urban planning could be considered a ‘scientific’ discipline came about with the varied results in different countries and urban situations. It is typically agreed that drafting general plans using zoning as a basic instrument permitted a coherent response to the demands of cities in the industrial era. Nevertheless, the experience of these urban renewal episodes and the configuration of new ‘modernist’ residential sectors, have been questioned from different perspectives, causing substantial changes in recent decades. Hence, the crisis of the *zoning* as a key instrument of modernist urbanism was associated with the problems suffered by the residential suburbs in the years of ‘urban developmentalism’. The discourse focussing on ‘what and how much’ has also been questioned, i.e. in an understanding of urbanism as almost exclusively addressing uses and intensities of land use (Ezquiaga 2011). Although it cannot be ignored that approaches have often served to legitimise a certain distribution of added value, it is obvious that the successes and failures in controlling urban growth

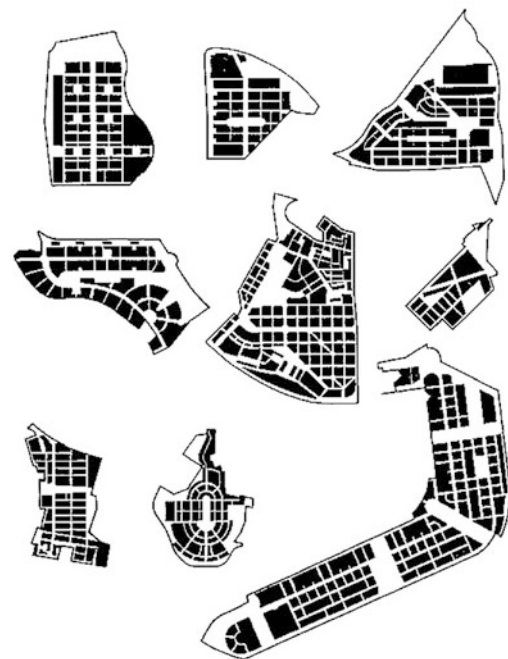
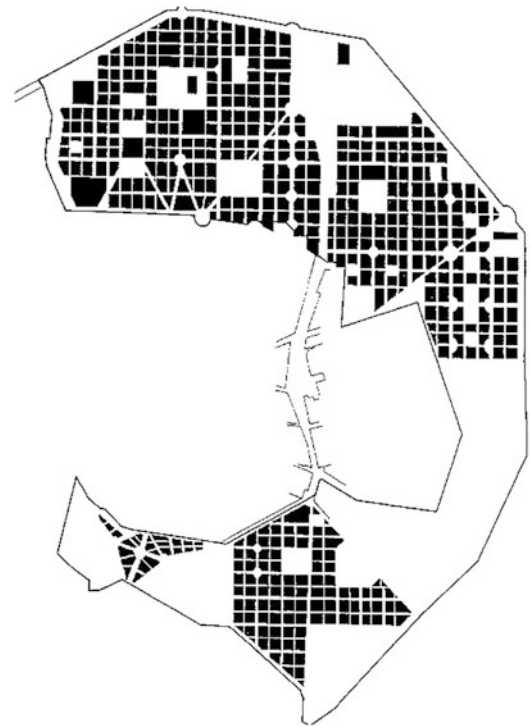


Fig. 11.5 Madrid, *Ensanche* (city extension) of the nineteenth century and ‘new extensions’ from the end of the twentieth century in depictions at the same scale

do not only depend on real estate speculation but also on the limitations of the discipline itself.

Parallel to the repercussions and influences economic cycles have had on urban planning approaches (e.g. the emergence of an urban project culture after a period of rapid

