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Using the city and the applicability of utopian planning

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Luisa Fernanda Alcocer Rubio

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Professor Martin Zerlang (University of
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Abstract (EN)

More than half of the population of the world live in cities. This issue is a phenomenon that has – drastically – changed the way we understand „the urban“. This thesis analyses how, when reading a city-plan as a discourse of utopian character and observing the lived experience of a used city, we can understand the relationship between planning and liveability. A comparison was made between the urban plan of Barcelona and the built/used city. It is considering the broad extent of the topic and of the city itself, touching upon the concept of urban acupuncture to use a micro-scale project of recent development, the Barcelona Super-block. It being a city of careful urban ideologies, it is easy to track the utopian narrative already with Cerda's plan, and now with Rueda's idea of a self-sustainable „mini-environment“. Our results show a discrepancy between the lived city and the planned city. But also, a difference in utopian picturing from the pre-modernism to the post-modernist era.

Furthermore, with support from authors like de Certeau and Hinton, it can be drawn that planning should conserve a view on the future while looking at the historical and social realm. From an academic perspective, this study becomes a building-block within the fields of utopian and urban studies, as in practical philosophy. From a practical aspect, it emphasises the urge to be cautious when planing social environments (cities), especially when it comes to the growing contemporary problems such as social inequality and climate change.

Keywords: *utopias, applicability, Henry Lefebvre, super-blocks, phenomenology, ontology.*

Abstract (DE)

Mehr als die Hälfte der Weltbevölkerung lebt heute in Städten. Diese Tatsache ist ein Phänomen, das die Art und Weise, wie wir „das Städtische“ verstehen, drastisch verändert hat. Diese Arbeit analysiert, wie wir, wenn wir einen Stadtplan als Diskurs utopischen Charakters lesen und die gelebte Erfahrung einer lebenden Stadt beobachten, die Beziehung zwischen Planung und Lebensqualität verstehen können. Es wird ein Vergleich zwischen dem Stadtplan von Barcelona und der gebauten / genutzten Stadt durchgeführt. Es betrachtet das breite Ausmaß des Themas und der Stadt selbst und berührt das Konzept der städtischen Akupunktur, um ein Mikroprojekt der jüngsten Entwicklung, den Super-Block, zu verwenden. Da es sich um eine Stadt mit sorgfältigen städtischen Ideologien handelt, ist es einfach, die utopische Erzählung bereits mit Cerdas Plan und jetzt mit Ruedas Idee einer selbsttragenden „Mini-Umgebung“ zu verfolgen. Das Ergebnis zeigen eine Diskrepanz zwischen der gelebten und der geplanten Stadt, aber auch ein Unterschied in der utopischen Bildsprache von der Vormoderne zur Postmoderne.

Darüber hinaus kann mit Unterstützung von Autoren wie de Certeau und Hinton gefolgert werden, dass die Planung einen Blick auf die Zukunft bewahren sollte, während der historische und soziale Bereich betrachtet wird. Aus akademischer Sicht wird diese Studie wie in der praktischen Philosophie zu einem Baustein in den Bereichen Utopie und Stadtforschung. Aus praktischer Sicht wird der Drang betont bei der Planung sozialer Umgebungen (Städte) vorsichtig zu sein, insbesondere wenn es um die wachsenden aktuellen Probleme wie die soziale Ungleichheit und der Klimawandel geht.

Keywords: *Utopie, Anwendbarkeit, Henri Lefebvre, Super-blocks, Phänomenologie, Ontologie.*

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Introduction

More than half of the population of the world live in cities. This is a phenomenon that has – drastically – changed the way we understand "the urban" – especially during the last five to seven decades. Also, leading to a specific understanding of today's problems: climate change and social inequality.

Under the belief that space and context change the behaviour of people, it raises my interest on how planning can affect society and the way we interact with one another. While considering justice and liberty as core values of social cohesion and liveability, I would like to analyse the concept of utopian cities – and the need for humanity to build such conceptually.

The concept of "utopia" itself, already suggests that it is something not achievable; but, can we consider this practice as plausible in the sense that it functions as a tool to acknowledge what we aim to achieve when planning a city or when picturing a certain social order?

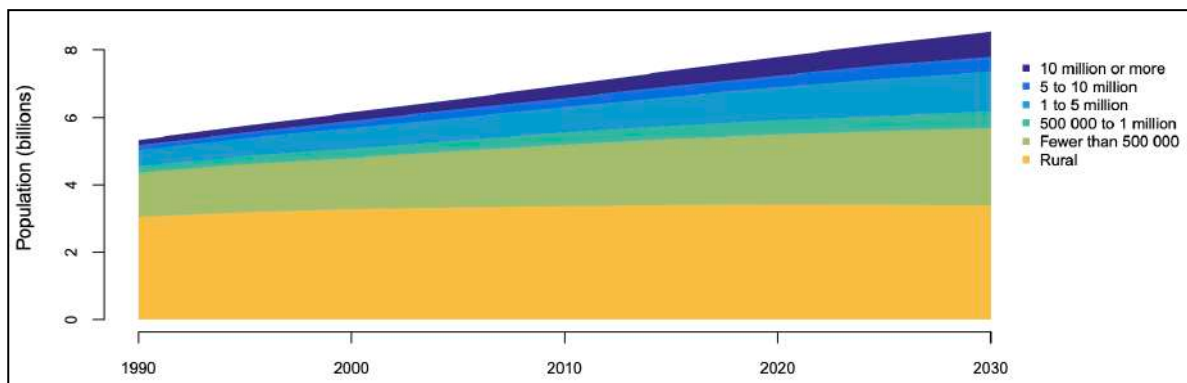
Since the greek, philosophers, have occupied themselves with the thoughts of "a perfect" society. Taking into account the constant seek of "a perfect" future, I would consider current imaginaries as the plausible and achieved "utopias" of today's world, e.g. Vienna as the most liveable city, among others. At the same time, moral and political thinkers have highlighted the constant change and dynamism of society and its dependability to time, space and current circumstances. It is not only how context shapes our way of perception but also how a certain milieu leads us to certain forms of performance.

Contemporary Challenges

There is a trackable urban growth in the last three decades. Fifty-five percent of the world population is living in urban areas. By the year 2030, around sixty percent will live in cities. The size of cities will increase, there will be more mega-cities – a mega-city is a city with over 10 thousand inhabitants – and more cities overall (see E1).

Moreover, there is a trackable shift from poverty downtown tendencies to the emergence of gentrification. Downtown areas became saturated with consumer opportunities. Hubs for businesses, students, touristic attractions and more. There is a shift of the economic base of cities to financial and businesses services as to consumer-leisure activities. Recomposition of central areas was never just about gentrification but about concerns of ownership, use of land and community functionality We have been brainwashed to think, look, act, work and consume in a

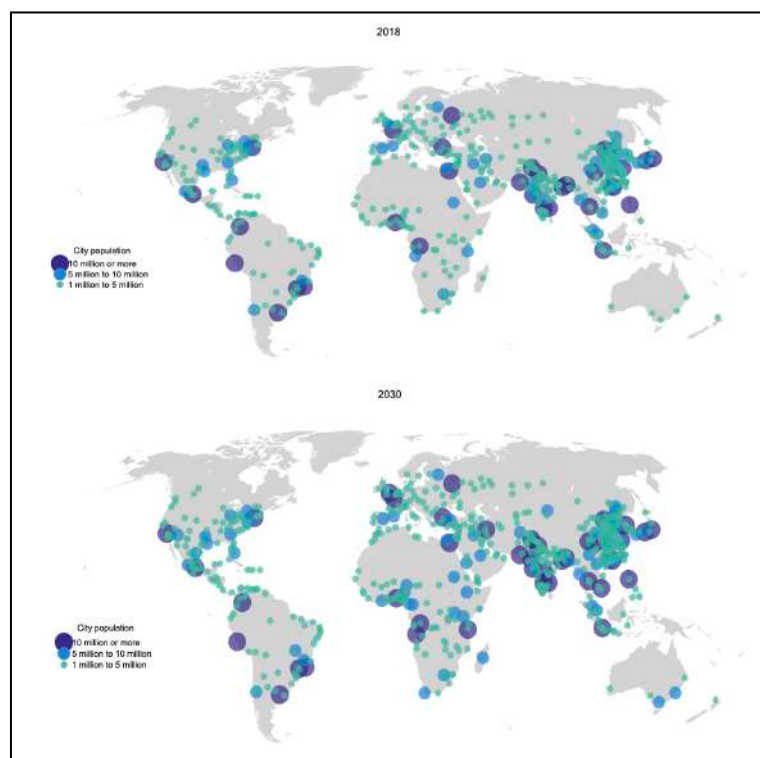
gentrification manner. Even in the way we study cities and we critique such projects "This seduction has dampened our analytical edge and our ability to propose alternatives" (Chatterton, P. 2010, p239).



E1 — World's population by size class of settlement (source: UN)

The idea that economy plays a key role is something we have to seek through interdependence and cooperation. The emergence of the self-managed squatter settlements are formed by those most marginalised and excluded from these built alternatives. The key of these initiatives can be really important to go against elites and counter-movements – policy makers, politicians and developers.

Marcuse (2009) says that we need to expose the problem, propose a solution and politicise it. It is impossible to tackle a problem in a world full of power relations but this power relations should be changed and to do so there is something that has to be done. Economical results in a city are not the only issue that humans are confronting, the urban realm is just a setting where most of the population live in today and cities are one of the main causes, but also of the main victims of the contemporary challenges. Ideally, there should be someone in charge of setting up a "just" urban world, solving problems of inequality, of pollution, of space, of rights.



E2 — Cities with 1 million inhabitants or more (source: UN)

As Marcuse (2009), other authors (Schwember, F., & Urabayen, J. 2018, Fainstein, S. 2010, Levitas, R. 2013, Pinder, D. 2015) agree that there is no need to improve the here and now – the here and now is the past, it is unchangeable. There is a need to think, research and act towards an idea of the city. A city that allows us to find solutions for a progressive future, a different city. And such city should be thought because we need to solve future challenges urgently and as soon as possible. And we have the advantage and disadvantage that the challenges of the future, as far as we know, are the same challenges of today: climate change, economic growth, un-sustainability and social justice.

There is a constant fight over a happy city – and not for the urbanisation process – that actually focuses on the well-being (Bookchin, M. 1996). Falling into discursive identities – e.g. Amsterdam as the most liberal city or into the potential negativity of utopianism can be avoided by focusing on concrete details and implementing this vision. When thinking of ideals, a general desirable future should be avoided, this might fall into superficial or into troublesome – i.e. oppressive characteristics of the present –. But this leads to a second problem, writes Cunningham (2010), unless the recommendations or solutions are radical "they will fail to project a genuine alternative to what critical urban theorists see as cities flawed at their very core, most prominently due to their implication in capitalistic structures" (Cunningham 2010, p269)

Problem Statement & Research Question

The matter to be treated in this thesis arose from three assumptions: first, that users are forgotten in the successful planning and carrying out of cities. Since the nineteenth century, and then again through modernism and the Bauhaus the city has been a canvas for aesthetically perfect and spatially organised plans. The idea of perfection became a trend. Notwithstanding, today, we can see many cities suffering from inequality, segregation and pollution; cities are the hubs and nucleus of the main challenges of the XXI century. Second, that these ideal cities or utopias are a result and mirror of the gaps and 'lacks' of a city. In other words, utopias are an ideal solution to our present, and it is an image or a model built from what we know from the past and what we want in the future. If this is so, then utopias of the 21st century reveal thoughts and ideal futures of social inequality and climate emergencies. Third, that the built environment affects the behaviour and performance of the users and therefore changes do not only affect the users of a city in a spatial form but also on how their lives unfold within a city.

Following this line of thought, he/she who plans a city or modifies a city should be aware of two things: that any pre-conception of a city has a utopian character because it is a possible ideal image of the future, and that a city is used by people whose lives seem affected with every change.

Problematising what was previously said, a utopia usually is considered as something not achievable or non-doable, but if all plans are somehow utopic and some more than others, how can we carry out any plan at all? Also, suppose the city as a built environment and a public realm is to be modified. Therefore, the planner is disregarding the right to the city that the citizen has, or he/she has to take these people into account, given that it is their city but most importantly, their lives.

The first research question, hence, is: Are utopias inevitable? Are they necessary? Are they feasible, applicable and achievable?... or synthesised: Are utopias something in 'the real world'?

On a more practical note, that at first may seem of different nature, there is a theory or a strategy to do urban changes through small-scale projects: tactical urbanism. However, tactical urbanism is still very broad. There is a sub-category of tactical urbanism that suggest a more specific plan of action: urban acupuncture. This form of urban interventions exists in theory and practice already for some decades. In the most recent years, Jamie Lerner (2016) has become one of the main actors developing research and projects of urban acupuncture, particularly in Brazil.

Furthermore, its methods presume to have successfully change environments in processes of place-making, as engaging the users to take action and make the changes themselves. Urban acupuncture means to impact whole cities by making small changes. As the name suggests it, it is to be conceived as the Chinese medicine with which it shares the name or in a different analogy, like a drop of water; a small change is to echo its effects to a larger area.

Developing a vague hypothesis that might sound somewhat paradoxical somewhat contradictory, I dare to consider the following:

All plans of urban development hold – on different levels – a utopian character. Since cities cannot be torn down and rebuilt utopias seem challenging to carry out spatially. Since cities are always changing in form and challenges, utopias might seem challenging to be preserved temporally speaking. Moreover, since cities are a result of human interaction, trade and living, utopias cannot be socially achieved either. Furthermore, suppose we think utopias as a goal for the future where this utopia is dynamic and cities are subjects – rather than objects. In that case, a utopia is achieved or can be achieved in the way that the direction of thought evolves all from the same idea, e.g. if our utopia from this present is x then our utopia in the future present is x_1 and not y . However, thinking of a utopia as such is thinking of a utopia as a process. Another sudden solution is to not only think of utopias as processes but to accept the idea that a utopia is not achievable, but to use this utopia as guidance. Similar concept, yet different cognition. If utopias are in that sense not achievable, what is the overall role of utopias and do they serve some other purpose than mere thought exercises?

Utopias could be seen as processes. In that sense, then a utopia can be built by steps or can even change directions on the way. Having accepted that: could a down-scaled utopia take place? Would this utopia be then achievable?

The second preliminary research question, therefore, reads: If one considers that utopias are future urban imaginaries (social), processes and guidance, could they be practically approached in small-scale projects – *micro-utopias*?

This hypothesis and previous assumptions allows to select a case study. Taking a plan that has not yet been finished. Carefully selecting the super-blocks of Barcelona planed by Salvador Rueda, the following is assumed:

The super-block works as a project of urban acupuncture and is at the same time a micro-utopia. The discourse should hold some utopian character if it resembles a solution to the current contemporary urban challenges. It takes into account the multi-dimensionality of cities, most importantly, the social aspect. Is the super-block utopian? Is it successful?

By accepting or denying this hypothesis we could rewrite the second and last research question: Could we then call a small-scaled utopia a successful approach for utopian applicability? Does it follow?

Methodology

For this research, the methodology picked is interpretative and not qualitative nor quantitative. It "is a research paradigm that is based on the assumption that social reality is not singular or objective, but is rather shaped by human experiences and social contexts, and is therefore best studied within it's socio-historic context by reconciling the subjective interpretations of it's... participants" (Bhattacharjee, A. 2012, p103).

The idea behind choosing an interpretative methodology over any other is because it is a sense-making process rather than a hypothesis testing process; the main aim of this research is to understand and build an argument based on the research questions. The research question leaves already behind the possibility to use a quantitative methodology since the conclusions drawn would not be reliable nor believable. The use of qualitative research could also have been an option to proceed; nonetheless, the coding approach can often be perceived "as an attempt to seek objectivity in a social phenomenon which is essentially subjective" (Bhattacharjee, A. 2012, p103)

Not to disregard the fact that I, the researcher, am trained in the field of humanities and soft social sciences, and therefore, the methodology of my choosing is appropriate to the research I can perform. Not to disregard the fact that I, the researcher, am trained in the field of humanities and soft social sciences, and therefore, the methodology of my choosing is appropriate to the research I can perform.

The methodology of my choosing was phenomenology. As mentioned before, trying to keep a holistic approach is essential. Secondly, the interpretative range that this method allows the researcher to have is necessary to answer the research question(s). From the premise of Husserl that, human experience is a source of knowledge, phenomenology will be used as a systematic reflection and analysis of the phenomenon creating judgements, perceptions and insights to appreciate and describe social action (Giorgi and Giorgi 2003). Nonetheless, some limitations in this respect happened without any control as a researcher – this will be touched upon in the fifth part of this work.

Complementary to the phenomenology, other methods were used in the research in order to balance information and to achieve a very thick description of what tries to answer the research questions. We are, thus, left with the following methodologies:

1. Phenomenology: as an interpretation and understanding of the lived experience. Focusing on values, principles, ideals and belonging.

2. Content Analysis: as an understanding and re-interpretation of the discourse and narratives surrounding the case study. Focusing on identity, reciprocity and rhetorics.

Phenomenology was meant to be field work, in place and during a series of experience, observation and conversation over three cycles. The second, will be done through a collection of mental maps from residents of the city of Barcelona and through a coding series of two cycles, inspired by the POLiFRAME approach.

The interpretative methodology assumes the phenomena as something that cannot be isolated from the social context, and the interpretation is grounded in the socio-historical context. The researcher is embedded in the social context and therefore is part of the data collection. It takes experience from the point of view from the researcher but also from the participants, which allows a thick description to be done. Language (verbal and non-verbal) are crucial to understanding social phenomena. At the same time, the methodology allows the researcher to make sense of this input while also making sense of the dynamic social process happening in a parallel form. It is a holistic understanding of the phenomena.

While these are some characteristics, mainly positive, the method also shows some limitations – for example, the limit of generalisability of the phenomena. Nevertheless, also limitations from the researcher's point of view, some skills and abilities have to be well trained for the researcher to be fully aware of their personal preconceptions and not let the bias interfere, but also for the researcher to be able to understand imageries, metaphors and other figures that might come along. Not to forget, the research requires an immersive involvement in order to capture the whole picture, while also the energy-consuming work that is a methodology that involves a process of moving back and forth in order to have "perfect" results.

The research will be done carefully and will aim to maintain credibility, confirmability, transferability and validity, throughout the process. Something that speaks in favour of this methodology is the capacity of linking abstract ideas with empirical complexities. It remains flexible to the specifics of the theory.

Throughout this thesis, the discussion focused on the role of utopias within urban social and spatial planning will be guided through an ontological, historical and practical approach.

Brief Contextualisation

Barcelona is the 16th largest city in Europe. It is the second-largest city in Spain, and it is the capital of the region of Catalonia. It is a coast city. Because of its location, it has been a hub of great importance during different reigns: Roman, Visigoth, Arab, Carolingian and that of the Spanish monarchy.

Its extension is of 10,140 hectares in a valley of around 17 thousand hectares. Approximately 64% of the land is wild, 29% is agricultural areas, 6,2% is urban, and the rest is of continental waters. Between 1956 and 2009, the urban city increased its previous area by 2,800 hectares, namely from 45% to 72% over the total municipal area.

The population was of 1.6 million in 2017 and has not grown much ever since (with positive annual growth of 0.2% for ten years already). The urban footprint is of about 33 thousand hectares and constitutes the most extensive urban conglomerate in its metropolitan region. The great metropolitan area is formed by 36 municipalities and hosts 3.2 million inhabitants. (Urban Resilience Hub, 2020).

