

# SANT ANTONI

## Is the neighborhood compromising livability for trendiness?

**Summary** | When a neighborhood becomes trendy, is living there a gift or a nightmare? Sant Antoni is a relatively small neighborhood conveniently located in the Eixample district of Barcelona. The renovation of the market of Sant Antoni as well as the implementation of a Superblock has allowed a revitalization of the neighborhood that has benefited the quality of life and the social opportunities for the neighbors. However, this success has also come with processes of real estate speculation on housing and commercial premises, which compromises the ability of many residents to continue living in the neighborhood. While the streets around the market are filled with bars and restaurants with tourists and local visitors from elsewhere in the city (i.e. hipsters having a brunch or a vermouth) entire buildings are bought by real estate funds to make tourist apartments and many long-time residents are forced to leave the neighborhood because they cannot afford their rent. Neighborhood platforms such as "Fem Sant Antoni" have been denouncing this situation and developing campaigns informing residents about several topics that affect them such as tourist flats and the rights of tenants. They demand active participation in the urban projects of the neighborhood, and support city-wide initiatives such as the regulation of housing prices, the expansion of public housing and the repeal of tax incentives that promote real estate speculation.

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Figure 1. A protest in front of Sant Antoni market. Source: [Twitter of Fem Sant Antoni](#)

The Sant Antoni neighborhood has always been structured around its market. Originally, the market was located at the southern access of Barcelona's old fortress walls, a point of entry and exit where many trade activities took place (Ajuntament de Barcelona, n.d.). The architect Rovira i Trias was tasked with building the large iron structure, which was inaugurated in 1882 as part of the broader Pla Cerdà (Mercat de Sant Antoni, n.d.). The market and the stands that were built around it formed a popular commercial area that still functions today.

Sant Antoni is well-connected and centrally located in the Eixample district of Barcelona, surrounded by cultural venues, nightlife, and close to areas like the Old Town and the Montjuïc Park. With a population of 38,900 inhabitants and a density of 484 inhabitants per hectare, Sant Antoni has a density well above the Barcelona average (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2020) and few green spaces per inhabitant, with street trees serving as the main elements of urban green infrastructure. This situation is very similar to the rest of the Eixample, with an average of 2m<sup>2</sup> of green space per inhabitant. In comparison, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a minimum of 9m<sup>2</sup> of green space per inhabitant and an ideal ratio of 50 m<sup>2</sup>/inhabitant (Russo and Cirella, 2018). Furthermore, the entire Eixample presents high levels of air and noise pollution due to the density of motor vehicles. In response, in addition to the renovation of the market which began in 2007, the Barcelona City Council made a series of improvements to the adjacent streets as part of the *superblock* model. The interventions, which began in 2017, include the expansion of pedestrian areas with low-cost physical solutions such as potted trees and the provision of new street furniture and garden areas with trees and flowering shrubs (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2019).

These urban renewal processes, in tandem with growing touristification and gentrification in the city, have led to a rise in housing and retail prices as well as the emerging interest of international investment funds. The neighborhood attracts a population with a high educational and professional status, higher than the average of Barcelona (López-Gay et al., 2022). As a result, lower income residents are increasingly being displaced and forced out of the neighborhood. Those who grew up in the neighborhood have a hard time finding an affordable flat to emancipate themselves from their parents, and many storekeepers are forced to close their traditional shops due to increases in rent. Fem Sant Antoni, 2017) and changes in consumption patterns. These processes of gentrification not only contribute to direct displacement, but also endanger the social fabric and sense of community and belonging of the neighborhood. The area has transformed from a small and familiar neighborhood to a center of attraction for both local and foreign visitors.

According to a study from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (López-Gay et al., 2022), rents have risen from an average of 693 Euros per month in early 2014 to 986 Euros in 2019—an increase of 42.3% in just five years. The average rise in rents in Barcelona is slightly lower, at 40.1% over the same time period. The study also shows that more than half of the people who have recently moved to Sant Antoni are young adults between 25 and 39 years old, with university degrees and many of them born elsewhere in Europe or America. Meanwhile, the local population is leaving, as expressed by Joana Micó, a young local resident involved in the Feminist Assembly and other local organizations in an interview conducted in June 2021: "I would say that more than 50% of my friends my age, around 30 years old, who are middle class, have had to leave. And they are not poorly positioned people, they have proper salaries. (...) It is frustrating for young people to have to leave. Why do I have to leave my neighborhood? Why? I have my family and my everything here!"