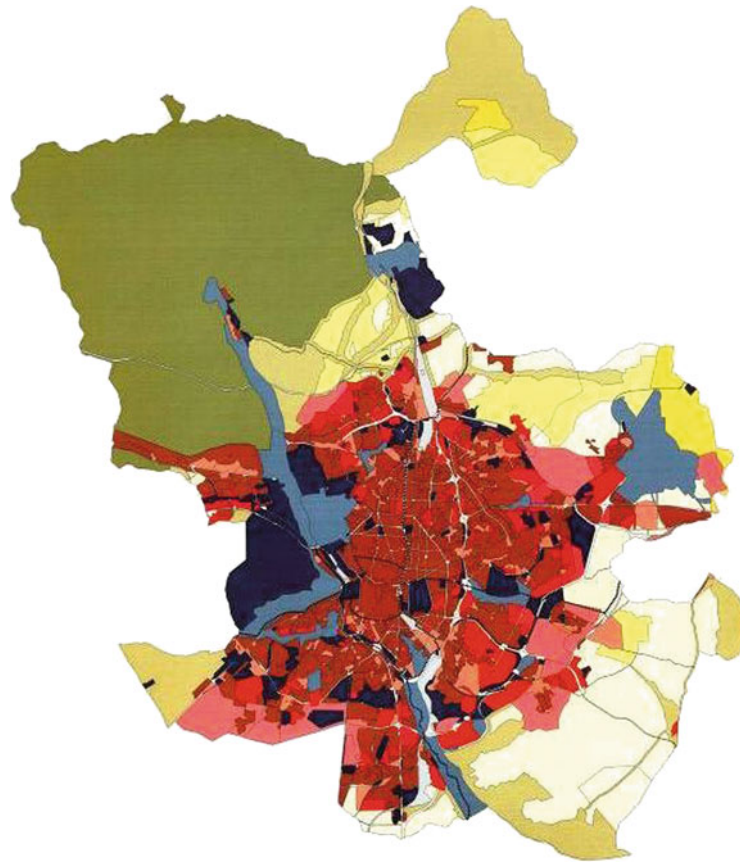


Fig. 11.6 Madrid, General Urban Development Plan, 1985

urban growth), the relative crisis of comprehensive general plans has been losing ground since the early 1980s to strategic urban projects. As Nuno Portas points out, imposing strategic town planning often takes place “outside or against general plans” (Portas 2004). Since the 1980s and 1990s, ‘middle-scale’ plans or urban projects have acquired greater importance as alternative tools to general plans and zoning¹.

Projects for international events, mainly Olympic Games and International Exhibitions, have had a renaissance since the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, drawing on a tradition that dates to the end of the nineteenth century. This new strategic aim is in continuity with historical objectives,

¹“The third generation of urban projects doesn’t differ from the previous ones either in its scale or in its functional composition ... these projects are different, in our opinion, due primarily to the program and the new opportunities offered to the interventions; Also, by the processes, or mechanisms, of organization of the realizations; Finally, and subordinately, by the bi-univocal and non-hierarchical relationship that the project tends to establish with the plan, that is, by the style of planning that characterizes the new project” (Portas 1998).

namely to ‘put cities on the map’. The novelty of these events is that they are used as catalysts for public and private investments, becoming a valuable means for mobilising state and local bureaucracy. It was precisely that ability to attract investments that gave rise to the reconsideration of projects that had been drafted previously for cities as the venues for these events. The 1992 Olympics in Barcelona marked a new generation of strategic urban projects. Despite the differences between cities and urban situations, the emergence of this new strategic town planning is also associated with International Exhibitions, increasingly pragmatic and instrumental catalysts of urban transformation, as was the case of Expo Seville in 1992, Lisbon in 1998, Zaragoza in 2008 or Milan in 2015 (Portas 1998). As for the design of the Olympic Games or International Exhibition infrastructure, some matches can be found with the new architectural and town planning paradigms, with clear protagonism of architectural and landscape urban development (Monclús 2014).

The foregoing considerations bring to light the risks entailed in generic interpretations of town planning in recent decades. As seen, we should not only bear in mind the



Fig. 11.7 Zaragoza, twentieth-century-urban estates and ‘new city extensions’ in depictions at the same scale

