



The Green Divide

City Profiles

Barcelona

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NATURATION
cities - nature - innovation



VORAPORT
actahotels

Poblenou

Barcelona, Catalunya

HUERTA LA VANGUARDIA
Somos SEMILLAS rebeldes

Qui som?

Col·lectiu de veïnes i veïns
en espai okupat autogestionat
de lliure accés
punt de trobada



Què fem?

- hort comunitari
- activitats socials i culturals

- seixim complicitats

s'admeten: ganes de participar i respectar l'espai

LA REVOLUCIÓN
de la lechuga y del
higo
admeten:

com ho fem?

- ens organitzem de manera
horitzontal en assemblees
mensuals

ni sexistes, ni xenòfobes, ni LGTB fòbiques, ni egoïstes

Synopsis

Poblenou is a post-industrial neighbourhood undergoing considerable urban redevelopment driven mostly by the 22@ plan, a municipal redevelopment strategy aimed at transforming the neighborhood into a tech startup, "new economy" hub. While a major priority of the plan has been the (re)development of green spaces, these have mostly catered to new residents and highly skilled workers in the knowledge economy. Poblenou is also the pioneering site of the ambitious Superblock mobility model that has instigated significant gentrification pressures including the displacement of working class and longtime residents. How is municipal-led, top-down planning transforming the urban character, fabric, movement, and population of an existing residential community?

I. Historical context

Urban Development History

Poblenou is a historically industrial, working-class neighborhood of Barcelona. At the beginning of the 19th century, factories and workers' housing blocks replaced the agricultural area and gave Poblenou a new socio-economic and architectural identity (Arxiu Històric del Poblenou 2021). In the 1960s, episodes of social mobilization protested the industrial decline and the urban plans of the City Council, such as the «Pla de la Ribera» in 1968. By the end of the 1980s, Poblenou was immersed in a profound urban transformation in preparation for the 1992 Olympic Games. (Baró 2018).

Contemporary Development

Starting in the 1990s and most notably since the first decade of the 21st century, Poblenou was gradually rebranded into a high-tech and design-oriented neighborhood (Barcelona Architecture Walks 2020). Over the last decade, working-class residents have been displaced by the creation of a new compact city model that pursues the concentration of knowledge-intensive activities, as realized through a series of



Facade of the original building of the L'Aliança Society
Source: Arxiu Històric del Poblenou, 2008

successive urban developments, including the 22@ project, the widening of the Diagonal, the opening of Maritime Front, Diagonal Mar and the Forum shopping complexes. Today, universities, research and tech innovation centers, together with new housing, infrastructure and green areas embody the latest paradigm of urban regeneration while hiding the progressive elitization of the neighborhoods and its inhabitants (BCNUEJ 2021).

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II. Recent green interventions (10-15 years)

Municipal

Parc Central del Poblenou

Designed by the renowned architect Jean Nouvel and constructed in 2008 at the intersection of Pere IV and the Nova Diagonal, Parc Central del Poblenou was originally presented as one of the most singular features of Poblenou's transformation (Barcelona Lowdown 2013). Its location was intended to provide connectivity to nearby tech and design companies. However, its inauguration was accompanied by multiple controversies, including the disruption of the historically central highway to France (Pere IV Street), its poor accessibility and elevated cost (Pérez del Pulgar, Anguelovski, and Connolly 2020).

2021d). However, this strategy of sewing neighborhoods with greenways and giving greater prominence to pedestrian uses has also paved the way for the construction of high-end hotels and offices that threaten local affordable retail and housing. An example of this is the imminent construction of a 14-story hotel (promoted by the chain The Student Hotel) in Cristóbal de Moura 49, which generated strong opposition from local organizations. In addition to a protest in 2018, protestors released a manifesto entitled "No to the Poblenou Macro Hotel " calling the project the first major hotel operation to be carried out after the approval of the PEUAT (Special Tourist Accommodation Plan) approved in 2017 and which created tension between municipal planners and leaders in the tourism industry (La Vanguardia 2018).



Eix Verd Cristóbal de Moura greenway
Source: BCNUJE, 2019

Superblock Poblenou

This urban intervention, inaugurated in 2016 pacifies nine city blocks, giving priority to pedestrians, bicycles and public transport to contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation goals (Roberts 2019). However, numerous controversies derived from its implantation gave rise to two conflicting groups: the Superblock Collective of Poblenou, in favor of its implementation as a key intervention to reduce noise and pollution ("Col·lectiu Superilla Poblenou" 2021), and the Platform for the Affected by Poblenou's Superblock, mainly made up of agents from the automotive sector, whose

criticism revolves around the congestion of circulation around it and its ineffectiveness for sustainability (PAS P9 2021).