The city has one of the highest population density in Europe: 15.992 people per square kilometre. From a city that had a population of around a quarter million in the mid-nineteenth century, the growth rate was quite fast, booming particularly after the 1950s.

The life expectancy of a resident is of 83.7 years. Most of the residents are of Spanish origins, and the predominant language is Catalan, although Spanish is considered as an official language. There is an immigration rate of 22 people per thousand residents: 40% of which usually are Spanish. The average foreign immigrant is Italian, Pakistani, Chinese or French.

National and Regional Economy

Around 9 million tourists are visiting the city annually. The average household in Barcelona hosts 2.33 people. According to the World Bank (WBG 2020), Spain is the fourteenth largest economy by GDP. It has a national net export and import of USD 408,295,800 and USD 317,178.000 respectively. Catalonia is one of the most developed regions of the country (economically). The region contributes to 14% of the national GDP, from which 35% of this output is produced in the metropolitan area of Barcelona. Around 90% of the economical production of the city comes from services (commerce, business, communication and tourism). (Urban Resilience Hub, 2020).

The median income in Barcelona is around USD 37k per household per year and USD 16k per individual. The poverty line is of USD 8k per consumption unit. From a peak of 23% in 2013, the rate of unemployment decreased progressively ever since.

Government and Administration

Barcelona is the capital of Catalonia. The president of Catalonia Carles Pigdemont (Catalan European Democratic Party) was suspended from office in 2017 by the Spanish government. Since then, Quim Torra (Republican Left of Catalonia and Together Catalonia).has been in charge.

The political cycle of the region is of 4 years. There is a mayor, a municipal council and a city commission. There are four deputy mayors tasked to manage as many policy areas: Economy, Employment, Digital City and International Relations; Social Rights; Citizen Rights, Culture, Participation and Transparency; and Ecology, Urban Planning and Mobility. "Moreover, in order to both foster a decentralised administration and greater citizens representation at the sub-local level, the city is further divided into ten districts; each of which is represented by its own District Council" (Urban Resilience Hub, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Right to the City

The concept of the right to the city was first introduced by Henri Lefebvre (1972), and later on echoed by authors like Mitchel (2003), Brenner (2009) and Harvey (2008). Chatterton (2010), who explores this concept through the idea of the urban impossible. He argues that social justice and equality, "and the dreams we have of a better world" (Chatterton, F. 2010), are a matter of exploring what seems impossible and making it real. The broad argument is that fighting for what is possible, known or easily achieved, will only give us limited purchase on social change. As a society, we need to search for radical changes in our city, and we are in absolute right to pursue such changes. Thus, the right to the city. However, what is precisely the right to the city?

To have the right to the city is usually underestimated in contemporary debates about development. It is to have the right to shape, intervene and participate in an always unfolding idea of the city. It is not about the material goods and equal ownership, but rather about the capacity and potential of participation, the first is, nevertheless crucial, too.

The challenge is to achieve direct democracy. For such, we must build momentums and participatory capacity. Insert some segment on urban impossibles need to all have the right to the city, to equally participate in (im)possible urban futures. Direct democracy might seem far away, but there are different ways to make it accessible and connected, like panels, assemblies, councils, participatory budgeting. Although participation can become a double-edged razor; if it is a bottom-up initiative, it might touch the borders of revolution and lay on a grey area of legality. On the other hand, a top-down democratic organisation can be fall into propaganda or even in controlling outcomes – control is not only achievable through corruption but also because of power relations. The general aim, though, is to rebalance the geometry of power in the developing city.

The right to the city is the right to participate in the future creation of the city. Although, up until now, the main critique is that urban policy and politics are directed through local strategic partnerships focusing only on a small range of stakeholders and elites to manage the affairs and to develop a future.

Dwellers hold a special responsibility because they impact the lives in and beyond cities. Politicising would be focused on maximising well-being, and the right goes individuals to determine their destiny (lives); fighting for dignity, justice and respect.

For a society to have full right to the city, it needs not only recognition from the councils and the policy-makers but also other social groups. The individual, despite their origin, socio-economical status, political preferences must hold the same capability – not capacity, but capability – to exercise his/her right. It is again the egg and the chicken dilemma, which comes first? The right to decide over one's own well-being/quality of life/everyday practices? Or is it through the well-being/quality of life/everyday practices that one achieve the right to the city?

It holds that the critical question to ask, when comparing societies and assessing them for their basic decency or justice is, "What is each person able to do and be? "In other words, the approach takes *each person as an end*, asking not just about the social average well-being but about the opportunities available to each person. It is *focused on choice or freedom*, holding that the crucial good societies should be promoting for their people is a set of opportunities [...] It thus commits itself to respect for people's powers of self-definition. The approach is resolutely *pluralist about value*: it holds that the capability achievements that are central for people are different in quality, [...] that they cannot [...] be reduced to a single numerical scale; [...] the approach is concerned *with entrenched social injustice and inequality*, especially capability features that are result of discrimination or marginalisation. It ascribes an *urgent task to government and public policy* — namely, to improve the quality of life for all people, as defined by their capabilities. (Nussbaum, M.2011, p18, as cited in Alcocer, L. 2018)

Whether it is an action coming from the policy-makers, from the elites, from the working class or the – very vaguely called – standard citizen, the right to the city should help create the parameters to pursue a good quality of life and a new environment that propitiates exercising this right as part of the daily routine. Now, going one step further. Being aware of this right holds a two-folded condition: one must be aware that the city from which one holds the right, whichever it may be, is not an object but is almost a being. It is through time and space; it has an identity; it has desires. Also, having the right to the city – as something fore-given or as a demand – automatically comes along with the responsibility of everyone living in the city, but also of the survival of the city, as a built space but also in thought.

City

To understand what the city is, it is crucial to be able to theoritise about the multifaceted, multidimensional *thing* that is the city. Ontologically and metaphysically, the city is a very complex entity. We can easily describe it though it is parts. However, we would miss the identity that goes far beyond – i.e., the identity that is before – the physical and social dimension that is already visible.

Henri Lefebvre (2014, p803), says that the complexity to understand a city goes as far as the question of 'what is the man?'. Do we have to understand the first in order to understand the second? Or is it vice-versa? There is an agreement (Mumford, Harvey, Lefebvre, Castell, Paz) that the city is not a thing. The city is process-like (Varzi, A. 2014), and by that, we mean that it is a process. But what is a process? Is it sufficient to describe a city as a process?

As it Varzi discusses, there is a tendency that brings academics to make analogies of cities with other process-likes like it is, among others, an ecosystem or an organism. Both analogies are not even close to the complexity in the matter. They (the analogies) also hold vast gaps in the formulation. A city cannot be like an ecosystem because it has a social dimension that is already a significant element that can be seen. On the other hand, it can also not be like an organism, because even if it is born, it feeds, it grows, it may reproduce, it does not die, e.g. Rome – with of course some exceptions, like Jane Jacobs (2002) mentions, e.g. Troy. However, like Heraclitus river, we can see a city, as that is in constant change, that cannot be seen as a whole, and that is never the same city. Alternatively, we can see it as a city always remaining from which we can only experience a spatiotemporal part from it in a specific spatiotemporal moment and place where our every-day life unfolds.

All we know is that a city, a town, the urban, is built by the man, is full of social relations, of social practices, of individual perceptions and individual experiences. A city, is a collection of things, people, symbols and language, all holding no meaning alone and an unknown meaning altogether. Nonetheless, it is in these sets, in this collections that 'the every-day — ours — is instituted' (Lefebvre, H. 2014, p803).

Materially we got somehow a very vague answer, but it is not a matter that must be discussed now. The city, is, however, materially not an already constituted entity; socially it is not either, nor temporally. It is a dynamic something; an only outcome of many possible outcomes. A city (urban space) is an indefinite number of sometimes complementary, conflicting and cohering in chaotic features of simultaneous presence. It is a potential locus for transformation into one of several alternative future spaces.

Nevertheless, as we fall in the looping description of the city as an agglomeration of buildings, institutions, activities and practices (i.e. the physical and the social), we also fall in the idea that a city is static. It is not, especially not in the modern world (Mumford 1937).

Further than finding a rigorous description of what the city is, the idea of it being a process and a four-dimensional object raises the question of if there is ownership of the city? Who decides what the city is? Who lives in the city? ...If the city is a dynamic process found in time and space, from which only a part of this is our every-day life as a singular thing; however, as a compounded spatiotemporality and as a collective it forms the city. Then, the city is not only one possible outcome, but it is also a memory of the past and a desire of the future. Thus, it has a sentimental character

that lays within the individual collective, and that is different from the built "*somethings*" and also from the social "*whatevers*" and is in its own *solid* against the progress but *liquid* enough to adapt.

The city of the future

A city is not an entity that is already constituted. It is a clear product of makings and re-makings of relations of power (Chatterton, P. 2010, Schwember, F. & Urabayan, J. 2018, da Cruz, N.F. 2019, Bianco, I. 2020). Cities are in constant change; they recast many multiple ways through the every-day encounter, opening then, new possibilities for radical changes (Lefebvre, H. 2014, Benjamin, W. 1999, Harvey, D. 2008, Cunningham, F. 2010). But, "before the city was planned, it was lived in" (Hinton, E. & Bremner, C. 2013, p74), i.e. before a city was a city, it was something else, and the city originated through the every-day practices that make a city a city. Furthermore, it is only after a given city arose, that the plan was possible.

Historically, there have been different forms of planning the city: different values and principles looked after. It is very recent that planning a city stopped being entirely physical – and even in some cases partly Physical –. Hinton, E. & Bremner, C. (2013), suggest that the city is no longer planned as an ideal shape but as a sentimental craft (p73). The practice, though, suggests that the ideal 'shape' is still a fundamental part of planning, even when it is in the form of craft; the ideal is still a matter being. It remains in the form of a shape, that might no longer be spatial, and that is not temporal nor a-temporal, but dynamic in time. The future city can no longer be depicted as a reproduction of 'utopias', "it can be crafted revealing signs of human activity, connections, and experiences, and it is these experiences that craft the public imaginary of the city." (Hinton, E. & Bremner, C. 2013, p74)

The good/just city

There are two philosophers/sociologists that have created ideal yet achievable conceptions of cities. On the one hand, we have the "good" city from John Friedmann (2000), on the other, the "just" city from Susan Fainstein (2010). If not they agree with at least something: the necessity to search for the common good. For Friedmann (2010), the lost of the seek for a common good makes it impossible to have a sense of local identity or even a political community. What to do to achieve this is independent of each context, it is just a general aim. On a personal note, this idea, is already utopic itself, but this shall be seen in the next fragment.

The "Insert Label" City

During the last decades, there has been a trend of new forms of imaginaries. These, work as tools. They have become up to a point, instrumental to the interventions of urban initiatives. These imaginaries become visions, identities, marketing, and further; they are strongly connected with the challenges that cities are confronted with: social inequality, climate change...

The perspective seems to be somewhere lost between the pursuit, the value and the recognition. We read titles similar to "Ljubljana is the green capital of Europe", "Copenhagen is the happiest city in the world", "Vienna is the most liveable city for eight year in a row", "Amsterdam is the most liberal city", and the list never ends. The trend gives labels, tags or categorisations to the cities, however, how much is a discourse, how much is an active fight to actually solve urban problems and how much is this tag is both: condemning the city to its eternal fulfilment, and just a *mascarade*.

Utopia

A utopia is a representation of that what should be. It is also a critique to that what is. (Horkheimer, M. 1978). Ernst Cassirer (1944), defends the idea that utopias have a permanent function to create space for the possible, against all contentment of the present that is. Herbert Marcuse (Marcuse, H. 1966) says that the absent should be present because most true resides in the absent. A utopia is a prototype of the 'not-yet'. The future (or the other), remains, substantially, unexpressed. The utopia of the twenty-first century is not the 'militant utopia'; it is not a demanded future made by and in the present. It is a will of a new vocabulary, an imaginary, a new strategy of action that could bring different and radical cities about. An absent, a not being, a 'not-yet' (Chatterton, P. 2010, p268). It seems to be like many authors agree that the new form of utopianism and utopian thinking is thinking of radical futures (Lefebvre, H. 2014). Notwithstanding, many authors criticise but also supporting utopianism come from the Marxist tradition of material historicism. Where utopias are on the one hand unthinkable but on the other the only way to achieve revolution.

Furthermore, in 1967, Marcuse states in *Das Ende der Utopia* that utopias are no more because we now have the space to build utopias. We have the material conditions and the technical knowledge to abandon the abstraction of utopias and actually carry them out, bringing the no-place to a there-place.

It seems to be like many authors agree that the new form of utopianism and utopian thinking comes in the form of radical possible future cities. The tools to build any city are there, but the urge to think, out of the box, it is something that since the

1960s has been more than explicit. Most members of the first school of Frankfurt (to mention some: Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno) and other Literary authors (e.g. Orwell) warned us of the authoritarian aspects of utopias and failed utopias, the dystopias. While these authors agreed on something, the outcome of a carried out utopia is a dystopia only because they impose order. These utopias are known in a non-temporal non-spatial non-social place, free from evil but also beyond reality, e.g. Utopia of Thomas More... . Such an ideal world cannot be carried out, nor would it be successful. However, we as a society cannot avoid thinking of utopias and these utopias open possibilities to new worlds and new futures and new understandings. Still, the more radical a vision is, the more vulnerable and unrealistic it becomes. Radicalness utopianism offers no realistic means of realisation. (Cunningham, F. 2010) Any thesis of utopianism falls victim to the charge of acquiescence to a status quo, where the identification of tasks is conditioned to already existing values, habits and institutions and the importance of this task is not itself challenged. "[W]ithout a vision of utopia there is no way to define that port to which we might want to sail" (Harvey, D. 2000, as cited in Chatterton, P. 2010, p268). There is a need to develop a wide political imaginary to intervene in the unfolding story. The urban tradition is weak of imagination, and there is a reluctance to use their work to dream the urban impossible and harvest that future today. "Prefiguration is key here, where the means actively shape ends; and in fact, means become the end" (Franks 2003 as cited in Chatterton, P. 2010, p236)

Utopia, the never ending story: Lefebvre

A city is a work in progress and a place of the possible. The high complexity, dynamism and ambiguity of urban spaces provide us with the bases for a possible future not determined by tradition or habit. Lefebvre projected an urban space free of capitalist impediments to people exercising a right to the fruits of city life and opportunities actively to participate in urban politics, planning and culture (Cunningham, F. 2010). The idea leads to relief and provides an alternative to the familiar Marxist ideas.

Lefebvre's approach is more of an intellectual construction of the possible, or better said, a reading of utopianism as a "transduction" (Cunningham, F. 2010). For Lefebvre, it is not only important to think of utopias as guidance but to avoid the classical utopias. He dislikes the idea that cities are perfectly planned, even those that are "not utopias". He argues that this brings richness in materiality but poverty of the everyday life. Says Lefebvre, that emancipation must occur at mundane levels affecting the way we walk, eat, have sex and engage in the feast of social coexistence as at the levels of production and ideology. (Mendieta, 2008).

Placing cities as a centre of analysis invites attention to the *loci* of life, work and politics rather than exclusively to historical periods and class relations. (Cunning-

ham, F. 2010). Utopias are ideologically infused, but they can also serve experimentally. Agreeing with Tafuri (Cunningham, F. 2010), Lefebvre thinks that utopias participate in a symbiotic way with aesthetics in expressing contemporary capitalistic ideologies; on the other hand, he thinks that utopias can participate and play a subversive role of proffering, it is a way to make possible a political action and to put in practice the possible impossible.

He attached to the disjuncture between the actual and the possible and how urban theory seeks to reappropriate possibilities embedded or repressed within current conditions. There is a need to have a historical understanding of conditions. To realise the possible form of the urban, we have to overcome the obstacles that currently make this impossible. The possible-impossible is a dialectical relationship of the real, the possible and the impossible. Any study that approaches the real must be guided by political opportunism, and any study that is too close to the impossible is "doomed" to failure (banal sense of utopia). (Pinder, D. 2015)

For Lefebvre, time is the most crucial category. Space is nothing but the writing of time in the world. Space should never be dissociated from an analysis of the production of time according to him. Harvey criticises Lefebvre for only attending to the temporal dimension and avoiding commitment of future visions (the spatial dimension) as an embrace of "agonistic romanticism of perpetually unfulfilled longing and desire" (Harvey, D. 2008 as cited in Cunningham, F. 2010). However, the idea of space infused by time assumes a general ontology where the present is seen as a complex implication: fusing past paths and future directions.

Utopia, the aesthetic experience: Benjamin

The concept of utopia in Benjamin suggests parallelism. It is a constellation of the manifestation of the same meaning and truth from (unexpectedly) different perspectives. (Ivancheva, M. 2006) It seems like the concept of utopia is, for Benjamin, beyond a mere critique or a mere depiction of what an ideal place and time would be. The allegorical and revolutionary forms of utopias that seem somewhat contradictory are for Benjamin features serving the same purpose (Ivancheva, M. 2006): to abolish the status quo of the existing social and world order.

A utopia corresponds to a time in history more than to a place. Correspondences are knowledge created by experience and by the human ability to produce and to perceive similarities of the most conceptual and abstract thinking.

Utopia is a moment or a thought that results from the constant dialectic of the new, the ageing and the old. It lays there in the "redemptive recollection of dream images of every past generation, and in the collection of material embodiments of these desires with every next generation" (Ivancheva, M. 2006, p98). The utopia lays between the experience and the desire. There, the arcades of Paris are the perfect

example. There is an embodiment of the utopian imaginaries of the bourgeois in the age of industry. The class is obliterated, the past is a memoir, and the desire embodies this utopia.

"These images are wishful fantasies, and in them the collective seeks both to preserve and to transfigure the inchoateness of the social product and the deficiencies in the social system of production. (...) In the dream in which, before the eyes of each epoch, that which is to follow appears in images, the latter appears wedded to elements of prehistory [Urgeschichte] (...)" (Benjamin, W. 2002, as cited in Ivancheva, M. 2006, p98)

The dialectical utopia of Benjamin does not need a synthesis. The utopia itself is the persistence of the myth, of desire. It is embedded in the endless repetition and inscribed in history. Unlike the phantasmagoria or the allegory, for Benjamin, a utopia does not need to take us to a different world.

Art and production are almost a product of commodity from the past and the future. It displays the immediacy and urgency in grotesque representations. Furthermore, this commodity is what makes the utopia a critical tool: art produces false consciousness. Moreover, to make people aware, you must recur to these utopian images as a standstill focal point. "Benjamin encourages a cautious and pedantic all-human project of collection and recollection [...] of reconstruction of the moments when history might have taken a different, alternative direction." (Ivancheva, M. 2006, p101)

The dialectics of awakening, interfaces of the past and present, of the dreamed and the awake, of the produced and desired. The arcades conflate the multitude of events that have taken place through time in the same places making the results and contents ambiguous. Also, it is the collective of lives of past people that are anonymous to the living dreamers. The flaneur is then led into a past that can be profound because it is not private, and it is not its own. A flaneur is an idle dreamer who plays the role of an everyday man. Space is conditioned by the past and the present in a common urban realm, but the anticipation of alternative futures also conditions it. There is a recognition – in the work of Benjamin – that calls for collective responsibility and action in the future-shaping; a utopia is a political tool. Politics overcome history; consequently, utopias overcome the conditioning of time and space.