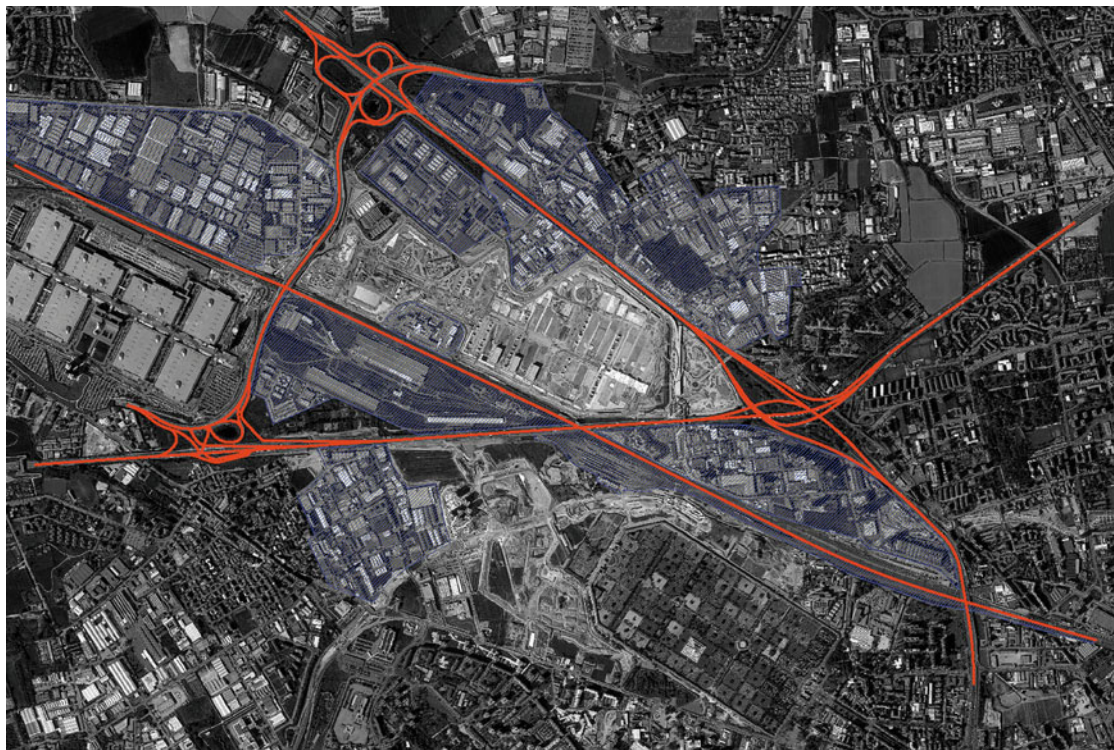


Fig. 11.8 Urban project. Milan Expo 2015 area



Fig. 11.9 Zaragoza, aerial photograph of the Ranillas meander which was the venue for the 2008 International Exhibition “Water and Sustainable Development”

specificities of national and cultural traditions but also the paradigms and technical cultures dominating each period and urban context. The changes in paradigm stemming from the functionalist town planning crisis drafted in the Athens Charter have given rise to different versions of town planning more responsive to the layout of urban forms. Although it could be claimed that revisionist perspectives began with the critical proposals by the second generation of modern town planners and ‘other urbanisms’ that coexisted with the functionalist paradigm [see Chap. 9], it is true that the substantial rupture took place after the final decades of the twentieth century. The claim for the “lost art of urbanism” (Hall 2014) that came from different cultural fields did not, however, entail a complete convergence of methods of urbanistic intervention. Proof of this is the contrast seen between the neo-traditionalism of New Urbanism and other historicist versions of the new architectural urbanism movements compared to other more ‘modern’ variants in

urban projects and in urban cultures in the south of Europe (France, Italy or Spain). In this sense, the report commissioned by the Labour government to an Urban Task Force led by Richard Rogers, which was published in 1999 under the title “Towards an Urban Renaissance”, is noteworthy. Visions of the ‘urban project urbanism’ were celebrated, making reference to cities such as Barcelona (with a foreword by the former Mayor of the city). The report was a diagnosis of British cities that proposed strategies for them based on the principles of design quality, social welfare and environmental responsibility recommending two types of urban planning intervention: small operations on small urban spaces, followed by strategic projects (Urban Task Force 1999). The case studies, described as follows, illustrate these paradigm shifts we have cited. A progressive imposition of the new urban planning paradigms can be seen in the transformations undergone by the city of Paris in the last three decades, with simultaneous interest in major urban