Eix Verd Cristóbal de Moura

In 2018-2019, Cristóbal de Moura Street was transformed into a green, pacified axis in the context of the 22@ plan in order to connect the Parc Central del Poblenou with the Parc del Besós to the north (Barcelona City Council

Carrer Pere IV

Known 250 years ago as the Mataró Highway, the Carrer Pere IV street was one of the city's main industrial arteries during the 19th century. Between 2014-2019, the 3km-long street was transformed into a green corridor intended as a new cultural hub for Barcelona and now contains a multitude of tech companies, residential buildings, and offices. The section between Roc Boronat and Bilbao streets—the historical heart of Poble Nou—was first remodeled into a new civic and heritage axis for attracting investment (Barcelona City Council 2015). A year after its inauguration in 2017, a second remodeling phase was approved between Josep Pla and Rambla Prim streets towards Besós. Leaving behind its previous configuration, which dedicated four lanes to traffic, it now hosts green amenity infrastructure such as bike lanes and new playgrounds (Barcelona City Council 2018c). Pere IV Street is comprised of tech companies, residential buildings, offices, empty lots and abandoned factories set to become a new cultural center for Barcelona.

Community Led

Founded after the 15M civic movement in Spain, the Hort Indignat of Poble Nou urban gardens of Poble Nou were developed and maintained by residents as part of informal community cohesion initiatives (García López 2019). The Assembla Social del Poble Nou, for example, which emerged from the 2008 financial and economic crisis squatted and transformed a disused lot into an orchard and food production space. The popularity of Hort Indignat of Poble Nou, a collective, self-managed and social assembly project, led to the squatting of other orchards (Pradel n.d.). However, due to real estate



ConnectHORT
Source: BCNUEJ, 2020

speculation, most gardens have been progressively evicted or dismantled.

Hort de la Vanguardia

In 2016, a demonstration against mass tourism in Poble Nou resulted in the squatting of a municipal area sandwiched between two plots then designated for the construction of two major hotels. The site was transformed by neighbors into one of the largest community gardens in Poble Nou. In light of the new hotels, community-based organizers fear that the municipality will yield the space to the hotels as an extension of their open grounds (Sekulova 2020).

ConnectHort

ConnectHORT is a permaculture garden conceived as a place of sustainable connection between people and their environment (Barcelona City Council 2021c). It responds to the Barcelona City Council's Pla Buits (Vacant Lots) plan intended to recover disused urban spaces (Sekulova 2020).

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III. Anti-displacement and Right-to-the-City Activism

The Assembla Social del Poblenou was born from the 15M movement, when different social groups decentralized their actions and reorganized around new spaces. In 2012, together with the Assembla de Joves del Poblenou and La Teixidora (an anarchist social center in the neighborhood), the group squatted a space that came to be known as the emblematic new headquarters of local social movements: the Flor de Maig social center (“Ateneu Popular La Flor de Maig | Espai Veïnal per a La Transformació Social” 2021).

To date, Poblenou has no housing rights or anti-eviction groups despite the emergence of initiatives such as the Taula Eix Pere IV, a platform that fights against the abandonment and degradation of industrial spaces in the neighborhood through the social reactivation of the Pere IV Street’s urban axis (“Taula de l’Eix Pere IV – Cooperar per Fer Ciutat” 2021, @eixpereiv on Twitter) and the Associació de Veïns i Veïnes del Poblenou, a historic neighborhood association founded in 1972 (FAVB Federació d’Associacions de Veïns 2021, @PoblenouAVV on Twitter). In 2016, when the Flor de Maig was closed by the City Council due to the poor conditions and self-managed orchards were evicted, the civic group Ens Plantem (@EnsPlantemP9) was created as a platform against the increasing massification of tourism in Poblenou resulting from the 22@ plan (“Ens Plantem | Ateneu Popular La Flor de Maig” 2021). It was not until 2018, however, that the Flor de Maig social center integrated housing struggles into its agenda as a result of the dissolution of the Housing Commission of Poblenou due to pressures from the Ens Plantem and Taula Eix Pere IV platforms in advocating for local housing concerns.