Urban Imaginaries

The complexity of cities — the sets of social, spatial, and natural characteristics they withhold — is understood in terms of infrastructure and design, inhabitation and density, diversity, ecology, etcetera. The imaginary is generally on a second level over these definitions. However, imaginaries play an essential role in shaping cities.

Among the first theorists to look at imaginaries were Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin. The former examined the "mental life" of the modern metropolis city. The second occupied himself with the perception and sense of the urban *flâneur*. Both used imaginaries as an object of studying. Kevin Lynch, in *The image of the city*, published in the 1960s, was the first to explicitly examine the role of imaginaries and cognition in the shaping of the experience of cities (Lynch, K., 1960). Urban users have mental images of the city. They tend to perceive cities in a fragmented manner when cities are dynamic places, and the imaginary or the city itself is the product of many builders who are continually modifying the structure for reasons of their own. (Linder, C & Meissner, M. 2019)

A couple of decades after – the 1980s – Michel de Certeau, the french urban theorist criticised Lynch's approach. Top-down visions of the city are a huge misunderstanding of everyday urban practices because they exclude a relevant range of urban activities and sensations. Therefore, the panorama is wrongly conceived and provide little knowledge of the actual urban life. The panorama then becomes a 'concept city' or a 'fiction of knowledge' (de Certeau, M. 1988 as mentioned in Linder, C & Meissner, M. 2019) On something that de Certeau and Lefebvre could agree that the city cannot be considered as just a thing in itself, but as a city being perceived and being lived by its users. Or as Lefebvre would put it „space, is socially produced“ (Lefebvre, H. 1974 as mentioned in Linder, C & Meissner, M. 2019)

On something that de Certeau and Lefebvre could agree that the city cannot be considered as just a thing in itself, but as a city being perceived and being lived by its users. Alternatively, as Lefebvre would put it "space, is socially produced" (Lefebvre, H. 1974, as mentioned in Linder, C & Meissner, M. 2019). Urban imaginaries do not escape the social power structures, and this could be an imperative topic to take on further discussion, yet it will not be touched upon further.

Going back to the labelled city, urban imaginaries play a defining role in the shaping of urban space. The imaginaries bring together different significants. It helps give the city an identity and vice-versa. As relevant as it is to take into account the point of view of the users, it is also an ethical matter to decide how to change it. Again, the power structure, but moreover, the following questions arise: of who owns the city? Who shapes the city? Furthermore, for which end?

Imaginaries are intrinsically political: "they shape and are shaped by socio-spatial relationships of inclusion and exclusion, empathy and apathy, solidarity and segregation, as well as many others. How do socio-spatial power relations produce particular urban imaginaries, and how do these imaginaries, at the same time, reproduce those relations?" (Linder, C & Meissner, M. 2019, p9) Too, what role can urban imaginaries hold in order to *reconfigure* the socio-spatial dynamics of the urban realm?

Crafting an imaginary

To imagine the city as the sum of lived experiences (i.e. the imaginary) it has to be mapped in a plan. Yet the city will always precede the plan. This plan should be constantly repaired, reworked and revised because it is an abstraction. This action is similar to that of a craftsman. The image must, therefore, be crafted. While the future city can no longer be depicted in reproductions of static perfections, it will always be reproduced in images, "involving a sense of 'the hand' and revealing intimate, meaningful, tactile, haptic, everyday experiences. This is the future role for the planner — to consider the plan as image and the city as imaginary, both in varying states of repair and (mis)representation." (Hinton, E. & Bremner, C. 2013, p.74)

Tactical Urbanism

Tactical urbanism is known as informal interventions in the urban fabric. These interventions can be both cultural and physical. "*Merriam-Webster's* defines *tactical* as "of or relating to small-scale actions serving a larger purpose" or "adroit in planning or manoeuvring to accomplish a purpose."" (Lydon, M. & Garcia, A. 2015, p1) There are many ways of implementing tactical urbanism that all share a similar *modus operandi*, aims and objectives. Tactical urbanism tends to be grassroots and bottom-up. The aim is to enhance the urban lived experience by implementing strategies of improvement in a low-scale form.

Anti-authoritarian, temporary, low cost, quick to instal, spontaneous, informal, participatory and community-driven are some of the main characteristics of this form of intervening in the urban public realm. The projects are usually – but not always – initiated by emerging architects and the creative minds outside of their professional boundaries (Courage, C. 2013). Tactical urbanism seems to be a general term that describes different kinds of interventions, those of different scales, those of temporary exhibition, those relating to informal actions, those that function as tests, those that reclaim abandoned spaces; "its use has also been extended to very specific fields of urbanism, such as the one of traffic engineering." (Birdsall 2015 as cited in Silva, P. 2016, p1044)

The idea that tactical urbanism is bottom-up is under discussion. They do not involve the whole community but only a particular group. Most actions are politicised almost right away, and in some cases, the actions come from the planning institutions, especially after the crisis of 2008 (Mould, 2014; Silva, P. 2016). "Tactical urbanism involves a broader field of action of citizens in a context where public institutions are less responsive to people's aims" (Silva, P. 2016, p1044). It is common to

Comparison Items	Various Types of Urban Renewal		
	Large-Scale Urban Renewal	Small-Scale Urban Renewal	Urban Acupuncture
Aim of Development	<i>Achieve mostly financial profit</i>	<i>Improve the environment and living conditions</i>	<i>Solve different urban problems (social, environmental, etc.)</i>
Director of Development	<i>Government and developers</i>	<i>Government and residents</i>	<i>Government, developers, and local community</i>
Development Method	<i>Mostly to demolish and reconstruct all at one time</i>	<i>Achieve goal in stages progressively</i>	<i>The accumulative effect, step by step</i>
Funding	<i>One-time investment from government or developers</i>	<i>From government and residents' funds</i>	<i>Various/unlimited channels</i>
Strategy: Planning and design	<i>From top to bottom</i>	<i>From top to bottom</i>	<i>From top to bottom</i>
Strategy: Construction	<i>From top to bottom</i>	<i>From bottom to top</i>	<i>From bottom to top</i>
The difficulty of Strategy Application	<i>Simple</i>	<i>Flexible</i>	<i>Flexible</i>
Level of Urban Development	<i>One-time improvement</i>	<i>Step-by-step improvement</i>	<i>Step-by-step improvement</i>
Preserving Local style and Historical Context	<i>The small level of preservation with a large level of demolition</i>	<i>A small level of preservation with a small level of demolition</i>	<i>A balanced level of preservation</i>
Economic Land Use Benefit	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Sustainability and Ongoing Development	<i>Low</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>High</i>

A1 — Types of urban interference (source: Nassar, U. 2021)

find projects of tactical urbanism in developing countries in Latin America, or the United States and Australia.

The tendency of tactical urbanism initiatives, says Silva (2016), is that they are not made to last. One of the main aims of interventions to be temporary is because it may serve as a transitional stage, or they want to start a debate on the use of the space. It may be a cyclical temporality, too. The nature of the space allows the people to experience and experiment to new forms of using the space, it allows people to get used to this new forms, but it also allows changes in time and space. The idea is to transform a place that already exists and to have results almost immediately. It focuses on a very selected local level and tries to find change and process.

Urban Acupuncture

The Brazilian urbanist and architect, Jamie Lerner (Ellin, N. 2007; Lerner, J. 2004), insists on thinking the city as a living organism. One must understand the urban environment as something dynamic and accumulative. Repeating from previous segments, the urban is a complex process of the always-changing. The success of the

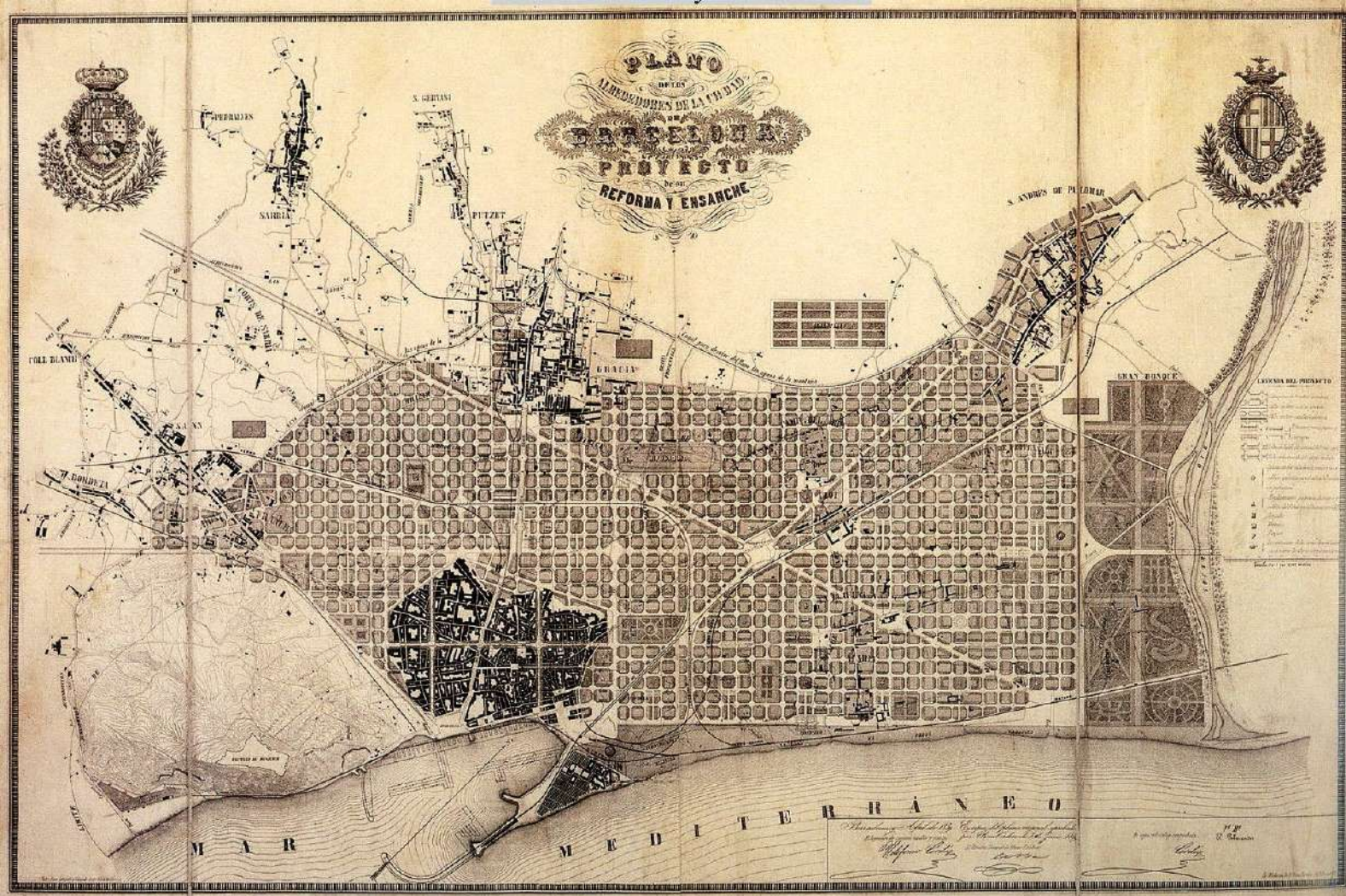
city does not lay in achieving a goal, but rather in the understanding and interaction of the city to solve the problems through and with the inhabitants (Jacobs, J. 2002).

If the city is like an organism – which it is not, even if it assimilates one –, then urban acupuncture is the surgery performed on it. The first time the concept was formulated, it was by an urbanist from Barcelona, Manuel de Solà-Morales (Nassar, U. 2021). He was trying to achieve a maximal effect on urban development projects in the shortest period of time; and so achieve the revitalisation of Barcelona in the 1980s (Degen, M. & Garcia, M. 2012; Marzi, M. & Ancona, N. 2004). Urban acupuncture aims to "impact every potential space in the city" (Nassar, U. 2021). There are multiple forms to apply urban acupuncture; it can even be through art; hence, the name 'the true art of our urban context' (Lerner, J. 2016).

Different to large scale urban strategies, urban acupuncture is localised and in small scale (For a more defined comparison, **see A1**). "Because this approach should be influenced by the local inhabitants, it must be raised from the smallest scale urban city development" (Marzi, M. & Ancona, N. 2004; Nassar, U. 2021).

To bet towards the most successful strategy and outcome in urban acupuncture, the catalyst must be most effective – this means, related to ecological, economic and social factors (Nassar, U. 2021) –, the more mixed-use the area is the better, and the most inter-connected the place is the better.

"Like the human body, each place in a city has certain linkages to other places. Space most frequently linked with other spots is the most suitable spot for the needle of urban acupuncture. With this ability, like stem cells in a human body, urban acupuncture would improve the whole structure of the city (Apostolou, 2015). Urban acupuncture theory has a more effective impact when applied to human-centred open spaces, where the spaces are more walkable, safe, accessible, and sociable. Thus, it is better to choose this approach for small, leftover, neglected spaces in the urban fabric, not for well-designed, large open spaces or parks. [...] [T]he concept of human-oriented spaces can be categorised as follows: Spatial aspects that relate to spatial forms of space. Socio-spatial aspects, which involve the relation between users and open space." (Nassar, U. 2021, p4)



3A — Eixample, Ildefons Cerdà 1859. (source: Museu d'Historia de la Ciutat, Barcelona.)

Historical Framework

After the Spanish Succession War ended in 1714, Philip V punished and suppressed any future of the city of Barcelona because the city had backed the Habsburgs rather than the Bourbons. Many of the institutions of the city were abolished, and a fortress citadel was built to keep the city under vigilance. Two centuries later the city had a growing population and had several outbreaks of cholera epidemics, riots, dirty water and miserable living conditions. (Roberts, D. 2019) In 1854, the Spanish government permitted to take down the medieval wall. It took twelve years to tear it apart completely. However, a competition was promoted to plan the expansion or the inauguration of a *new* Barcelona.

Eixample, Ildefons Cerdà

The urban plan of Barcelona has been used as an inspiration model already for decades around the world. Ildefons Cerdà produced this plan, previews to its creation,

the author did a methodological study and a diagnosis of the living conditions of the population in the social structure of the "old" Barcelona (Pallares-Barbera, M. et al., 2011, p124). He proposed a strategical positioning of schools, markets, hospitals and other public services in order to meet the educational, health and most basic needs of the population.

The young urbanist, born on the outskirts of Barcelona, studied engineering in Madrid. He then decided to go travelling around Europe where, so is said, he took ideas of industrial innovation, of technological tools and means of communication. All these inputs can be read into his concepts of urban planning. After his return to Barcelona, his main aim was to understand the social order and its embeddedness in urban development. He wanted to know how movement, communication and technology could be the new basis for the new city, for the city of the future.

To develop his plan, Cerdà made an exhaustive diagnosis of the urban dynamics that Cerdà pulled through and the statistics of the living conditions of the working class. He analysed the professions of the population, the functions of buildings. However, he also pointed out the lack of schools, physicians, teachers and hospitals, and he drew a connection between this physical lacks to the high mortality rates and children exploitation happening in everyday life. His "social philosophy" focused on his "urbanisation idea" (Cerdà, I. 1849). He created a theory about the scientific and modern organisation of urban form (Pallares-Barbera, M. et al., 2011, p125). Railroads, streetlights, telegraph, sewers, all of these were included in his model – the new technology of the epoch.

The foundation of a new city

For Cerdà, it was essential to talk about his plan, not as 'the expansion of Barcelona', but rather 'a foundation for a new city'. While the debate of whether it is or not the same city is ontologically interesting, it is irrelevant for this segment.

Barcelona today is well known for its grid plane view. Cerdà used regularity as the main feature. He thought of a built environment formed by an indefinite number of blocks, creating an unlimited grid of geometrical perpendicular intersections. Similar to other cities, the epidemics of the time forced planners to make less dense cities, and for him, it was imperative to achieve "optimal hygienic density".

After producing his theory on scientific urbanisation, he thought that the possibility of considerable improvement in the conditions of urban life (life quality) would involve solving two questions (Soria & Puig 1991):

1. How building new roads, sanitary infrastructure and municipal equipment could be finance
2. How housing prices could be adjusted to different wages.

His first draft of the *Memoria del Ante Proyecto del Ensanche de Barcelona* was presented, along with a map and an analysis of the working class, in 1861. According to his rigorous methods, the living standards optimal for a person where six cubic meters per person and room, and 40 square meters per person 'within towns' (in housing). He referred to atmospheric air for a correct breathe and other terms of the kind. In his analysis, life quality was a science, and it was possible to calculate the space necessary. Nowadays, such a plan would look 'silly'.

To determine the width of the blocks, Cerdà calculated the number of square meters per person, the number of inhabitants per house and the width of streets, getting 113.3 meters as a result. The following formula was used for which "without an explanatory interpretation, Cerdà took the values of the variables to be $2b = 20$ metres, $f = 20$ metres, $d = 20$ metres, $v = 43$ and $p = 40$, obtaining 113.3 metres, the current side length of the block." (Pallares-Barbera, M. et al., 2011, p125).

$$X = \frac{2pv - 2bd}{d} \pm \sqrt{\frac{4pv}{d^2} (pvf - 2bdf - b^2d - df^2)}$$

x = length of the side of the block;
 p = number of square metres
 per person;
 v = number of inhabitants per house;

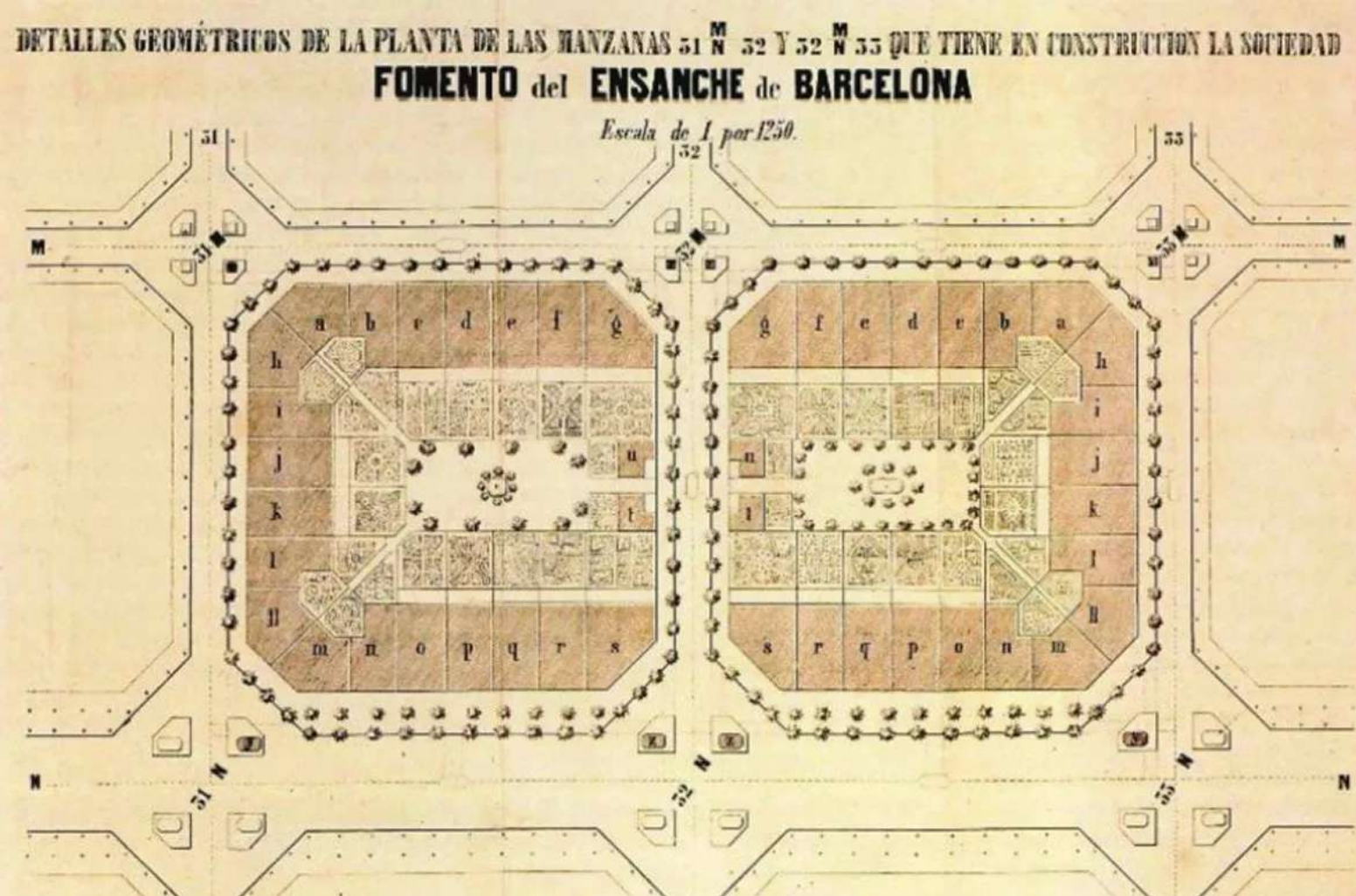
b = width of the street;
 d = height of the facade; and
 f = depth of the building site.