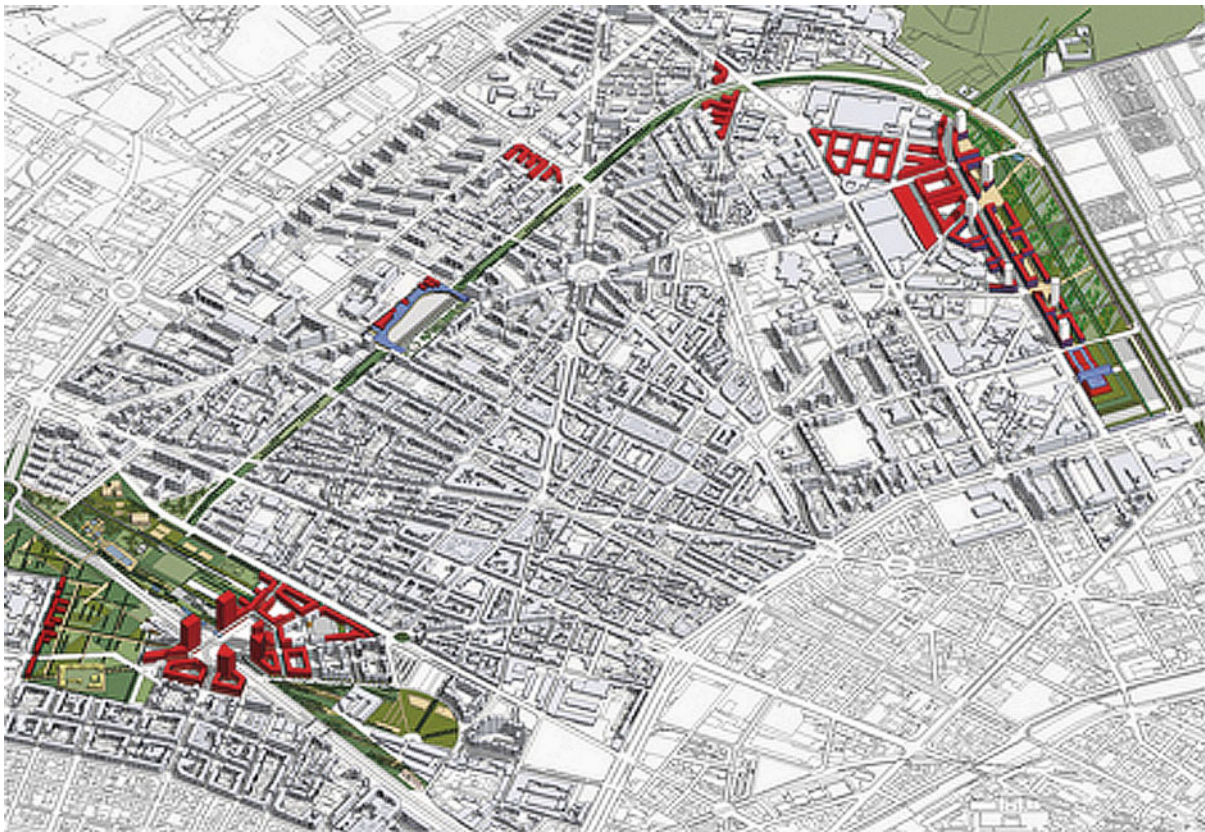


Fig. 11.10 Turin, Piano Regolatore Generale, Variante 200 for integration of infrastructures, 2010

