



From “Ribera Plan” to “Diagonal Mar”, passing through 1992 “Vila Olímpica”. How urban renewal took place as urban regeneration in Poblenou district (Barcelona)

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ABSTRACT

The paper aimed at analyzing the Poblenou district evolution after the 1970s–1980s due to postindustrial development in Barcelona, especially its regeneration by some large urban projects such as Vila Olímpica (1986–1992) and Diagonal Mar district (1990–2004). As to address this analysis, the methodology used is the following. Starting from a desk research analysis on the Poblenou’s urban transformation process and a fieldwork by the Author, this study analyzes the different Poblenou’s process of spatial production by three key moments. These moments are materialization, emptying/dismantling, and regeneration of large industrial and railway properties understood as a “capital in land” strictly linked to real estate development.

This work demonstrated that the last 20th century decades growing tendency of neoliberal urbanism has been legitimized by public administrations so as to let private actors search for urban rent benefits despite belonging to different political contexts. Additionally, the research shows how Poblenou’s industrial urban environment has been manipulated as a tool which led to the global homogenization of the urban landscape, the destruction of the historical legacy, and the dramatic change of socio-economic structure. Regardless of the fact that the urban renewal project “Ribera Plan” did not take place in the 1970s, following the real-estate market purposes a similar intervention was developed twenty years later taking advantage of the 1992 Olympic Games.

«Strolling (from Glories following the Diagonal and the Waterfront), I have the perception that the Catalan Manchester is transforming in the Barcelonian New York. Where before there were horizontal factories of exposed brick walls, now there are numerous skyscrapers with predominantly glass and steel».¹

Bonadona Marçal, architect and photographer, *Poblenou’s hotels*, a look at the stars, local journal “El Poblenou”, July 2012, page 11.

1. Introduction

The paper aims to understand what happened in Barcelona’s Poblenou neighborhood based on the process of historical evolution of large industrial and railway properties. In fact, as a starting point, this study takes into consideration the “large property” as it expresses itself by developing an “urban rent”, and its condition of “capital in land”. This means that a “large property” does not act only as the support

making possible the location-development of a certain activity, such as industrial, railway, military, and market, but also as a “bargaining chip” to undertake other types of operations, such as the redevelopments needed by the capital accumulation process.

This work approached the comprehension of the evolution of Western European globalized city referring to the specific case of Poblenou’s historical evolution starting from its production-reproduction over the decades. This approach constitutes one of the most outstanding achievements of the paper in order to explain the “capitalist city” (Rossi, 2010). The city-making process has clearly an historical approach which helps to understand the way industrial and railway “large properties of urban land” have been used for the capitalist’s purpose over the time. The work focused on understanding the city, specifically Poblenou neighborhood, as a product whose historical making process also implies its dismantling, abandonment, and ruin.

The paper demonstrated both how “large properties of urban land”

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¹ Original version in Catalan language: «Fent un passeig (des de Glòries tot resseguint la Diagonal i el Front Marítim), tinc la percepció que el Manchester català s’està transformant en el Nova York barceloní. On abans hi havia fàbriques horitzontals de murs de maó vist, ara hi abunden gratacels on predomina el vidre i l’acer». Title of the article: *Hotels del Poblenou, una mirada cap a les estrelles*.