He then proposed incorporating an additional 1,969 hectares to the medieval core (at that time of only 192 hectares) by implementing the grid between the old city and the peripheral villages. "The map's legend contained 33 schools, three hospitals located on the edge of the city for hygienic conditions, eight parks, 10 markets and 12 administrative buildings" (Pallares-Barbera, M. et al., 2011, p126).

Once his plan was approved, it was changed by the city council almost immediately. Investment from the Real-estate developers snowballed as they could even triple their investments in only four years.

The original *Manzana*

The original plan consisted of one thousand blocks with streets of 20 to 30 meters wide and the 113.3 meters length of each block. Similar to a green city, the grid had parallel buildings on each block with an occupation of 40% of the block. In comparison, the other 60% was supposed to have yards, green spaces, pedestrian paths in-

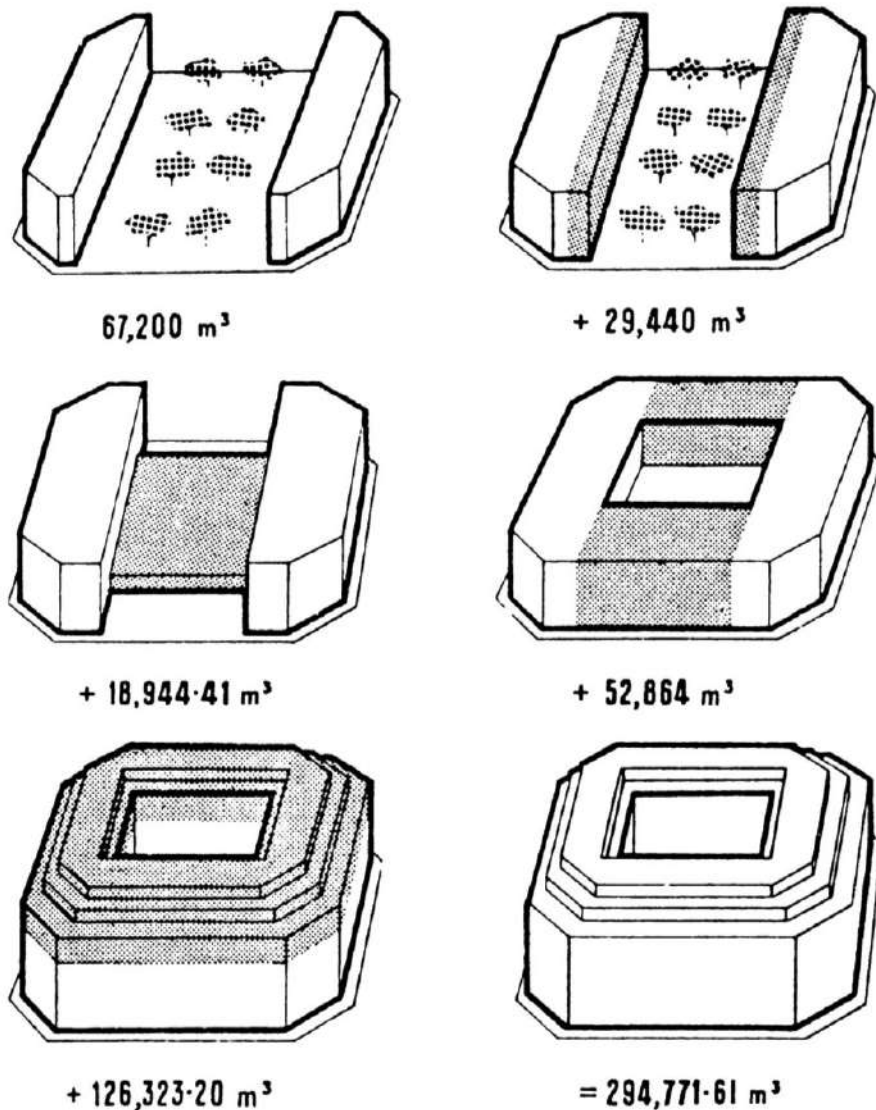


3B two block plan 1863 (source: Wikipedia)

terconnecting the inner open spaces, independent from the street network. Moreover, the corner of each block cut at forty-five degrees to create small squares between the octagonal blocks.

The plan was modified almost after approval. The first thing that changed was the green alleys formed by the squares, an allowance of 100% more construction area was approved, and therefore only open space of 20% remained as an inner-patio. Then the width of the streets was reduced to only 20 meters. "The explicit concern with special housing facilities for workers as means of achieving a more egalitarian city was completely abandoned [...] and the former regular distribution of parks and public facilities was not made obligatory" (Busquets Grau et al. 1992). In 1958, the volume of the block reached 294,771 cubic meters, while on Cerdà's bylaws it should not exceed the 67,200 cubic meters (see 3c)(Pallares-Barbera, M. et al., 2011, p126)

Cerdà rigorously calculated how many hectares would the population of the city (around a quarter of a million) to settle in the new foundation. The plan had to be spatially located between the old city and the seven municipalities located on the limits of the Barcelona Valley. However, by the 1920s, 920 blocks were already partially built, and the municipalities had expanded and met with the grid. In the 1950s, 1.201 blocks had been developed, and the population was almost five times larger than a century earlier.



3C The infilling of Cerdà's Block from 1859 to 1972 (source: Vox)

A tool for urban planning

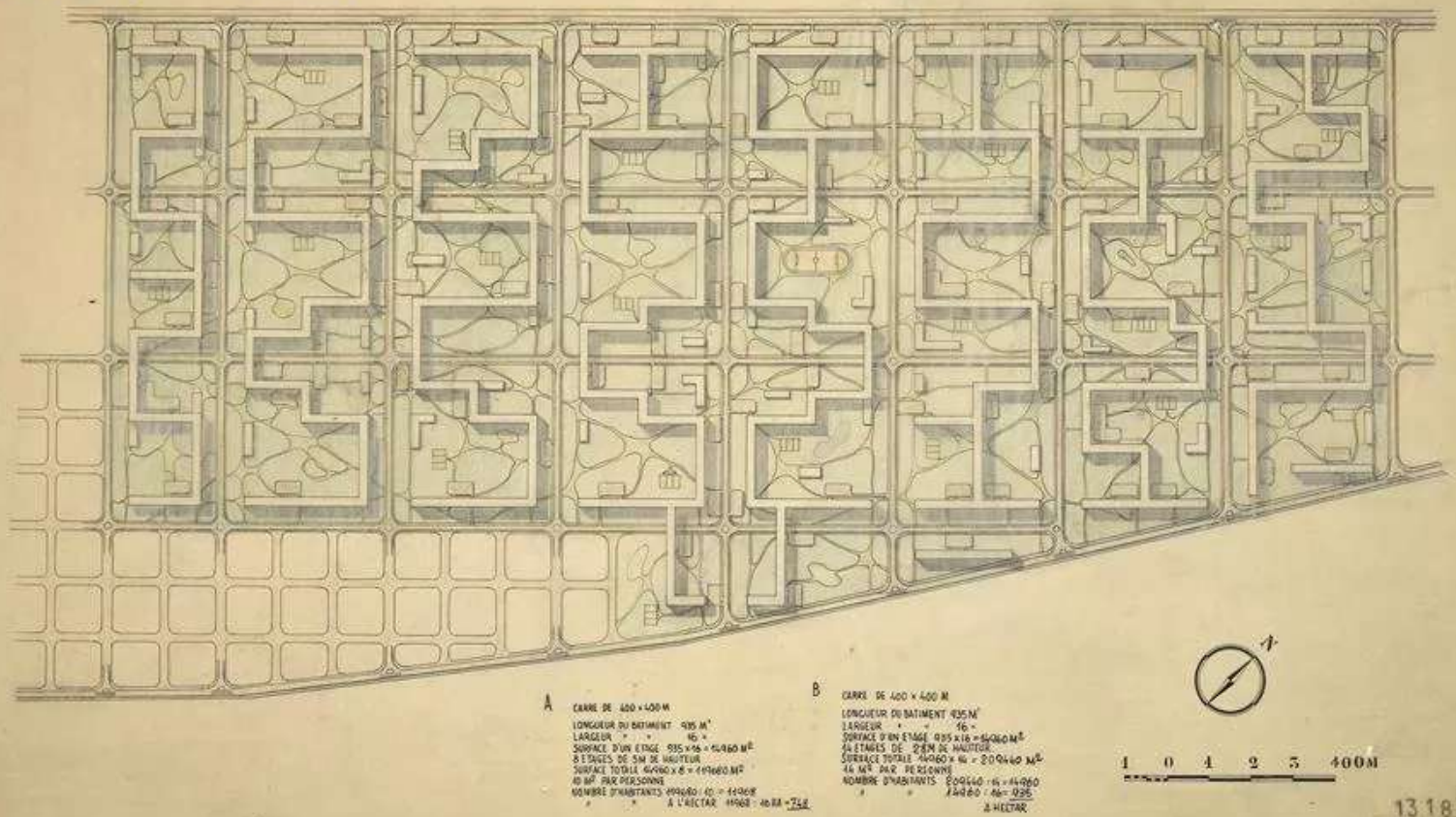
One of the main things that concerned Cerdà when he planned the foundation of Barcelona was the poor urban conditions and the relation that these had with the mortality rate. He attributed the lack of hygienic means to the ignorance and greed in planning. A bad-plan would automatically lead to bad quality of life and thus to a lower mortality rate. At this point, bad quality of life consisted of poor services (housing and food) and on the lack of minimum health standards. He focused on solving these problems first. He insisted on the schools and markets to be at a reasonable distance for everyone. He strategically positioned the three hospitals at the edges of the city for sanitary purposes, and he planned the low density blocks in order to give green spaces and airflow to a city that fell into regular epidemics every 20 years.

The distribution of markets and health, education and social services give a sense of Cerdà's idea of social equality. The city, or better said, the plan, was for Cerdà, 'the tool' that fix these differences and improve the living conditions of various social classes living in precarious conditions. This new form of measuring service provision and planning through it became a new perception of a modern way of living – and planning.



3D — Infrastructure (source: Pallares-Barbera, M. et al., 2011)

A study in 2011 focused on understanding the optimality and efficiency that the location of facilities had considering Cerdà himself never explained these suggestions. The study aimed to understand the connection between these and the improvement of the social wellbeing of the population. Through a model, they carried out two services out of four (hospitals and markets; leaving education and public social institutions behind). The study was based on the original plan out, leaving the old city out of the study and considering "a density of 250 inhabitants per hectare and 40 square meters per person" (Pallares-Barbera, M. et al., 2011, p131). The results show that the citizens of the city would not have to commute longer than 30 minutes to get to the nearest hospital or 24 minutes to get to the nearest market.



3E — The residential district of the Macià Plan. (source: Vox)

The Macià Plan, Le Corbusier

In 1888, the Universal Exhibition was hosted in the capital of Catalonia. The population of the city was of around half a million. The event was meant to bring urban upgrades to the city. Sewage, water system and other amenities that a growing and ageing city would need. Modernism and modernist architects participated in generating new ideas and structures that should be built in the city.

More than 2 million visitors arrived for the Exhibition and Barcelona started to gain its reputation as a "premier European city". The time of Antoni Gaudí's work dates back to the transitioning decades from the 19th to the 20th century. By 1929, the city had grown encompassing six settlements around it. The International Exhibition was hosted that year and improvements were made to the city: replacement of gas to electricity, public lavatories, and more.

The Spanish monarchy fell in 1931. That decade, the Macià Plan was being conceived. In 1939, Franco's dictatorship started. The Macià Plan was never implemented.

The modernist utopia

In the 1930s, Le Corbusier, together with a group of architects called the GCATSPAC (Catalan Group of Technical Architects for the Solution of Problems of Contemporary Architecture), planned a thorough transformation to the city. Barcelona should be re-cognised as political and cultural capital.

Being a modernist project, it paid attention to hygiene, green spaces, and remain somewhat humanitarian. It was conceived to try to avoid a revolution of the working class. At the same time, it imposed a rigid order in the city, an artificial order. There was meant to be a residential area, one for industry, one for civic activities and one are for leisure. Everything was big-scaled, monuments, roads, scrapers: a rational city, a modern city.

The plan was built to regularise the Old City, there where the working class was living. The sanitisation of the Old City included both the Gothic and Raval areas. "This new layout was designed to allow greater and more fluid movement of goods through the area, as well as giving the neighbourhood a fresh sense of order. The new Raval would leave behind the turbulent times of barricade building, protests and proletarian uprising, and make way for easier policing and the supervised use of public space" (Howley, C. 2016).

The plan proposed by Le Corbusier would displace and relocate the residents of the Raval to multi-story blocks built in the Bauhaus style in the neighbourhood of Sant Andreu. The Raval and Gothic would then be flattened and then rebuilt with one storey, uniform housing arranged in a grid and to be inhabited once finished. Demolishing the Old City would mean getting rid of all historical and symbolic spaces of the city. Having major roads and uniform housing meant redefining the character of the area entirely. Nevertheless, because of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the plan was never materialised, and the revolution was never avoided. (Howley, C. 2016).

Post Franco: governance & market

Spain was in-between an authoritarian government regime. One of the characteristics of Franquism is the centralisation approach to development, governance, innovation, communication and more. Centralisation meant that Barcelona was no longer an independent city nor the capital of an "independent "region (Catalunya) but all choices and decisions where made in the Spanish capital, Madrid.

After this regime, Spain quickly catch-up to other European countries in the race of neoliberalism, already in the 70s, while it became a hit far into the 90s (Blanco 2019). Regaining democracy meant a boom of urban neoliberalism in the country. In

Barcelona, many groups formed illegally during the regime were now helping these movements succeed. It was a new trend.

The trends were basically: privatisation, turistification and profit; ideas imported from Western Europe and cross-Atlantic, and being implemented. Garcia (2015) identifies two traditions on how we read a city: The first focusing on urban development, individual and collective creativity; offering a possibility to innovative responses to social and economic needs. The second is as a machine of economic production and consumption where an individual is a crucial engine for city branding. Barcelona was carried away by a tactic where city branding was equal to quality and growth, and this led to a substantial rupture when the city was saturated with consumption. The inevitable growth and expansion of the city that at first helped it be identified as a well-known global-city later became a burden. They led to the alienation of the citizens and of the city itself from global recognition.

In 2008 (Blanco, 2020), Spain was among the most affected countries after the economic crisis. This crisis represented for many, the failure of neoliberalism. The decade that followed led to an abrupt political shift in the major Spanish cities: Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Zaragoza. This drift became visible in 2011, where the two parties leading so far lost their support throughout the country. Some ideas of re-centralisation came back to Spain, in the case of Catalonia, this meant the possible independence of the area and a continuance of the already ongoing progressive tradition in the region: a strong civil society born already during the Franco regime, e.g. international and local trade union, active grassroots, neighbourhood committees, among others.

After these two waves of strong political policies (Franco & neoliberalism), Catalonia/Barcelona had the chance to re-imagine a city/region as they wanted to and to carry these ideas out. As a participant of a global trend, the region wanted to have a "social rights" approach on how to handle the situation in governance and spatial planning.

As a response, the government of Catalonia drifted towards a radical left with sentiments of independence and conservatism of the already built status quo on an individual level (citizens and behaviour) but also internationally (trades and city image).

The model of Barcelona (urban and economic) was well received internationally. On a regional level and from the new government it was highly criticised because of the corrupt alliances among the elites and the governments in play. The plan was given less value because of the privatisation and commodification of the public services resulted in the decline of the public sector and into an unaware emptiness of the public agoras encouraging citizen participation. The city was a product of an indefinite and unlimited growth of tourism and consumption that could not be stopped. (Blanco 2019)

Historically the local and municipal governments of Barcelona did not work together, and now they work as an "ecosystem" (Blanco 2019). Dependant on the flexibility and participation of the citizens and the public policies, it is still an attempt to incorporate different stakeholders into the realisation of projects. Though, this is hard when brought to a subnational level.

Cities and urban governments are facing rapid changes and are struggling to adapt to the different challenges of today. Among this challenges, says Rode (2019), the participation of citizens on institutional capacities is one of the most substantial challenges. It represents an always growing uncertainty on how to handle topics of controversy. A second struggle is to adapt this international trend on a national level.

How can institutions and governments represent a whole city and its inhabitants in a clean and transparent form? It is a constant "game" of interpretation; a game that lays not only on language but also on behaviour and imaginary too.

The tendency towards local community initiatives is pretty high in Barcelona (it is a tradition that originated as "subsuelo ") (Blanco, 2019). The limitations of the government on different scales and subsections is a big issue. The government of Barcelona is struggling with pressure from the Spanish Government, from the Catalonia Region and from an international and local out-/input of ideas that are becoming harder and harder to handle. There is a need to adjust the capacity to adapt policies and policymaking to the steadily changing polis. Adjustment of budgets, adapting to translational (global) and cultural (local and unique) practices.

A case study: La Superilla

The Barcelona Super-blocks

In spatial terms, the Super-block is a set of basic roads forming the 'intervía' (a polygon or inner area). Within, this 'intervía' contains several blocks of the current city. It works like any other urban object; it has an interior component, as it does an exterior component. The first, the 'intervía' is open for pedestrians (primarily residents) and closed for vehicles (outsiders and traffic). The exterior forms this 'basic road' network, creating a periphery of approximately 400 meters for use by passenger vehicles and heavy transportation. As it can be seen on the image to the side, this model was 'created' to fit the city of Barcelona (that does not exclude the idea to be used somewhere else) and to fit the grid-like pattern that the city has since Cerda's interference in the urban landscape of the city. **INSERT FOTO.**

The model restructures the typical transit network. They "provide solutions to the main problems of urban mobility and improve both the availability and quality of the public space for pedestrian traffic" (Agencia de Ecología Urbana de Barcelona [BCNECO], 2012). Pedestrians have the preference above motorised vehicles; and the inner streets are reserved for "residential traffic, services, emergency vehicles and loading/unloading vehicles under" (BCNECO, 2012) exceptional circumstances.