Housing development in Poblenou
Source: BCNUEJ, 2019

IV. Campaigns and demands

At present, Ens Plantem functions as a housing group focused on cases of eviction and residential precariousness. In 2019, the group launched a campaign with the slogan “It could be your house” to denounce gentrification and advocate for the construction of public housing in 10 empty and unused lots owned by the Barcelona City Council. However, due to the extreme vulnerability brought on by the COVID19 crisis, much of its current advocacy work has shifted to supporting the #RentStrike Pledge (#HuelgaAlquileres) led by the Barcelona-wide Sindicat de Llogateres, a tenants’ union that defends the right to housing and affordable rent.

Meanwhile, the Taula Eix Pere IV group is running the campaign Transformem el 22@ (@Transformem22a), which seeks to analyze and propose alternatives to the social shortcomings of the original 22@ Plan. The campaign has presented seven proposals to the Municipal Action Program 2020-2023 (#PAM2020) and the participatory budgets (#DecidimPressupostos) inaugurated in 2020 in an effort to make urban planning serve the residents affected by the 22@ Plan. The case of Can Ricart, one of Poblenou’s original industrial complexes, is another example of the urban transformation that has all but dissolved Poblenou’s singular industrial character. Still active in the early 2000s, it was abandoned for seven years and was transferred in 2013 to the University of Barcelona to be used as an Arts campus.

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V. Success Stories

Passage de Morenes

As part of the 22@ Plan, old buildings, abandoned lots, and ground floor storefronts are being replaced by large hotels and tall office buildings. About 25,000 new workers are expected in the next few years (Shields 2019), targeting a qualified sector of high cultural capital that excludes much of the local population. In response, long-term residents have mobilized against displacement brought on by the pressures of new investment funds, such as Praedium Global Invest. An emblematic case is the Passatge de Morenes, a group of low-rise houses scheduled to be demolished and replaced by twelve-story offices after an investment fund acquired 60% of the block in 2018. To date, neighborhood mobilization has managed to temporarily postpone demolition and the eviction of residents (García López 2020).

Flor de Maig

In 2012, activists from the 15-M and Indignados Movement (particularly those within the Assembla de Joves del Poblenou, the Assembla Social, the Octubre Casal Independentista and the Associació de Veïns i Veïnes del Poblenou) squatted what would later become the Flor de Maig social center used for community meetings and organizing. Despite the acquisition of the property by the City Council in 2014, the space closed again for the second time in 2016 after the building was alleged unsafe and in poor condition (Pauné 2012). It is thanks to the neighbors' mobilization that its recent remodeling and reopening as a civic center was made possible in 2018 (Barcelona City Council 2018d), which gave rise to the Ens Plantem platform and the Hort de La Vangüardia ("Ens Plantem | Ateneu Popular La Flor de Maig" 2021).

Cristóbal del Moure

In 2020, the City Council nearly completed the conversion of the former industrial Cristóbal de Moura into a green corridor that provides 32.000m² of new green space to the Sant Martí district of Barcelona. The intervention integrates a linear garden, maximizes space for pedestrians and incorporates a bike lane. The infrastructure

also serves climate adaptation purposes through a SUDS (Sustainable Urban Draining System) by using collected rainwater to irrigate new trees and shrubs. The 1.27 kilometer-long corridor will connect the Poblenou Central Park, the Rambla de Prim and the Besòs Park.

Progressive anti-displacement or green equity policies and plans

As a result of its progressive transformation, most notably after the 1992 Olympic Games (Baró 2018), Barcelona has become a cultural destination and international tourist attraction. The city went from welcoming 1.7 million overnight tourists in 1990 (Barcelona Provincial Council 1990), to 9.1 million in 2018 (Statistical Department of the Barcelona City Council 2018). The well-known "Barcelona brand" represents the city's shift from post-dictatorship socialist concerns for neighborhood equity and quality of life expressed by the 1976 Metropolitan General Plan to entrepreneurial planning approaches that prioritise capital, economic growth, and tourism investments (Jones 2016). This has occurred through two major initiatives related to the knowledge economy and cultural activities: the creation of the 22@ innovation district in the declining industrial area of Poblenou in 2000 and the controversial Universal Forum of Cultures complex built in 2004 (Baró 2018). This is how, in part, socioeconomic differences have increased between districts and residents, particularly since the 2008 economic crisis.