In this context, organizations gathered around the community space "Calàbria 66" have denounced this situation and developed several campaigns and activities. One of these organizations is "Fem Sant Antoni", which was born around 2014 and since then has been organizing demonstrations, assemblies, exhibitions and informational material on a regular basis around the issues of speculation, tourism and abusive rents. They demand active participation in urban projects, price regulation, the expansion of public housing, stopping evictions and the repeal of tax incentives that promote real estate speculation (Fem Sant Antoni, n.d.). In 2017, they released the "Manual del Llogater" (Tenant Handbook), a handbook for renters in the neighborhood informing and offering support about their rights and leasing conditions. On their website they also provide information about the requirements of tourist apartments, how to report incidents, and how to report an illegal tourist apartment in your building. They also developed "El mapa de la vergonya" (The Map of Shame), a map with data from 2016 on the number and location of tourist flats, real estate agencies, hotels, and buildings owned by investment funds. Other close associations and assemblies that work on these topics in Barcelona include the "Assemblea de Barris pel Decreixement Turístic" (Neighborhoods' Assembly for Touristic Degrowth) and the "Sindicat de Llogaters" (Union of Tenants).

**Ens fan fora del barri!**  
**UNA ALTRA CIUTAT**  
**ÉS POSSIBLE**

*"Barcelona ha de fer un salt endavant per canviar les polítiques d'habitatge. D'altres ciutats han demostrat que és possible"*  
(Pilar Garcia-Almirall, Catedrática de l'ETSAB-UPEC)

**L'habitatge social és gairebé inexistent a Barcelona**  
Llogar social: habitatges amb preus per sota del mercat lliure sotmesos a cert control públic directe o indirecte

Ciutat	Llogar social (%)
Amsterdam	48%
Nova York	42%
Berlin	30%
Londres	23%
París	17%
Barcelona	2%

**Per una regulació més estricta dels allotjaments turístics**  
Pla Especial Urbanístic d'Allotjaments Turístics

**Abans...**

**...i després**

**Tanca el comerç de proximitat!**

**No som un espai per a l'especulació immobiliària!  
No som una zona d'oci! No som un eix gastronòmic!  
No som una parada del bus turístic!  
No som una concentració de pisos turístics!  
**Som un barri!****

[femsantantoni.wordpress.com](http://femsantantoni.wordpress.com)

[Fem Sant Antoni](#)

[@FemSantAntoni](#)

**FEM**  
**SANT**  
**ANTONI**

Figure 2. Figure from an exhibition organized by Fem Sant Antoni. [Source: Fem Sant Antoni](http://femsantantoni.wordpress.com)

In an attempt to regulate the proliferation of bars and touristic souvenir stores, preserve the commercial balance and avoid the "monoculture" of tourism, the City Council decreed in 2017 the suspension of licenses and building permits within twenty blocks surrounding the Sant Antoni market (Diari Ara, 2017), an action specified in the new "Pla d'Usos" (Land Use Plan) of Sant Antoni (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2018). As the District Councilor, Gerardo Pisarello, said: "We want the neighbors from Sant Antoni to enjoy the benefits of the reopening of the market and the *superblock*, in a way that does not change the essence of the original neighborhood."

The COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 lockdown highlighted the importance of public space and green areas at a time when it was not even possible to leave the municipality of Barcelona. The implementation of the *superblock*, as well as the renovation of the market have undoubtedly improved quality of life for residents of the neighborhood. However, there are conflicting tensions. Neighbors have gained new spaces and meeting points, but some storekeepers complain that the new configuration hinders loading and unloading and parking availability for their customers (El Periódico, 2021). The City Council recently released a new report on the economic recovery of the Sant Antoni district, which shows that consumption has returned to pre-pandemic numbers, while the rest of the city has not (Betevé, 2021). In addition, a survey carried out in stores around the *superblock* showed that half of the storekeepers felt the transformation of public space "had affected them positively and given them more visibility". However, it is not clear whether these metrics of economic recovery trickle down to neighborhood residents, especially those who do not own businesses in the area.

Although the residents of Sant Antoni have benefitted greatly from the remodeling of the market and the implementation of the *superblock* with new spaces for social interaction, this success has contributed to gentrification and tourism, compromising housing affordability for those with lower and middle incomes. Projects that aim to improve public space must take into account all residents and establish measures to curb real estate speculation that protect local businesses. This remains a challenge in Sant Antoni, where the *superblock* is already being used as a model for the future expansion of the "Superilla Barcelona" project in the Eixample (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2021). How conflicting interests are resolved going forward can serve as an example or a warning to other neighborhoods in Barcelona and help us to consider what model of the city and the neighborhood is best for all residents.

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## Links d'interès

Twitter Fem Sant Antoni @FemSantAntoni

Twitter Assemblea Feminista de Sant Antoni @FeministaSt

Web de Fem Sant Antoni <https://femsantantoni.wordpress.com>

Web Espai Calàbria 66 <https://calabria66.net/>

Web Sindicat de Llogaters <https://sindicatdellogateres.org/>

Web Assemblea de Barris pel Decreixement Turístic (ABDT) <https://assembleabarris.wordpress.com/>