It is a plan that has a holistic approach to problem-solving. It unites urban planning at a city scale with mobility, housing and market issues on a more local level. One of its aims is to return the public space to the citizen. "The importance of the citizen, or the simple pedestrian, gives meaning to the revolutionary structure of the Super-block: each grid section has universal accessibility, there is increased safety due to a 10 km/hr speed limit, and there is the potential to increase the habitability and comfort of citizens in public spaces" (BCNECO, 2012). It is essential to highlight that the Super-blocks improve the urbanity significantly, while it also reduces the environmental impact of long-distance travelling, especially by cars. There is also no need for significant restructuring to plan urban elements, like urban parks, for example. Visitors and residents will have a better quality of living while being in the city, social cohesion is enhanced, and the economic activities are meant to increase. This model is "an essential tool for mobility, capable of improving the lives of people in cities of any type." (BCNECO, 2012)

Goals

There are eight distinguishable promises of the Super-blocks. Although they are mostly formulated as goals, the little rigidity that the project has is enough to understand that goal and plan are tightly bound. The first is to improve sustainable urban mobility by accepting the restructuring and the new creation of mobility networks. The car should, by then be no longer attractive. At the same time, people will prefer to use public transportation. Safety on the roads, for pedestrians, will also be achieved, encouraging people to use the bike or move by foot. Second, to revitalise streets and public spaces by giving space and "freedom" for the creation of new (shared) places of leisure and exchange. It will improve the vitality of the area and even encourage the development of local economies.

By achieving a grid of Super-blocks, green alleys can be created, gardens and parks, too. The third "goal", to preserve biodiversity within the city; the natural ecosystem will be boosted and recovered. The fourth is to encourage social cohesion and collaboration. Through the encouragement of networking events, workshops and meetings, new types of partnerships could arise (at an individual level as well as at an organisations level). Then the fifth is to introduce participation and new models of governance. Different actors should be included in the processes of decision making and of pulling changes through. There is the aim to listen top-down to the needs of the people and thus, making bottom-up changes.

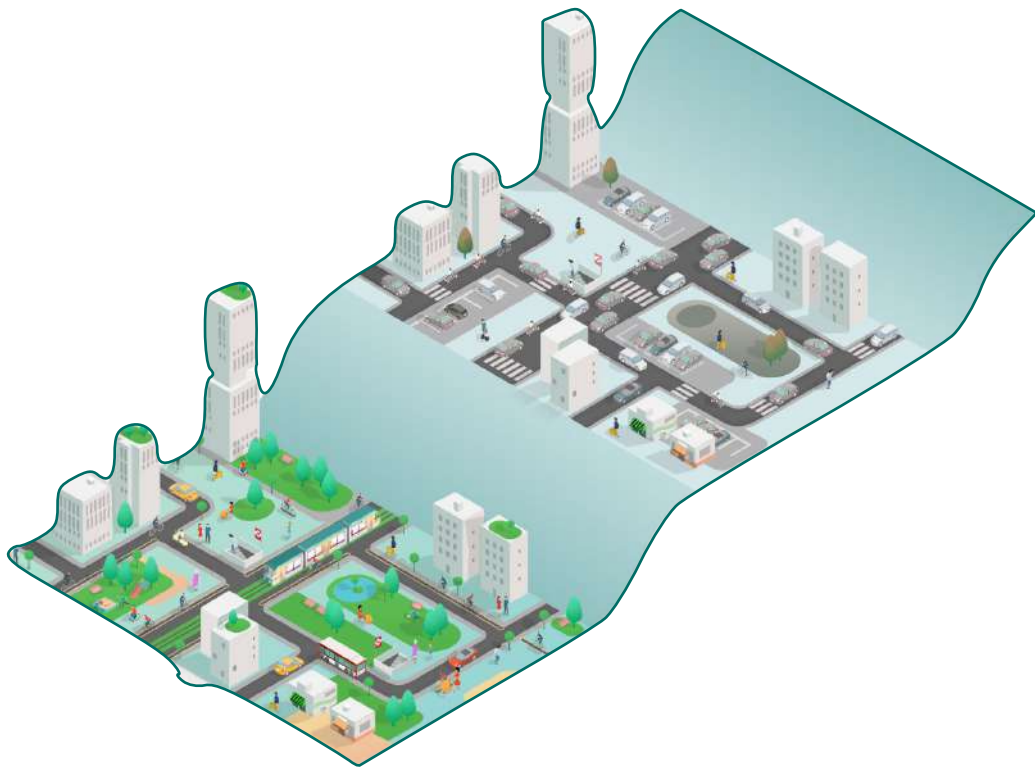
To promote sustainable energy production and consumption is the sixth. It is directly related to promoting the use of renewable energy, to not waste rain- and greywater, to build smartly, and related. The seventh is to reduce noise, air pollution and carbon footprints; by changing the mobility network that does not only improve mobility but also reduces emissions and reduce sound, augmenting the life quality. Eighth, to adopt flexible solutions, which are the adapting possibilities of the blocks (e.g.) to allow cars temporarily and then to return to their natural state.

Parallelism to the six goals of Barcelona six goals

On the website of the city hall of Barcelona, there are seven goals –and four principles–towards "the city of your dreams" (Adjuntament de Barcelona, 2020). Together with a comparative illustration (see 4A) there is a question on the website, it reads:

"SPOT THE DIFFERENCES: Between the city we have now, where private and motorised mobility takes priority, and a city focused on pedestrians with more green spaces, fewer cars and motorcycles and more public transport. Which do you prefer?" (Adjuntament de Barcelona, 2020)

The seven goals go more or less as follows: to have transportation that does not pollute in noise nor with gases. To have a connecting network of mobility. To impulse



4A "the city of our dreams" (source: Adjuntament de Barcelona)

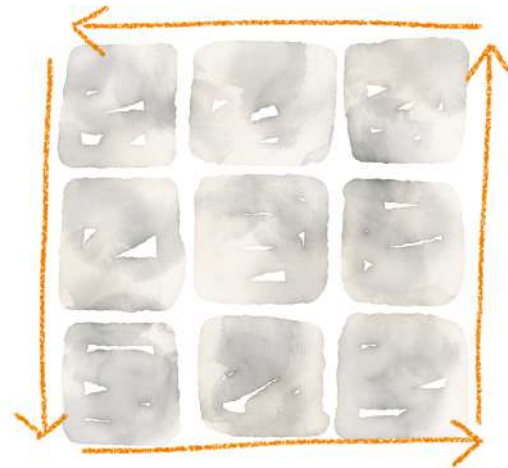
cycling mobility. To have a greener city, and therefore healthier. To have an efficient underground transportation network but also on the ground level. To have more people on the streets. To achieve public spaces of quality, allowing play, sport and walk. These seven steps or seven goals are bound with the seek of safety, sustainability, fairness and efficiency.

It is not of much in-depth analysis to see the overlapping and parallelism of the Super-block project with the aims of the city and the goals of mobility. The four principles tackle directly the challenges cities handle today: inequality, violence, climate change and information management.

It seems like the goals of the city and of Rueda (when planing the Super-block) are acute to the tendencies: we need smart cities, socially-oriented, sustainable and safe. The city hall also has determined six aims for the Super-blocks independent to those that Rueda has purposed but equally relevant: more sustainable mobility, revitalisation of public spaces, promotion of biodiversity and urban green, promotion of urban social fabric and social cohesion, promoting self-sufficiency in the use of resources, and integration of government processes. "The idea is that these Super-blocks would become distinct communities, neighborhoods within neighbourhoods, with shared governance and common resources – the urban equivalent of a micro grid, if you will" (Roberts, D. 2017)

Mobility

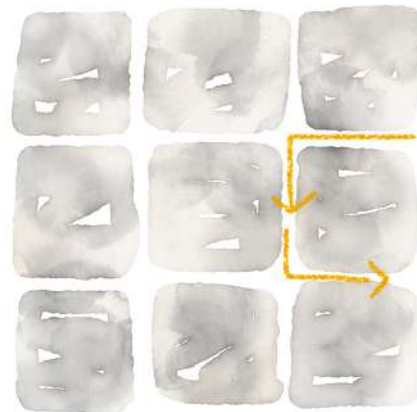
Only very local traffic is to be allowed in the super-blocks. Normal traffic is only permitted on a perimeter basis (see 4B)– i.e. between the Super-blocks. Within the Super-block, there is a speed limit of 10mph, and these are made in a one-way loop so that no street works as a drive-through road. (see 4C, 4D & 4E).



4B Heavy transportation

Public Space

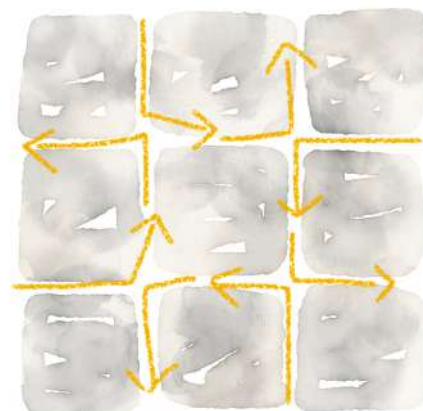
The idea of closing the streets is to recover the use of this space for the residents of the areas. The assumption is that once the streets are closed, people will start developing their own public space. Although this was tested on pilot Super-blocks, and some adjustments have to be done, the public space is produced almost immediately. The creation of more Super-blocks leads to the possibility of connecting public space from one core to the other and even to implement "green alleys" running throughout the city. (see 4G)



4C Local traffic

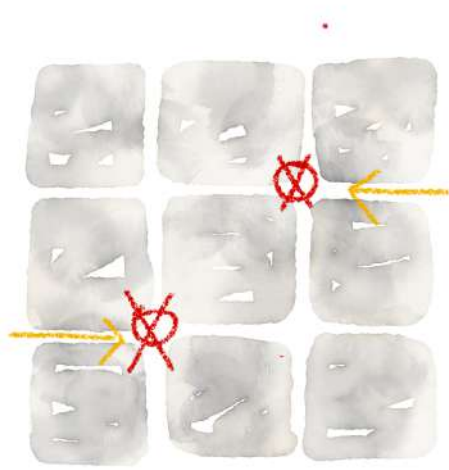
‘...the presence and making of insurgent public space serves as a barometer of the democratic well-being and inclusiveness of our present society’ (Courage, C. 2013)

Because of its clear grid, the city of Barcelona is perfect to "test" the Super-blocks approach (see 4F). It could be the first metropolitan city to reduce traffic drastically and to regain a significant percentage of space for the use of it and the "life in-between".



4D Loop system

"A city starts to be a city when you have public space" (Rueda)



4E No-crossing

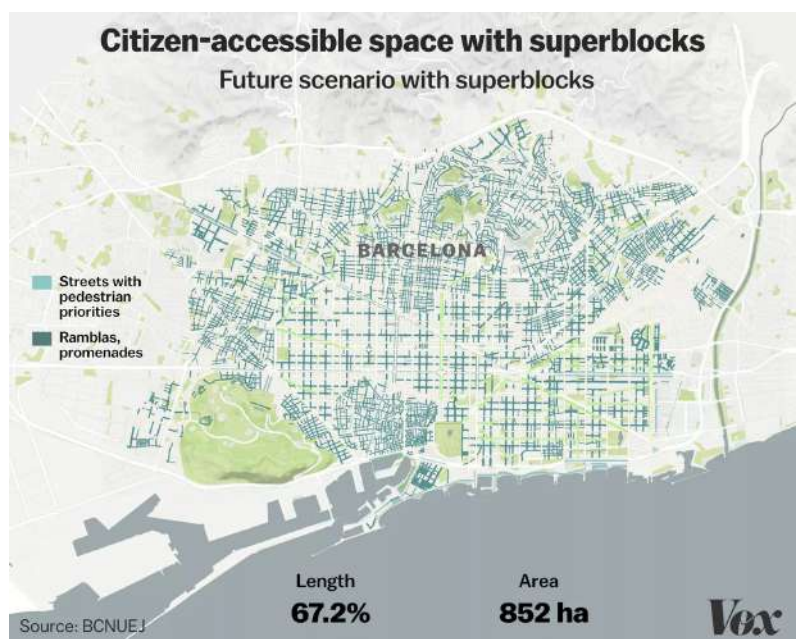
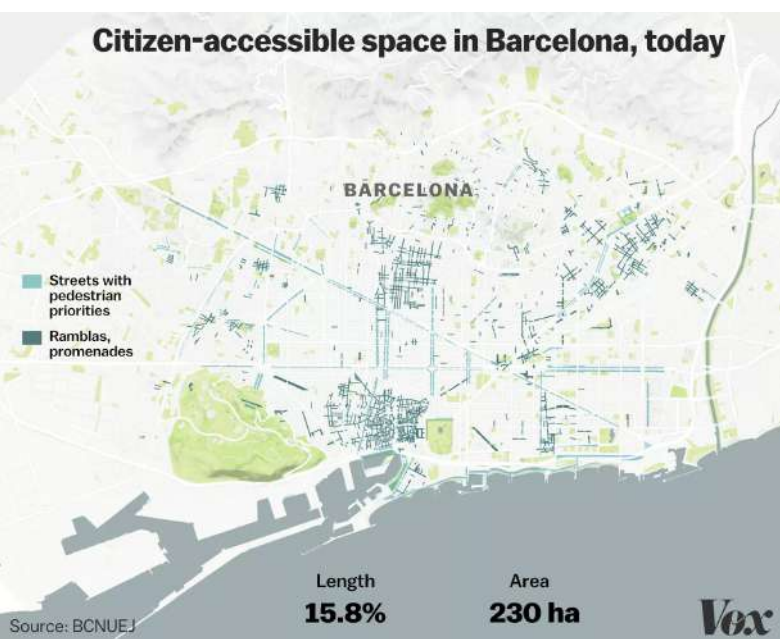
Stakeholders

The Super-block plan is being supervised and implemented by the Municipality of Barcelona in close collaboration with the Urban Ecology Agency (from Salvador Rueda).

The project came together through various steps. There was a round of consultation with experts and citizens. The organisation of workshops and meetings happened in multiple districts. There was a group decision to select the different representative stakeholders that would "play" a role in each pilot Super-block.

The first year, all proposals for inviting different stakeholders were collected. Then, the following year, decisions were taken about who would implement what and where, and how it would be done. Following this, an evaluation process started, and indicators to measure the impact of the actions taken in the course of the building was designed (POCACITO 2017).

The Urban Ecology Agency and the Municipality of Barcelona are the main actors driving the development of the Super-blocks. There is a list of 5 different types of secondary stakeholders, and two groups who influence the development of the overall project but mostly indirectly for each specific Super-block. A more detailed description of the role of each is described on the next page.



4F Public Space Today vs Future (source: Vox)

120 = 23 ha.
potential intersections

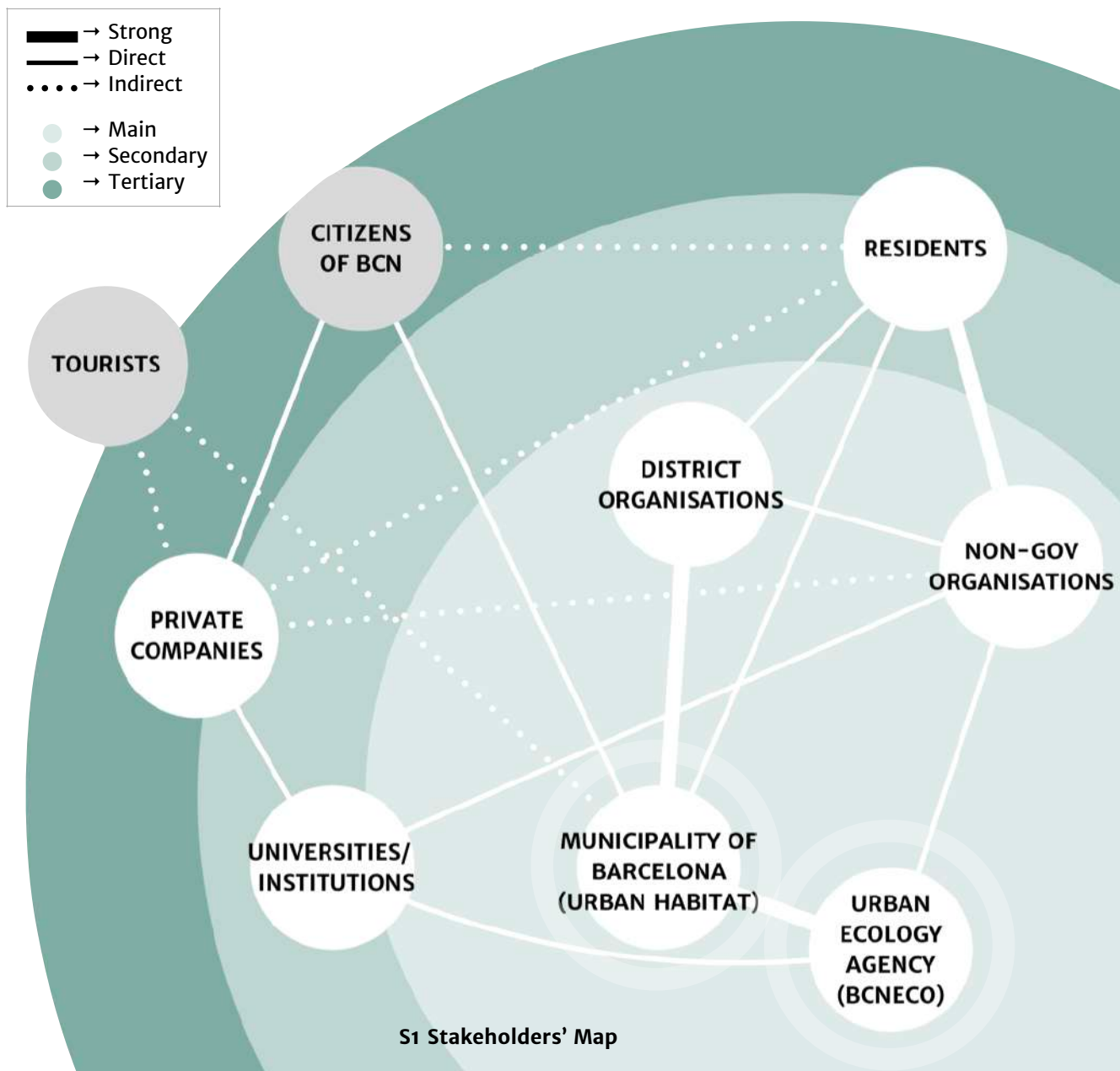


4G Potentiality of the project (source: Ajuntament de Barcelona)

- *Residents of the neighbourhood:* this group does not have a direct say on what can be or cannot be modified. Nevertheless, the project itself acknowledges the residents as main actors since they participate in deciding what possibilities there are to accommodate the area and also by voting for proposed changes. They live the project, and they are, therefore, the main actor in determining the success of this project.
- *District organisations:* being almost subordinate to the municipality, the district organisations work as a direct observer of the local necessities and progress. They have direct contact with both the municipality and the residents, while they work closely together with the non-governmental organisations.
- *Non-governmental organisations:* selected in the second round of decision, these organisations are in charge of collecting data, proposing new projects and implementing them. They work together with the residents, while they have the material and preparation to try new things and innovate. These organisations can be both non-profit and agencies.
- *Private companies:* either for investing or funding, private companies play an essential role in the development of the Super-blocks. They do

not decide "whether or not". They also do not have a saying on policy-making. Nonetheless, the role of private companies is vital for actual development and different results. Focusing on tourism, consumption, popularity and other economic and social factors, this stakeholder is as essential as the others.