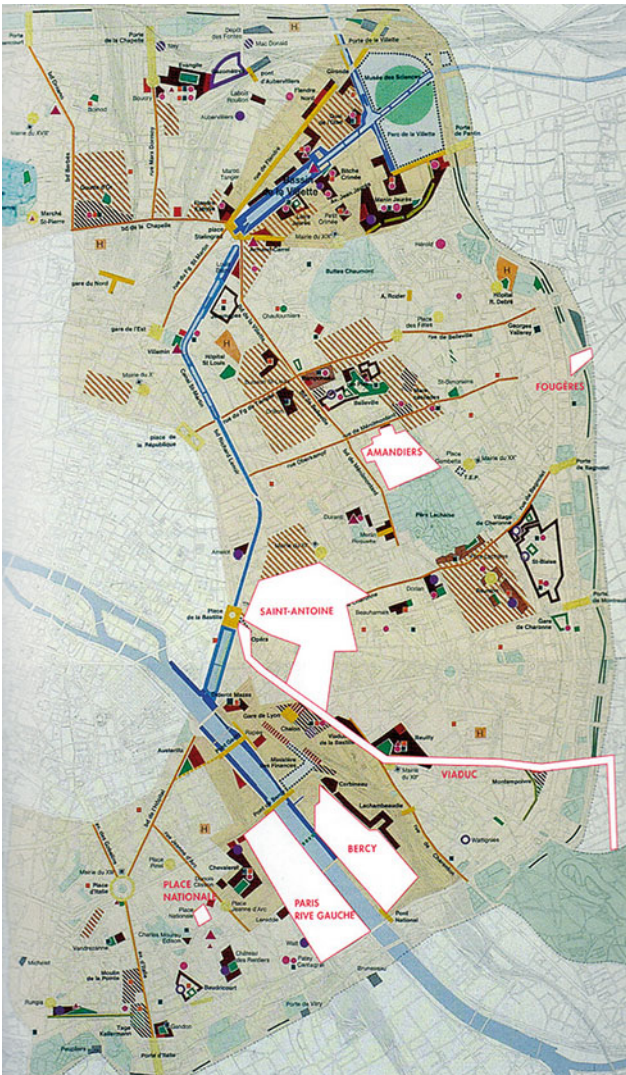
infrastructure operations and occasional urban projects at middle-scale. Hence, the launch of the ‘*Grands Projets*’ in 1982 using the pretext of the bicentennial of the French Revolution celebrated in 1989 to mark a deadline for their execution (Woolf 1987). Although the precedent of the Pompidou Centre is occasionally referred to when speaking of the relationships between the monumental public work and the city, the Parisian urbanistic tradition dates back at least to the Haussmann interventions of the second half of the nineteenth century. Slightly over a century later, we need to understand the ‘*Grands Projets* cycle’ not only as an operation of prestige, without belittling its importance in this sense, but also as a strategy to renew the urban structure of the city, in terms of social rebalance and reconquering of the most impoverished areas of the city. In another example, Barcelona, from the 1980s to the present day, has undergone radical transformations, evolving from an industrial city in crisis to one with tourism and the new services economy,

simultaneously reconverting its economic and social foundations. In that process of reconversion, different phases and periods can be identified, although the continuity in some strategies and methods or urban intervention is the subject of a heated debate between professionals and scholars. In fact, in recent years, international dissemination of the so-called Barcelona model (Calativa and Ferrer i Aixalá 2000) has led to positions somewhat more critical that question the exaggerated originality (Monclús 2003) or prominence of business views compared to those played by the public sector through a series of integrating plans and projects. The generalised vision of urbanism in Olympic Barcelona between town planners and urbanism historians, supported on the international recognition of the quality of certain urban projects and the strategies driven by the public powers, led the episode to be considered as “one of the most powerful international urbanistic models at the end of the 20th century” (Ward 2002, 371).

Case Studies

Plan Programme for the East, Paris (1982–2000)

The ‘*Grands Projets* cycle’ covered action of different natures: the Grand Louvre, the Grande Arche, the D’Orsay Museum, the Arab World Institute, the Ministry of Economy



and Finance, the Bastille Opera House, the National Library of France and the Villette Park. At the same time, as also happened during the Haussmann episode, the creation of a new system of green areas is noteworthy (150 parks, including the new Villette, Bercy, Citroën and Martin Luther King parks).

But it was the great Plan programme for East Paris, launched in 1983 with the major operation on the Paris Rive Gauche sector that specifically dealt with regenerating a large territory covering 130 hectares predominantly industrial and rail yards. Some of these major projects (the Bastille Opera House, Villette Park and the National Library of France) are specifically associated with renovation of an ‘inner suburb’ characterised by obsolete industrial areas. The studies and projects for the Exhibition and Olympic Games, that never materialised, contributed decisively to the recovery of those strategic areas for the city.