(Green) Equity Policies

In 1976, the General Metropolitan Plan (PGM) was approved by Barcelona's new post-dictatorship socialist City Council in order to implement over 1,000 new planning and zoning modifications. It aimed to curb speculation and rehabilitate degraded urban spaces, placing special emphasis on social, healthcare, cultural and green infrastructure. Since 1980, the city has added more green and public spaces and pedestrianized many streets (Baró 2018).

At the same time, the implementation of the PGM has proved challenging, especially due to gentrification dynamics and real estate speculation that have exacerbated inequality through the city.

In response, the modification of the PGM was approved in Barcelona in 2018 to allow for more social housing on consolidated urban land, with the proposal to implement officially protected housing at a homogeneous, appraised price in the city. Since then, all new multi-family housing construction and major urban land renovations are legally bound to allocate a minimum of 30% of the total project to social housing, thanks to the civic initiative of Barcelona's Platform for Mortgage Affected People (PAH), the Federation of Neighbourhood Associations of Barcelona (FAVB), the Neighbourhood Assembly for Tourism Degrowth (ABDT), the Tenants Union (Sindicat de Llogateres) and the Observatory of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Observatori DESC) (Barcelona City Council 2018a).

Parc de Les Glòries

In 2013 the Barcelona Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Plan set key city goals and actions for green space and biodiversity until 2020 (Baró 2018). This plan has guided the creation of several neighborhood parks, including the new 14 hectare park in Glòries Square. Dismissed as a peripheral area for decades, the square was transformed in the late 1980s into one of the city's main access points. With the transformation of the 22@ district in the early 2000s, the square became a hub for shopping malls, cultural centers and experimental architecture. In 2003, the City Council launched a municipal action program to discuss the future development of the plaza. As of 2021, the formerly elevated ring road is being transferred underground and replaced with a large green area and a more pedestrian, public transit, and bike-driven mobility model.

Poblenou Superblock

Included in the PGM are the Superblocks, a climate change mitigation and adaptation intervention that closes off nine street blocks to traffic and prioritizes sustainable mobility and public space (Roberts 2019). At present, superblocks exist in the neighborhoods of



Poblenou superblock.
Source: Alberto Bougleux, 2020

Poblenou (the controversial pilot project began in 2014), Sant Antoni and Horta, while more are planned for Camp d'en Grassot and Gràcia Nord, Sant Gervasi, Sant Andreu, Prosperitat, Maternitat and Sant Ramon, Sants and Hostafrancs and Esquerra de l'Eixample, as outlined in the new Barcelona Urban Mobility Plan (PMU) 2019-2024, promoting the creation of over 100 Superblocks across the city (Barcelona City Council 2021). While generally well-received, concerns over reduced mobility and green gentrification have also arisen.

In 2015, the Barcelona Commitment to Climate was signed which includes a 40% reduction of CO2 emissions per capita in 2030 from the 2005 baseline, as well as an increase of 1,6km² of urban green space (Barcelona + Sostenible 2015). The agreement has resulted in a series of citizen climate projects which make up the Climate Roadmap 2015-2017. The actions specified in the Climate Roadmap are also echoed by the municipality in the Barcelona Climate Plan (2017-2018), which categorizes commitments into four main aspects: mitigation, adaptation and resilience, climate justice and promotion of citizen action (Barcelona City Council, n.d.). To this end, a series of grants to promote citizen action were awarded in 2018 and 2020, and based on this same framework, a Table for the Climate Emergency was constituted in 2019 as a working group of the Sustainability Council to effectively define concrete measures. This was followed by the January 2020 declaration of Climate Emergency for Barcelona.

Anti-displacement policies

The progressive urban rehabilitation of neighborhoods throughout the city, together with intensified tourism and real estate speculation, have contributed to an increase of housing prices and cost of living. The average rent per square meter in Barcelona increased by 138% between 2000 and 2019, having evolved from 6.0 euros per m² to 14.3 euros per m². This sharp increase in rental prices is also exacerbated by the limited effectiveness of the Barcelona's Right to Housing Act (Act 18/2007), which stipulates the objective of developing a minimum of 15% social housing within twenty years (Qüestions d'Habitatge 2018). This is far from the current amount of social housing, a mere 1% of the total housing stock.