- *Universities and Institutions:* professors and academics and consultants make data analysis and constant research in order to produce information about the progress or development of the project. While this field/theoretical research can be done independently, it is usually under a partnership with the different organisations and companies, not to mention with the council.
- *Citizens of Barcelona & Tourists:* They are indirectly actors of the project. The changes in the environment and traffic affect them directly, while their voice and actions are not directly affecting the decision-making process.



S1 Stakeholders' Map

Pilot Programme

The five pilots Super-blocks took place from 2014 until 2018, these were located in five different neighbourhoods: Les Corts, Plaça de Les Glories, Sant Martí, Eixample and Hostafrancs. According to a report written in 2016 by the European Post-Carbon Cities of Tomorrow (POCACITO 2017), each project was implemented in collaboration with the residents, with some organisations and especially with the city council.

Some meetings took place and were held at different project levels. The primary purpose of the meetings was to involve citizens to participate directly in envisioning the next steps, and to contribute with decision-making and action-taking. Each Super-block followed this procedure, but the outcomes were different in each neighbourhood attributed by the city council to distinctive differences, e.g. dynamic economic activity, higher density or less educated inhabitants (POCACITO 2017).

The project is still on its making – currently on an initial stage. There were already some observable results back in 2016, Les Corts Super-block seemed to be the most developed and most "successful", with the most considerable progress. The main reason is because of citizen participation. The implementation of 11 new Super-blocks is already happening.

An experiment: Poblenou

The first Super-block was the one in El Poblenou. The changes were made from one day to the other. Residents of the area were informed about a Super-block pilot that was upcoming, but no further information was given, especially not about the durability of the "pilot".

The day it happened, architecture students were called to create figures with tires and paint on the streets in order to make it visible. It was the first stage of two. Through tactical urbanism or an attempt of it, temporary installation of furniture and provisional nature were installed.

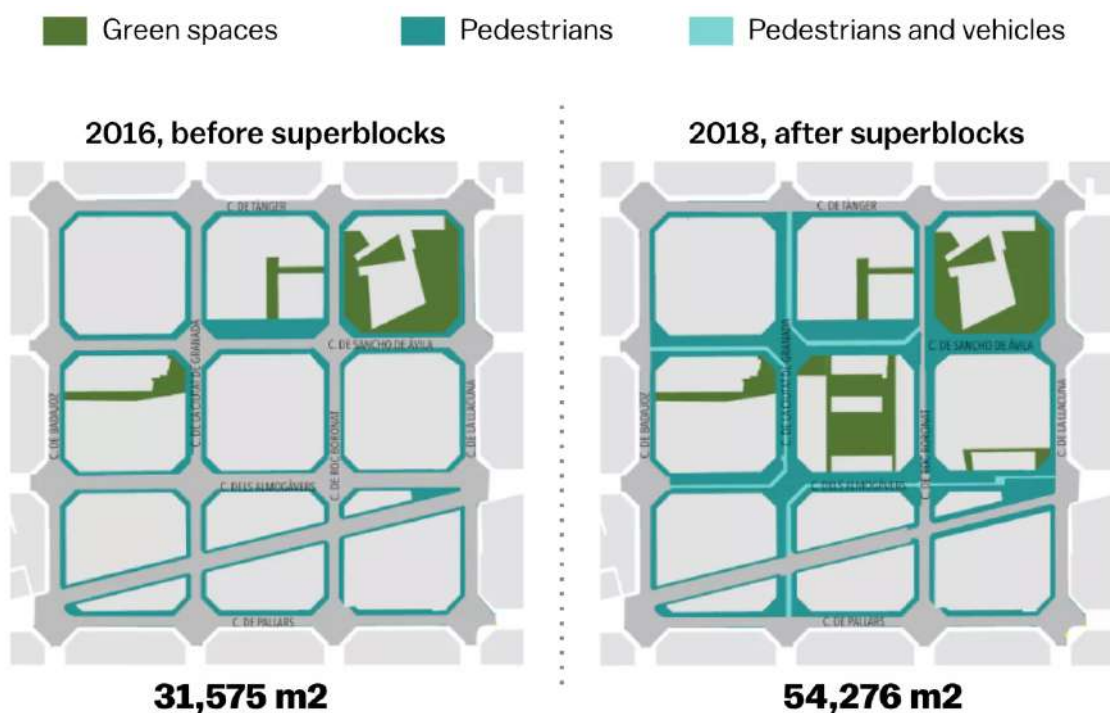
Many neighbours disagreed with the changes. Their everyday life changed drastically. They reported an increase in traffic on the surrounding streets and more time needed to get to work in the mornings. The Plataforma d'Afectats per la *superilla* del Poblenou was founded, and it lobbied the administration to reverse the project. Some argued that the streets were empty of cars but also of people and that the area was not dense at all, so it did not "solve" any problem. "It was completely an ideological project, they didn't come here to solve anything" (resident quoted by Roberts 2019)

The second stage consisted of more permanent installations. People were getting used to the idea, and they started to modify the space on their own instead of wait-



4H Poblenou in geographical context (source: Vox)

ing for the city to do so. Six months later, the city invested in playgrounds and other amenities for the area. This stage is about "consolidating the intervention on a permanent basis by means of conventional civil engineering work [...] The Super-block in Pobleneou now seems rooted and irreversible. As for the residents who enjoy a surfeit of shared spaces, they aren't complaining." (Roberts, 2019)



4I Public Spaces for citizen use (source: BCNUEJ)

2020+

The first observations that could be seen (POCACITO, 2016) was a high decrease of the proportion of space used by cars due to the increase of the number of journeys in the areas that were undertaken by foot or bicycles. Local businesses increased their commercial activities. Furthermore, necessary to highlight, even though only a couple of Super-blocks have been built, other Spanish cities have taken on the idea to create Super-blocks; among them, Madrid.

Right now, the first five pilot Super-blocks are already "working", there are some plans to extend further 11 blocks. The ideal is to achieve a total of 503 blocks by 2050 and to reduce zones of traffic by 70% (see 4G).

In January of the present year (2020), the city of Barcelona declared a Climate Emergency. In spring, the outbreak of Covid-19 hit the country (Spain). Barcelona is facing many challenges for which the Super-block approach seems to be not only working but also inspiring further cities to do so. Some Latin-American cities, like Mexico City, is already considering taking a similar plan in action (Alejandro Rivadeneyra mentioned this in a conference in June 2020.).

Funding

The city of Barcelona just recently received EUR 95 million, from the European Investment Bank, for 40 different projects to support climate change adaptation and mitigation. Among these projects, the Super-blocks programme will receive a quarter of this money to regenerate a 200,000 square meter area of the city based on Rueda's concept. (Wray 2020)

Does "the end justifies the means"?

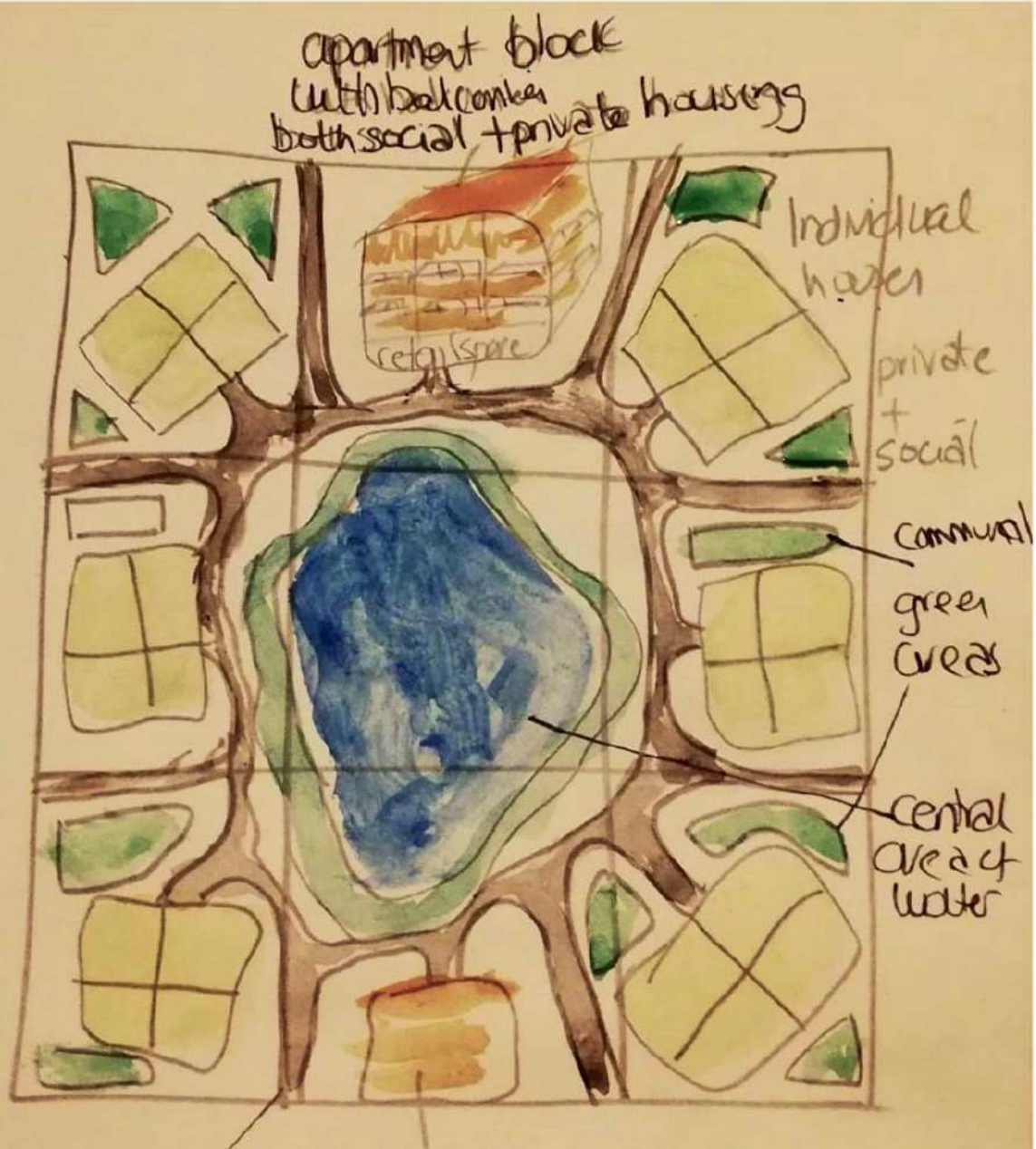
While many of the residents were instead taken by surprise, many reactions were positive. Keeping it brief, the city decided to make a radical change in the city, if not the most radical transformation since the Eixample of Cerdà. People were not asked directly, especially not for the first pilot. While the decision-taking was made rather promptly and without much thought, and the results were good, those in charge are responsible for the effect it might take on people.

It raises the question of "who shapes the city?" and "for whom?". Knowing the general outcome is overall positive and well criticised, it could be argued that the means should be somewhat more humanitarian.

Janet Sanz (Roberts 2019), the major for ecology, urbanism and mobility, noted in 2018 that there is a necessary task and that is to be able to balance tactical urbanism

with structural urbanism. While the first is fast, low-cost and has a high-impact, the second is more lasting and it makes more permanent changes, e.g. change the pavement. She mentions that the resident was not directly asked if they wanted public space; they were confronted with it. They were given the task to make something out of this public space, and this is when tactical urbanism is essential, it gives you the time and space to observe the behaviour with the minimal investment of energy and money.

"[W]ith a little courage, the process of transforming urban space can be accelerated. It can work better to present the changes as a fair accomplishment and allow residents to shape rather than reject them. It just requires faith — faith that well-designed public spaces, where they can be created, will be embraced and endure." (Roberts, 2019)



Evidence: results & analysis

Mental maps: the imaginary

As an essential part of the research, empirical evidence was gathered through mental maps, as a way of complementing but also partly substituting the methodology of the initially proposed research. Mental maps are a tool for engaging in behavioural geography and the perceptions of time and space from those using a city, district or neighbourhood. It is a way of understanding milieus and social roles, but also to understand the built environment from a different perspective. "[O]ur perception of the city is not sustained, by rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns" (Lynch 1990, 30)

The process of creating images is double-pathed, there is an observer and an observed. According to Lynch, the observer has to be trained for him/her to depict the lived complexity at its best. Nevertheless, using his proposal, giving instructions and guiding the viewer can also be utile.

"[I]t is possible to strengthen the image either by symbolic devices, by re-training of the perceiver or by reshaping one's surroundings. You can provide the viewer with a symbolic diagram of how the world fits together: a map or a set of written instructions. As long as he can fit reality to the diagram, he has a clue to the relatedness of things." (Lynch 1990, p11)

In this research, there is no other form to train the observer than through instructions. The observer is supposed to create an image of their past experience and future ideal on paper. They should be able to depict a form of living and not a specific set of spatiality.

The participants were given a set of rules (or instructions) for them to guide themselves and to get acquainted with the concept of the Super-blocks. It was in no case intended to bias the results, and even if further questions emerged, they would not get any hint that unveils additional spatial, temporal or social characteristics.¹

Participants Profile

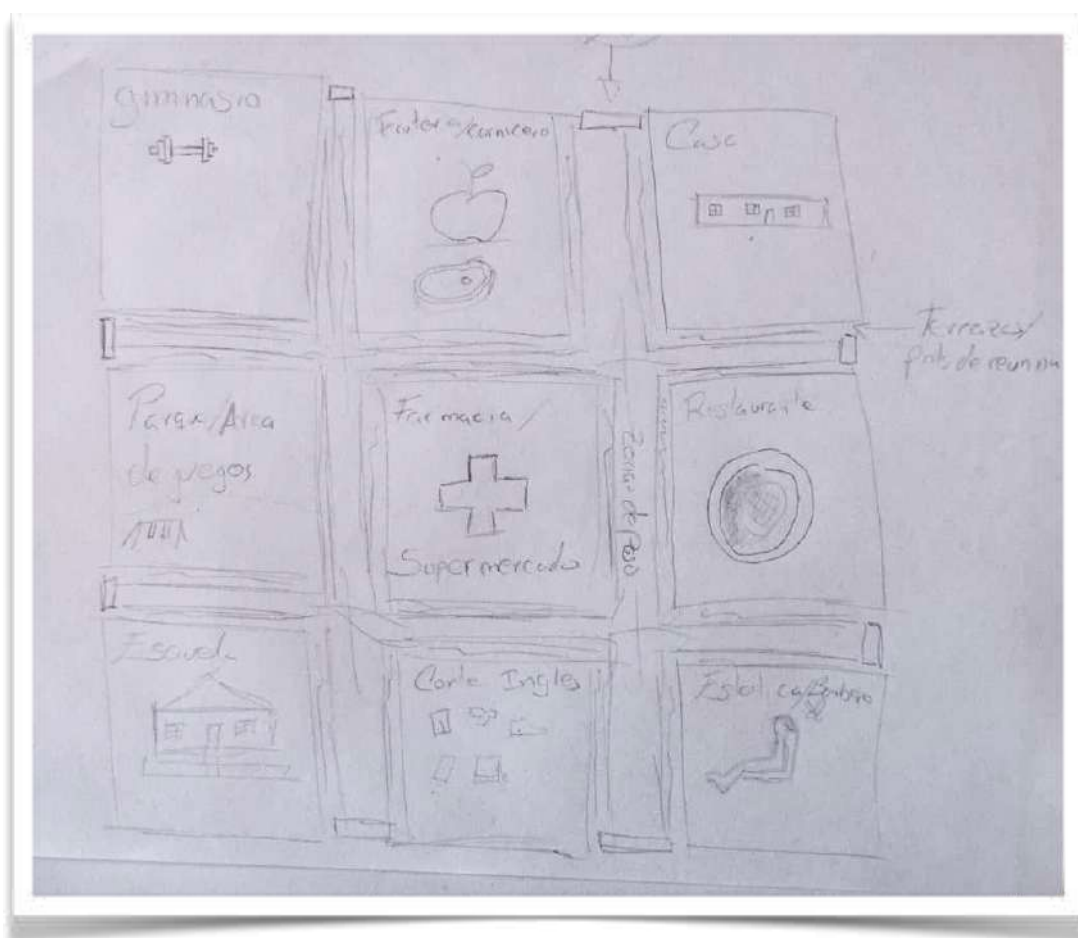
The basic profile that people had to have to participate in this exercise was that they had lived apart from their childhood home, and they live or have lived for at least six months in Barcelona.

The idea of them living in a different environment (it could even be next door) means they have experienced the area/city from their own eyes. Their every step is

not biased by their upbringing but rather by their everyday routines. The reason why the participants did not have to live (present time) in Barcelona is because this exercise is focused on an image of the future and not necessarily of the present (except for one case where the participant happened to live in one of the pilot Super-blocks). The fact that one has been resident of a city helps to understand and internalise the identity of the city, in this case of Barcelona. A certain amount of familiarity is built, but also of critique; one becomes aware of what the city needs and of what the area where one lived lacked.

The participants were contacted via social platforms and through personal connections. Therefore, there was a minimum requirement for internet access. The age was not asked, nor the nationality. At the same time, some people provided this information voluntarily; this information was, never the less, not used in the results and will not alter the interpretation of the maps provided.

Vaguely, all participants fit in the working-age (15-40) and are from European or American (North & South) origins. In total, 12 mental maps were collected from



E1, "No solo el super, también el poder comprar cosas como ropa... hmm y una escuela, tiene que tener una"

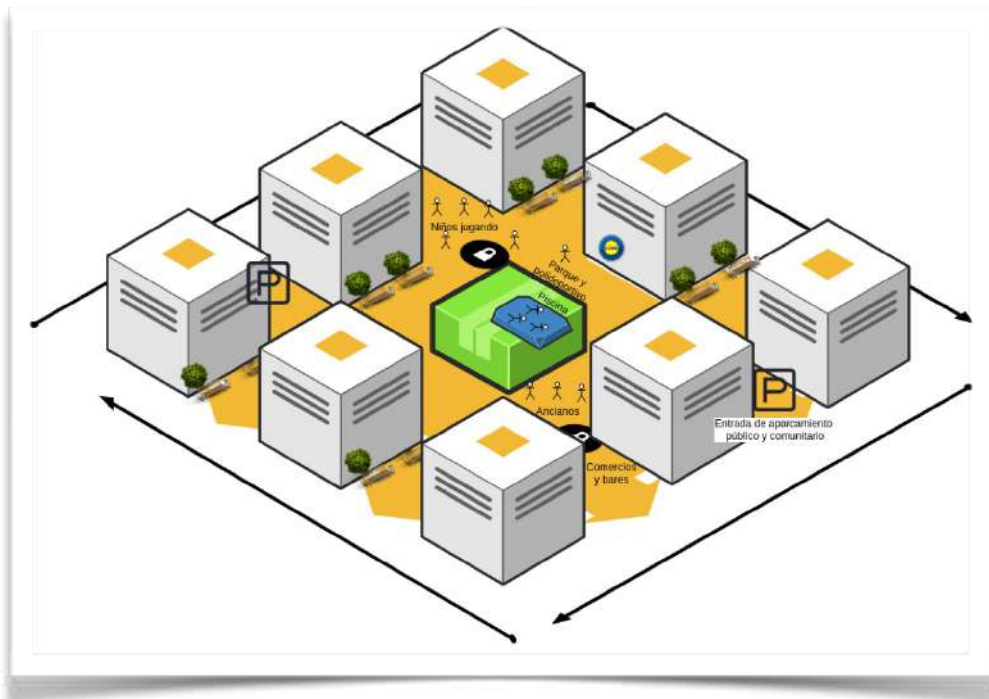
which 7 are displayed in this work, the rest were not readable or repetitive. Around 60 per cent of the participants are male, and 40 per cent female.