Several operations managed through the strategy of the so-called *Zones d’Aménagement Concerté* (ZAC) enabled effective implementation of residential renovation programmes and new activities, equipment and infrastructures, paying special attention to public areas. The lack of definition in the programming of many of those projects nevertheless permitted adapting to new local needs, without renouncing the structuring role of the major urban operations.

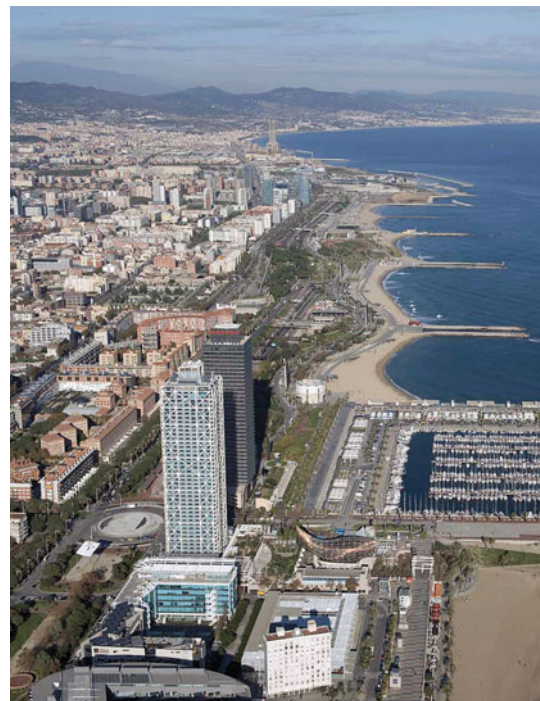
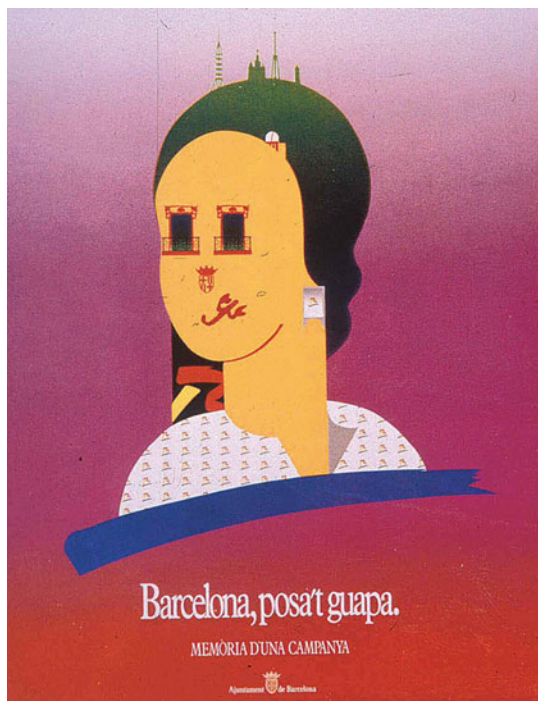


Strategic Urban Plans, Barcelona (1992–2010)

Clearly, Barcelona made the most of the opportunity afforded by the 1992 Olympic Games to renew its waterfront by opening up the city to the sea and integrating the seafront in the city, along the same lines as other European and American cities. The step from modest interventions at the start of the 1980s to other more ambitious work linked to the Olympics, both in terms of infrastructure, amenities and public areas, accounted for a change in scale towards strategic urban projects.

Some studies bring to light the continuity with the initiatives that had taken place in the 1970s, begun by

neighbourhood movements, to the leadership of the first democratic city halls and the influence of professionals on the Barcelona council. Others relate visions of ‘urban reconstruction’ to the theorisation of the international town planning culture. Other interpretations emphasise the discontinuity between the first pre-Olympic stage and the subsequent stage, subordinating economic interests and the political interests of the ‘Barcelona brand’ with the proliferation of spectacular, iconic architecture. Beyond these different opinions about the urban transformations in recent decades, there can be no doubt that Barcelona has stood out for its ability to promote structural, deep rooted transformation through urban projects of all different scales.



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