The most painful manifestation of this situation is the high number of evictions that have occurred in the city, with approximately 75% of current evictions due to rent defaulting (Observatori DESC 2018; Observatori Metropolità de l'Habitatge de Barcelona 2018). While evictions are unevenly spread across the city—over 50% take place in the Sants-Montjuïc, Nou Barris and Ciutat Vella districts—the fear of eviction is widespread. This type of structural injustice is largely a result of the monopolization of housing financialization by investment funds such as Blackstone, a major private equity and asset management firm that, by buying thousands of homes in North America, Europe, Asia and Latin America, has become one of the world's largest landlords. It is denounced by the Observatori DESC, among other organizations, through a campaign under the hashtag #KillBlackstone. Overcrowded and substandard housing, improper subletting, squatting, makeshift settlements are just a few of the consequences of this situation (Observatori DESC 2018).

In this sense, despite the provisions of Royal Decree 27/2012 postponing mortgage foreclosures in certain cases, the increase in evictions in Catalonia led the Barcelona

City Council, the Illustrious College of Lawyers of Barcelona (ICAB) and the Illustrious College of Attorneys of the Barcelona Courts to sign Protocol 1696/2013. Defining situations of social risk, the Protocol encourages Catalan judicial departments to join forces, collaborate institutionally and streamline access to support for citizens affected by eviction processes, all in coordination with Social Services and municipal teams to minimize the risk of eviction (Olea Ferreras 2015).

In confronting the housing emergency, the progressive municipal government of Ada Colau, mayor since 2015, has promoted a series of measures for residents who have lost or are at imminent risk of losing their home, in addition to offering preventative rental mediation services and mortgage advice through the Housing Offices. One example is the creation of the Unit Against Residential Exclusion (UCER) in 2016, a unit that attempts to enforce citizen housing rights that has drawn up the city's first census of vacant dwellings and penalizes anti-social uses such as property harassment, vacant flats, and improper uses of officially protected or social housing (Barcelona City Council 2018b). Another example is the Loss of Housing and Employment Intervention (SIPHO) which provides information, accompaniment and legal advice to housing units affected by an eviction process.

Glories Park
Source: Alberto Bougleux, 2020





Poble Nou residential neighborhood
Source: Alberto Bougleux, 2020

New social or public housing provision

Likewise, alongside these anti-displacement measures, the Barcelona City Council is attempting to increase the public housing stock through the construction of new buildings and properties, but also betting on an alternative model: cohousing transfer-of-use (Barcelona City Council 2021b). The Barcelona City Council has created a cooperative housing database and launched public contests to allocate municipal plots for co-housing projects. Some examples of these municipal actions are the three cooperative housing projects known as Abril, La Balma and Llacuna 39 built in Poble Nou, as well as 20 officially protected houses and six other developments near Plaça de les Glòries. The scale of these projects is still, however, quite small and cannot yet provide a stable housing alternative for a significant number of people.

Controlling the negative impact of mass tourism

Ada Colau's municipal government filed a provisional moratorium on tourist accommodation licenses in 2015, which was later replaced by the Special Plan (PEUAT) in 2017 in an effort to alleviate some policies that may have negatively affected the tourism industry (Barcelona City Council 2021). Both policies led to the closure of more than 4,500 illegal tourist flats that could once again serve their social function as long-term tenant-occupied properties. However, while certain neighbourhoods have been classified as zones of necessary de-growth and residential stability, others face increased development and real estate pressure, such as the case of the area Provençals of Poble Nou. The recent relaxation in 2018 of the Terraces Ordinance that came into force in 2013 has also led to an increase in tourist pressure in several zones around the city, such as the Rambla del Poble Nou (Barcelona City Council 2021).

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Implications and future steps

The measures outlined here aim to achieve the provision of new social housing units, reduce land values, promote land regulation, expel speculative investment funds, and make way for socially responsible actors. But their effectiveness remains to be seen. To date, it has not been enough to ensure equity and prevent the displacement of Barcelona residents, particularly those of Poble Nou. Efforts both at the institutional and grassroots level have been made to subvert social segregation resulting from the city's commodification. The neighborhood movement has a wide range of proposals and demands that are expected to be met by the City Council at a time of such great instability, in which the uncertainty of the future makes the city a decisive stage for political dispute. Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis represents both a challenge and opportunity to address public and green space needs through the city and decrease the social vulnerability of many working-class residents. More than 200 organizations are urging the government to enact a Shock Plan through measures that include a moratorium on rent and evictions. Through participatory approaches and policies that prioritize housing stability amongst residents, touristic and predatory real estate practices can be controlled.

Changing storefronts of Poble Nou neighborhood.
Source: BCNUEJ, 2019



For more resources

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