Those most active were from Reddit, then the 2nd point contacts and third those on Facebook. For the analysis of the results, pseudonyms substitute the real names of the participants, but mostly, the mental maps will be addressed as M1, M2, ..., M12. All images are to be found in an index section. A certain repetitive tendency could be found in the received mental maps; thus, categorisation in three groups could be done. The first three pictures, M1, M2 and M3 (shown in the following pages) were selected as a representation of this resulted categorisation.

Key Findings

As mentioned before, among the mental maps, there was a pattern to be recognised. Throughout the pictures received; the following features are recognisable:

- *Green Central Area:* Although the participants were encouraged to picture their own super-block, the original project from Salvador Rueda was shortly explained. It was mentioned that the only physical change to the current blocks would be the deviation of cars and heavy transport — it was also said that the Super-blocks should develop according to the residents' use of the areas. A fraction of the participants "demolished" the central block of their 3x3 grid. They added a green space with a water body instead. In some cases, there was a swimming pool on every block. As it is observable in M1, we see a green area in the middle, with what seems to be a lake. The author of this image seemed to add a social dimension to the use of green areas and differentiated the most public with the most private. "Each block should have a green space, and it should be communal and not private", she said when sending the picture.
- *Cars, mobility and parking:* Most participants forgot the cars as pieces of the super-block. It seems natural to ignore the use of vehicles when one is "promised" a small city with all utilities in the area. It could also be attributed because people see cars as a secondary thing to their everyday life. Either too embedded in it that it's no longer acknowledgeable, or it plays no significant role in our daily routines, but a secondary one, commute. There was one participant that mentioned a metro station was necessary (see E7); it could be interpreted that not every super-block should have one metro station but should offer connectivity. Also, in some cases, parking was integrated into the infrastructure of the super-block: either as multi-level underground parking or right at the entries of the super-block, helping to break the cars



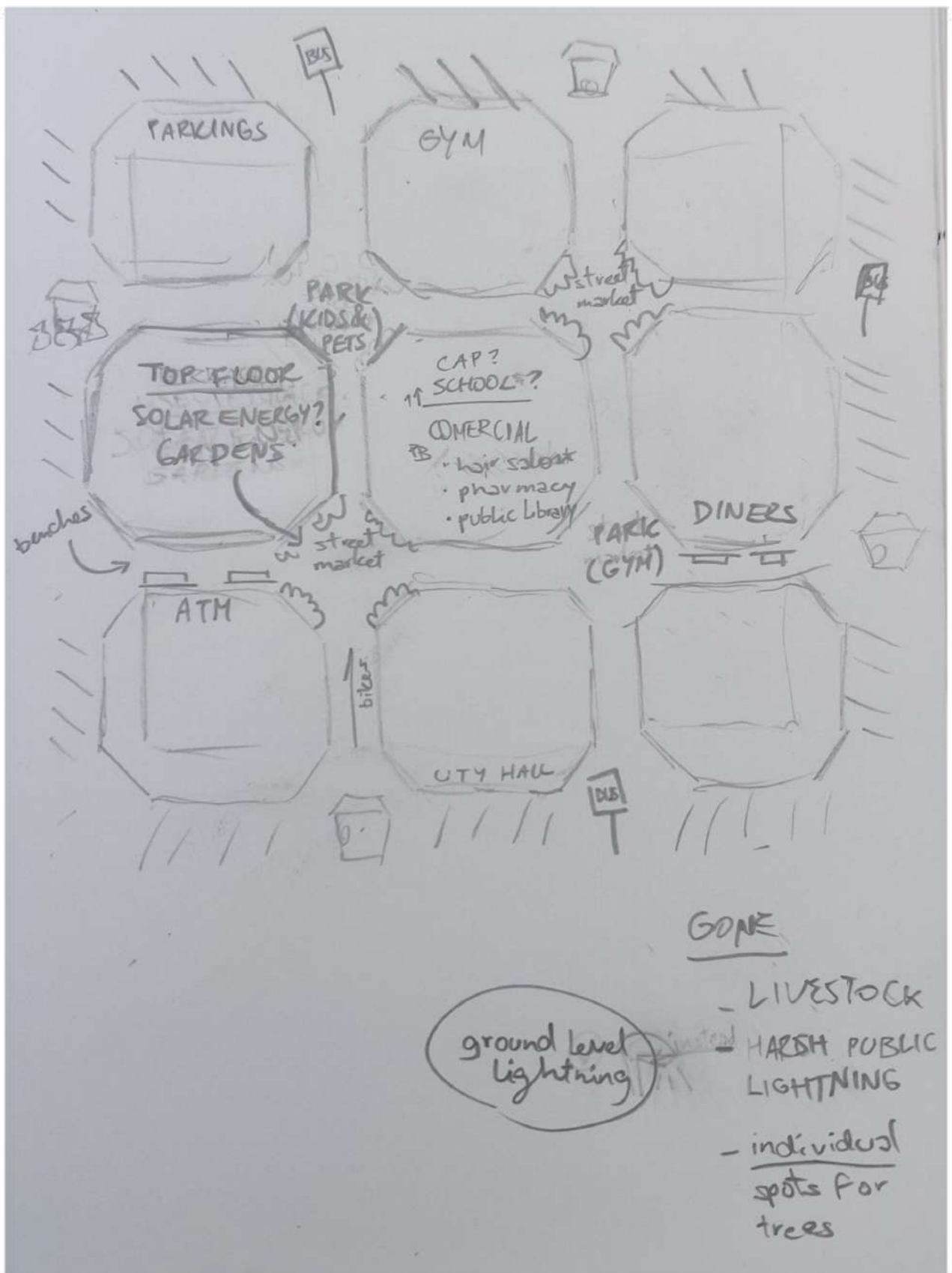
E3, "El polideportivo debe tener canchas de basquet. Hay que quitar un edificio para hacer el polideportivo... Abajo de la super-manzana hay un parking multi-nivel para que los vecinos guarden sus coches y las visitas se pueden aparcar en las entradas a la cerrada."

El Mercado y Carnicería / Pescadería / Frutas / chuches / Xarcutería / Quesos
 El Parque y zona Juegos p. Niños
 Los Bloques de pisos con piscina en lo posible

⑩ Autoservicios ⑪ Patis/chinos ⑫ Panaderías ⑬ Vinerías ⑭ Veterinario ⑮ Farmacia ⑯ Lavandería ⑰ Zapatero y Costurero ⑱ Tintorería ⑲ Droguería o Similar			

① Pipican
 ② Bares, restaurante, heladería, cafetería, etc.
 ③ Bancos
 ④ Capilla o zona cultural
 ⑤ Yoga, spinning, ballet, etc.
 ⑥ Dentista, Óptico, Físico, Podólogo
 ⑦ Estética y tratamientos de belleza
 ⑧ Ropa, Zapatos, Accesorios, Repro. d. Cama, Mercadería
 ⑨ Correos

E4

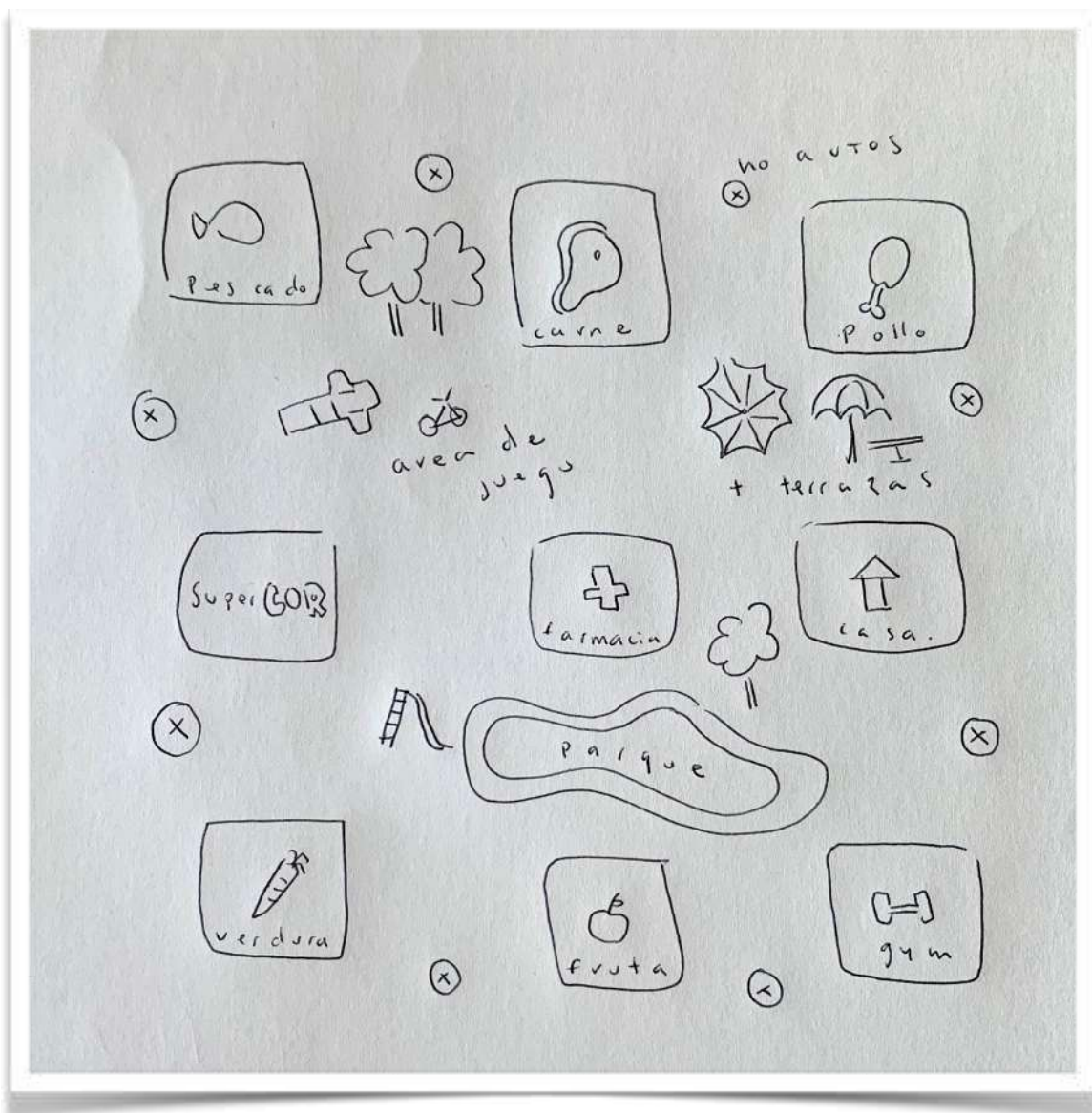


E6 — Sebastián Christen & Adriana Calderón (explicitly asked to reveal his name)

"We studied the super-blocks at the School of Architecture, they are missing a lot."

from driving-through.

- *Safety:* The most vulnerable groups in our societies are children and the elderly. As seen in E3 and E5 there are determined playground areas, or simply just children playing on the streets and the elderly using the public space too. This being also a social dimension of the use of space, we can see the need for safety in our public spaces. Especially in the cities transited by (too many) cars on a daily basis, having the possibility to close the roads immediately means more safety.
- *Housing:* Not many participants said how housing "happens" in the Super-blocks. A couple signalled a single home. Some other did signalise housing. There should be mixed housing (private and social), and it should happen on the surrounding blocks or the upper levels.



E5, "Debería de ser un espacio que no quieras dejar de seguir viviendo".

Analysis

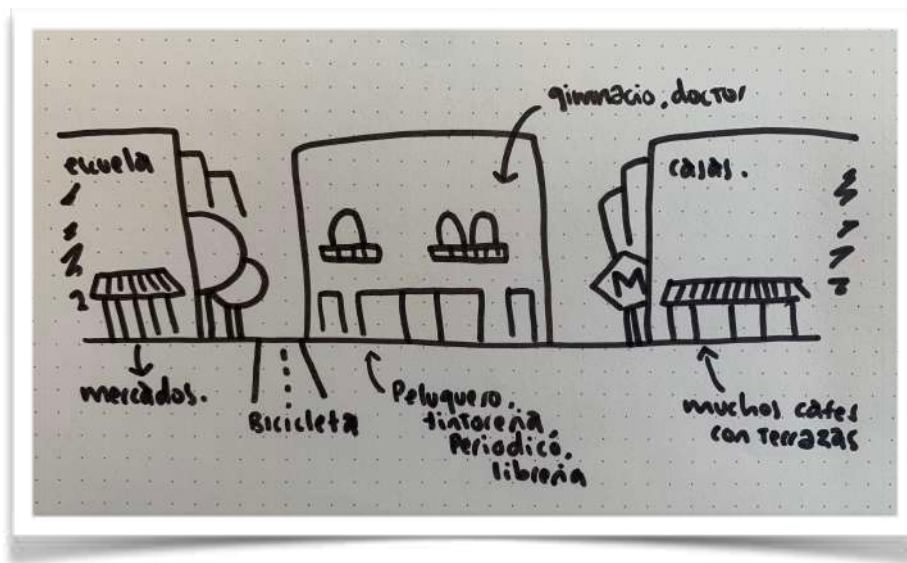
When attempting to answer the research questions through mental-map analysis, there is a considerable gap in interpretation. It is necessary to keep such interpretation as neutral as possible throughout the reading of the maps.

The four 'key' findings mentioned above were selected from a minority of mental maps that had such, e.g. when talking about the central green area, only 2 out of ## drawings had this. When seen the other way around, all mental maps had a similar symphony. People drew what they were familiar within their neighbourhood, they added spots they usually use in their everyday life but that are not in their neighbourhood, e.g. school or laundry shop. Easy to notice how many of these added places were mainly commercial.

People are on the streets in many of these mental maps, although, we can observe a lack of activity. Are they walking? Are they hanging out? Are they playing or engaging in different activities? The participants seem to be keen on the idea of "recovering" the streets for the people, but they did not seem to know what they could do with space. "In the end, people can evaluate it only when they see it" (Richards 2019). As some authors have said it before, we can only picture an ideal (future) scenario parting from the things we know and the ability we have to at some point pursue this ideal moment.

Given that the participants were provided with an empty canvas where they could have pictured the most radical changes, most people stuck within a frame of applicability. Now, the reason for this result is twofold: First, this almost empty canvas gave the participants a hint that the super-blocks were to happen in Barcelona. Clearly, participants had a biased mindset as for were to set the scene. While it would be interesting to see the cognitive interpretation of this "bias", that is somewhat off-topic. This bias makes the participant want to stick to what they know, to the language of this specific city. In which case, it would be interesting to see if such results would be any different if made in a different city.

On the other hand, it is not necessarily against the research since we are not trying to plan a new city with ideal features. What we can recognise is that there is an imaginary of what the city is and of what the city could be. People seem to be acquainted with the *identity* of the city and seem to know what is that makes it vibrant and functioning so that you could have all of these within a minimal walking distance, hence, the perfect super-block for this specific city. Second, participants knew that the project of the super-block was something already in practice and to be developed further on in the next years. The amount of applicability of a project already selected is also mind-closing to radical ideas of extreme-new spaces. The most radical change was the demolition of the central block in order to expand green areas.



E7

The mental maps show something that was not expected but is as insightful. They do not show a new model or a new way of perfection, but they do show homogeneity among the mental maps. This similar thinking and a similar picture of the *ideal* super-blocks makes one wonder if its actual potential. While many seem to think that similar thoughts result in little to no change, that similar thinking brings and identity in-hand and overall brings the *power* to pull this identity and these ideals and make it work. It does not take a genius to contribute to such a project.

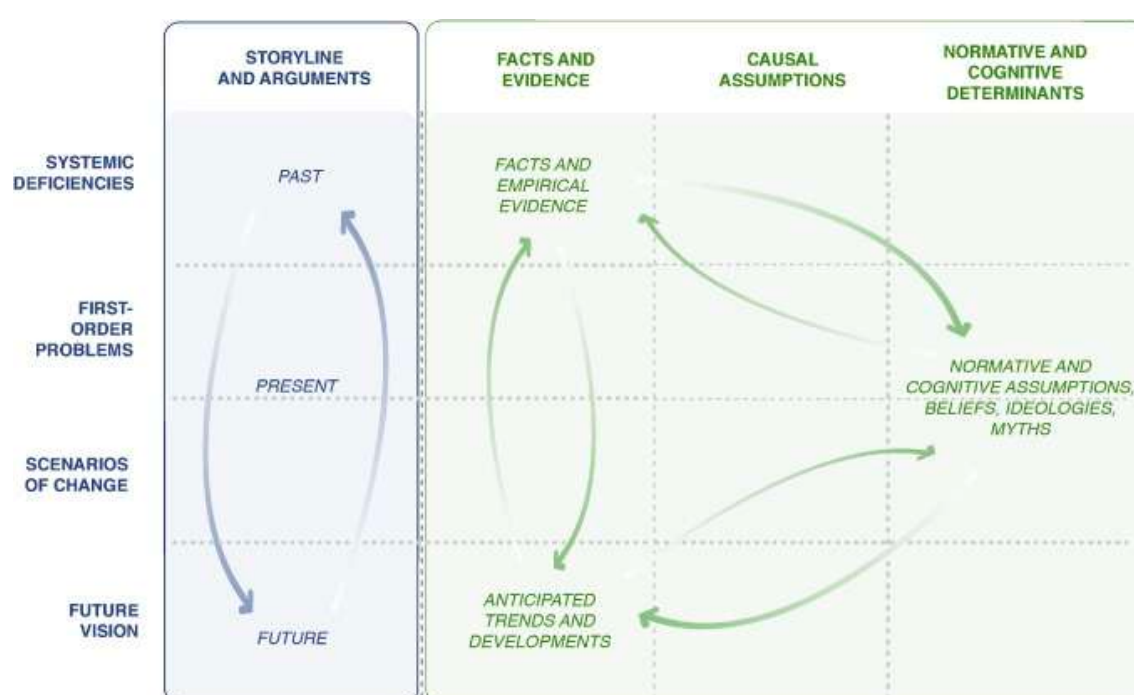
In a very interpretative manner, it can be said that the mental maps show an agreement among participants to what Rueda and the City of Barcelona are proposing. While many solutions are still unclear (green areas, housing, safety), we can assume that this will develop through time. As Rueda said once in an interview for an article at Vox, "It is about spontaneity and self-organisation, empath and relationships between people. You cannot plan that, but you need to create the space. The more permanent features are to be done slowly, in my opinion. It is a nervous process." (Richards 2019)

Having said that, the ideal or the utopia lays in the dream, in the air, in the individuality. It may all seem notably poetic, but as it was with the mental maps, the making of the super-blocks is something that takes time, and if people are involved and living in these super-blocks they will want to change things, adapt others; they will disagree, and they will then accept changes. All of these, if they are encouraged to participate in the making and if they are given a chance. The utopianism of the super-blocks does not lay in the perfection of time and space but rather in the imperfection of it. It is a utopia that ideally will grow into a new one. It is a social utopia that involves collective imagination and action.

Content analysis: the discourse

Pseudo-coding

As it was previously mentioned in the methodology, coding can be accused of trying to quantify qualitative data or data that transcends hard analysis. The reason for this coding approach to be part of the research means to give structure to an in-depth reading of published columns, news, articles that give interpretative data about the Barcelona Super-blocks. The structure meant to help identify specific types of statements but in no way to minimise these statements to a mere word count.



E8— POLiFRAME original scheme (source: scienceactive.com)

Based on the POLiFRAME approach to coding (see E8), a coding scheme was created in order to understand data. In total, 30 articles were selected in 3 different languages (English, Spanish and German) and from multiple newspapers, blogs and magazines worldwide. While the POLiFRAME approach suggests focusing on a storyline, on data, assumptions and cognitive concepts and a vertical scheme on deficiencies, problems, changes and future scenarios, the approach is taken in this research go as follow: Vertically, there are three columns, one that shows quantitative or qualitative data, a second one that shows assumptions and a third one that shows beliefs, values and other cognitive concepts. On a horizontal level, there are also three lines, problems (past), solutions and change (present), vision and ideal (future).

This approach was used to categorise the speech and discourse of the Super-blocks. The aim was to answer both research questions more directly and to identify the utopian character of the plan on the one hand, and on the other, to know their level of successfulness and applicability. Having the liberty of adding the prefix 'pseudo' to the name of the methodology is not arbitrary.

The use of a coding approach is only to have maintained a rigorous and more or less systematic procedure to identify certain discourses. Different from standard coding, this approach does not mean to find a piece of new information and arrive at new conclusions but rather to prove or disprove the idea of the Super-blocks holding a utopian character and if they are considered a successful project, and whether this fits or not the previously framed meaning of utopia, instead of finding out what kind of information, the aim was to know if there was a specific type of information involved. Furthermore, coding is normally associated to qualitative methods rather than interpretative. Although it is insightful to know where to is the result leading in a general qualitative-quantitative manner, this method is not used for that purpose specifically, but it rather became obvious to the eye once the results were organised in a chart (see E9).

Discourse

In 2017, Salvador Rueda wrote an article for the blog of Barcelona, where he talks about the future in two forms. First, he suggests we live in a world where a growing population and especially a growing urban population, together with consumerism, production and the exhaustion of resources leads us to one to the most uncertain futures we have yet had as humanity. On the other hand, he presents a project. This project is that of the super-blocks. A project he has been working on for the last 30 years, based on ideas that date back to the 1950s already. A project, he assures, that will "reduce uncertainty", increase predictability and wants to "change the rules of the game to adjust the economic strategy competition between cities and regions" (Rueda, S. 2017), and to develop an urban model that integrates both greater sustainability and the idea of the knowledge city. In a different article, written by Brad Aaron on the same year says that Rueda's Super-block project is to create "three-block y three-block areas redesigned for people". Aaron's (2017) entry was presenting the super-block as a model, in this case, aspirable, for the US. It is a small summary and vague proposal to follow the ideas exposed by Rueda's keynote at the Transportation Alternatives Vision Zero Cities conference. As a final statement, Aaron quotes Rueda in a, interpretably concerning way: super-blocks "are the basis for the new urban model. Period." (Rueda, S., as quoted in Aaron, B. 2017).

While this superficial analysis already suggests a strong radically in the discourse and a high promise-ness towards the future of the super-blocks themselves and of the super-blocks as a model, some other facts can be perceived.

	HARD DATA	ASSUMPTIONS	COGNITIVE V.
PAST	4:3 Barcelona declared a climate emergency in January this year; 12:2 visitors making overnight stays in the city increased from 1.7 million in 1990 to more than 8 millio...	1:10 The problem is not the cars," said Rueda. "The problem is the bad use of cars; 5:12 We are designing cities that work really well for elite white men and not very well for the rest of...; 10:3 "It's hard to calm down expectations of bringing and parking your car everywhere after more than 50...; 14:2 This causes pedestrians and cyclists to be pushed to narrow pavements and cycles lanes, both having...; 16:1 la situacion de emergencia climatica urge la transformacion radical; 16:2 trafico y la contaminacion	1:14 reduce vehicle traffic by 21 percent; 7:10 he residents of Poblenou did not ask for public space until they had it; 10:4 Now I need another 20 minutes to go to work. I have to walk a third of a mile to get to my car; 14:11 streets were empty, without life,
PRESENT	1:5 the 17 percent of people who use cars every day take up around three-quarters of the city's public s...; 1:11 Barcelona has 1.85 square meters of green space per person; 2:4 road transport emissions caused 53,000 americans to die prematurely; 2:5 1.35 million people around the world die each year as a result of road traffic accidents; 2:6 they're parked for more than 90% of the time; 5:7 Cars take up 60% of public space across the city; 10:2 The average conversion for a single superblock costs about €5 million; 12:5 environmental emergency	1:13 thousands of premature deaths and hospitalizations annually due to bronchitis, asthma, and related l...; 2:10 the block (Poblenou) recieved criticism from residents concerned about access and parking and local businesses worried that it would hit trade; 12:3 Barcelona has no room to grow and people just keep coming; 12:4 the lack of affordable housing	2:14 public space is an extension of our homes; Smart doesn't just come from the intelligence provided by the technology but also from the citizens...; 7:3 "A city starts to be a city when you have public spaces"; 14:6 superblocks can be adapted to any urban fabric; 14:8 the right to leisure and habitation as they allow for sports practice, children's games and celebrat...; 16:4 no hay nada mas efectivo que el distanciamiento y unas sencillas mascarillas; 5:3 reclaim the streets; 7:10 he residents of Poblenou did not ask for public space until they had it; 12:1 Barcelona is the self-styled capital city of the Mediterranean and a victim of its own success; 12:6 here's a sense that Barcelona could risk losing its soul; 14:9 opposition and protest from local residents; 2:11 Now they (originally most opposed) see how much it's improved their quality of life, they want an even bigger block; 2:12 people in general are very happy; 2:2 One of the key proposals first put forward in the 1980s is now becoming a reality
FUTURE	2:3 There are six so far, with as many as 11 more planned over the next few years — and more than 500 if the plan is carried out in it's entirety; 4:1 The European Investment Bank (EIB) will provide €95 million (US\$112.4 million) for 40 projects; 4:6 regeneration of a 200,000 m2 area of the city; 5:10 one which will look at how to tackle sustainable energy by generating it from road surfaces; 5:11 the other focused on how technology can be used to help the city's elderly population; 7:4 The average time savings for a 3x3 structure is up to 15 percent; 7:9 Some residents living at the periphery of the superblocks are confused about the modified traffic si...; 10:1 he and his team have reduced the number of cars on the road by 27%, leading to a 42% reduction in th...; 14:3 evels dropped by the significant amount of 5.5 decibels; 14:4 42 percent reduction in Nitrogen dioxide emissions and a 38 percent reduction in particle pollution...; 2:7 the city could prevent 667 premature deaths every year if it created all 503 superblocks envisaged in the plan; 2:8 (NO2 levels) would fall by 24% bringing Barcelonas NO2 levels in line with the WHO's recommended maximum; 2:18 reduce the number of cars in the city by 125,000 within three years with air pollution down by 20% within four; 10:4 Now I need another 20 minutes to go to work. I have to walk a third of a mile to get to my car	1:2 limit traffic to local use; 1:3 freeing up space for walking and biking; 1:12 to improve the public realm and reduce pollution, which Rueda said costs Barcelona 45 billion euros...; 2:1 get rid of the cars; 2:13 the air quality is clearly much better; 5:1 virtually no traffic and the space where cars would have parked is given over to play areas, trees a...; 5:4 one that could save hundreds of lives that might otherwise be lost because of heavily polluted air; 5:6 Seattle, which is considering introducing something similar; 5:8 As soon as you redistribute that space and rebalance the situation, you are supporting groups that u...; 7:1 an experiment to return the streets; 7:7 When further superblocks are established around the city, more bus routes are bound to be modified; 7:8 The future network runs fewer routes than the radial network it replaces, but the frequency increase...; 12:8 encourage community cohesiveness and reduce noise and other negative environmental issues; 14:1 You take an area of blocks and close off the inside to 'through' traffic; 14:10 adapt to the new system; 1:15 the share of street space that prioritizes pedestrians will increase from 27 percent to 77 percent; 2:9 the life expectancy of the average barcelona resident could increase by almost 200 days and generate savings of 1.7 billion euros a year; 2:17 Rueda believes that supeblockplan could easily be applied to the more densely populated US cities such as New York; 7:2 the creativity of the residents becomes the only limitation on the roads; 7:6 he city's redesigned public transportation options and incentives for cycling; 14:5 positive impact on the economy of the local area	1:1 more hospitable and humane; 4:2 support climate change mitigation and adaptation; 4:5 to climate action, the green economy and the green transition to a healthier city and greater wellbe...; 5:2 radical plan; 7:11 t's about spontaneity and self-organization, empathy and relationships between people," says Rueda...; 10:5 On this side of the highway, we're living in an unimaginably pleasant future, and on the other side...; 12:7 seek a fair balance between the best version of globalisation, and keeping the character, identity a...; 12:9 radical idea; 14:10 adapt to the new system; 14:12 are nowadays people who eat their lunch outdoors in the installed picnic tables and benches, and chl...; 16:3 soluciones sencillas y baratas; 1:16 the basis for the new urban model. Period; 2:15 Public space is where we coexist, it's where society is made; 4:4 social inclusion 5:5 act as a blueprint for other cities; 7:5 A success for superblocks; 12:10 foster a sense of community was given a renewed impetus when Colau came to power and superblocks hav...; 14:7 "the five rights that public space should guarantee.

From all articles, there is a tendency towards a discourse of the future and towards a cognitive-abstract thought. That could suggest a couple of things, e.g. most 'hard-data' knowledge provided is about the possible outcome of the super-blocks and can therefore help to argue in their favour and convince people of their reliability.

A second interpretation suggests that there is a tendency towards abstraction because the project itself is not aiming to-reduce pollution directly but to tackle the problem on a more local, down-scale level dealing with issues of personal life quality, personal liveability and community level cooperation.

While, there are suggestions of plans "becoming real", of an increase in the humane perspective of the city, in public spaces, in adaptability, most of these articles take for granted the fact that these are the values that people want. From most articles, only two had conversations with residents of Barcelona, most were with the author of the super-block model. This tells us that the super-block approach is seen as a solution, as a work of art and as a product that will, abruptly said, "solve everything".

The most interesting articles were those questioning if such a model could be applied in other cities. Some suggestions were New York, or Chicago, among others. While it is not for this work to judge whether this project would be suitable for replicability or not, we can see a pattern of calling the project a 'model'. Some other articles described the super-blocks as the perfect solution post-Covid-19. If the model creates public space, people will not need to get exposed to the virus and can remain within the recommended radius and walk on the streets with the recommended distance. Although this seems like a suitable project, I dare to say that the comparability to other cities is abrupt and not entirely responsible. While the project itself suggests good ideas, it is against the nature of the project itself to be reproduced in a copy-paste matter. It is if we dare to call it that way, a 'unique utopia' – unique because it can only be used once and if it is to be replicated, it must be adapted thoroughly.

Phenomenology: the *everyday*

The original methodology of this research, was as mentioned earlier the central approach to determine whether or not the character of utopia was to be found in the new Barcelona Super-block project and if whether or not this was successful so far. Under the assumption that information about the imaginary could have been collected through informal conversations, and that as a researcher, one could have obtained further results from observation and interpretation (and repetition), there was the expectation of building both, a set of cultural findings, ideas and a set of personal interpretation and personal experience in the field.

Although it is not very often encouraged to do such interpretative research, it is part of a process and understanding of how societies live. The social, the political and the cultural are phenomena that we cannot quantify that easily, and qualitative methods usually tend to quantify data after collection. It is almost urgent that we start understanding the social from the social and the lived through the experience. Nevertheless, then again, this is a topic that should be discussed in a different paper — what would be very encouraged.

The plan and time table for this research to be carried out was during spring. It was not only coincidental that there was time to make the necessary travel or that me, the researcher, was living in Spain at the moment given that would make this research easier; but it also matched what seemed to be the appropriate time of the year. The temperature in Spain tends to drop during the Wintertime, and during the Summertime it tends to peak, not to mention, both are seasons where tourists arrive in the city. With more than 8 million people visiting Barcelona every year, selecting spring to follow the research meant the following. There would be weeks where there are not too many tourists, then it would be easy to observe the activities of the locals. On the other hand, the easter break would have been examined too and in a similar calendar time as the other observation sets; in this case, the results would show the use of tourists and the capacity of the Super-blocks (and the city) to hold this group of people — group of people that are somewhat part of the nature of the city.

Limitations

It is not unknown that the outbreak of Covid-19 arrived in Italy by mid-February and it did not take long to reach Spain. To be precise, the universities and great scale companies announced its closing already the first week of March, while on the 14th, a total Lockdown was ordered from the government — such movement has not been seen in Spain since the Franco Regime.

Due to personal health risk from the researcher — which will not be discussed further — and because of the Lockdown in the country, it seemed impossible to commute to Barcelona on and off for a whole month without being affected by the restrictions and without being exposed and exposing others. Moreover, it would not have been political nor ethical nor moral.

Second of all, if in a hypothetical scenario it would have been possible to travel at the time or to travel once the Lockdown was eased by the end of June, the results would have been altered. The findings would be relevant for studies of different kinds but not relevant at all for this research. Having a prompt alteration to the daily routine of the residents of the Super-blocks and the city precluded the research from being carried out. Most findings would be of unusual adaptations, that while interesting to

observe and to draw conclusions about, it would have been merely temporal. Jan Gehl (2020) did a study on the use of public spaces and the changes in traffic during the Lockdown Results would not have shown the overall successfulness of the project if it is, nor its utopian character, if there is one.

While at that time being, it became impossible to execute the research, new challenges arose and — in a very subjective assumption — the opportunity to consider the project successful became even more significant.

Advantages

The pandemic of Covid-19 represents a big challenge for urban development and planning. It has forced societies worldwide to change the rhythms and to adapt to different lifestyles. Among the quickest solutions and recommendations were to stay within a small radius. Long commuting and travelling were not encouraged. Work, school and other various activities took place online and home-based. In countries where a strict Lockdown did not happen; outdoors activities were recommended. Gastronomy and markets started taking over the street space in order to accommodate the customers with a safe-distance. Children resorted to new forms of play, considering they were not allowed to go far from home. The dynamics of domestic animals also changed. People wanted to come out to use the outdoor and not necessarily for means of consumption. Long distances seemed like a higher risk. Things changed.

These changes are an obstacle for the research to be carried out at the moment. Moreover, the challenge of overcoming the pandemic is testing the durability and actual success of the Super-blocks and even of the utopian character of it. How?

Having an extra-ordinary challenge or phenomena happening not only in the city, not only on the country but also worldwide, changes the mindset of how cities should be planned and what people need to be able to carry out their daily activities in the city within a safety parameter. A vital characteristic of the Super-block approach is that it creates an emptiness by reducing traffic circulation. This emptiness is de facto immediately a public space, not a vibrant or active or acknowledged public space, but it is one. This space is to be developed by the different organisations, local commerces and people from the area.

To carry out phenomenology in the near future could become a more forceful statement to both, approve the idea of Lefebvre that utopias are a goal that is always adapting to the spatiotemporally of cities and to see the Super-blocks as a successful project despite the current challenges. Suppose we assume that the Super-block can be seen as a utopia because it remains as a dynamical space to and in the city. In that case, it can also be assumed that the success of the Super-blocks is the success of the utopia, in which case, if the Super-block were to overcome such challenges and



E9 — the intersections (source: 3rd. Person street-walking)



E10 — the car lane and the chess tables (source: 3rd. Person street-walking)



E11 — mobility (source: 3rd. Person street-walking)



E12 — playground and priority to pedestrians (source: 3rd. Person street-walking)



E13 — the open borders (source: 3rd. Person street-walking)



E14 — mix (source: 3rd. Person street-walking)

conserved the same goals over the way and even integrate new challenges, the project and therefore the utopia would be prosperous. To a point where the super-block itself can no longer be recognised as such in the first place, but it is not about changing everything or starting new, but about it being somewhat successful.

The third-person *Flâneur* experiment

Being lucky enough to know the language, the city and some of the residents of Barcelona. An urban dweller provided a video of one of the pilot super-blocks, the one in Sant. He, walked around the area on a "normal" summer day under the only instruction to show me, through video, what he sees. No commentary. He happens to have studied history and is well familiarised with the grid of Cerdà; he lives in the super-block in one of the buildings from the central block. He walked around, without making any commentary, pointing at what I suppose was relevant for him.

At first, I hesitated to use his contribution, nonetheless some relevant findings appeared. He seemed to focus on the patterns on the ground. While it is still asphalt on the streets, there is a friendly approach that might make it appealing for the people and more comfortable to the eye once citing. There are also a lot of improvised greenery. On picture E13 we can see him approaching the 'border' of the super-block. On video, it was clear how he stood on the same spot from this picture and looked both ways, signalling the crossing, the bike lane, the traffic. Interesting because he remained *inside* the super-block.

While this small experiment help to see the current state of some of the pilot programmes, it also leaves a lot to wish for. Sense the air, the colours, the people. And it also invites to think of further debates, like borders, furniture, permanency, and so on.

Brief Summary

To summarise the problem; the world is becoming urban driven. Even if it is only a percentage of the population that is actually living in cities, many of the industrial and agricultural production is to suffice the urban population, both, in entrepreneurship but also their daily life. It is not alone the problem that the urban discourse is "taking over", not that the world population is rapidly increasing, but that it is also in cities that social inequality becomes evident. Cities are also among the first actors in climate change. These challenges create new solutions.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the urban developers and urban sociologists shifted towards two, a more humane and a more economical, approach in planing and reading cities; the urban has, therefore, users, and it is also a financial machine. Recapitulating, the concept "right to the city" from Henri Lefebvre has become popular among authors like David Harvey, Susan Fainstein, John Friedmann, and other not so recognised but not less relevant authors. The concept suggests that the inhabitants of a city are entitled the right – and the responsibility – to change the city. As Harvey (2008) urges the thought that citizens should be aware of the dynamism of the city and the relationships of power. A momentum has to be done to achieve change. This leads us to the idea of a city. A city is not an object but a subject, it is vibrant, it holds identity, and it lives through time and space. A city cannot be itself somewhere else, not 'somewhen' else. Cities are not static nor homogeneous. There is a perpetuation of an oppressive status quo, because it focuses on a complex domain of multiple users. Utopias must then remain radical and realistic.

Assuming that a utopia is a future ideal image of the urban and that it points out what society is missing or lacking in the way that it proposes solutions to it, we could say that utopias are a good way to re-cognise the city and to give it a direction. Walter Benjamin, despite his critique to certain forms of utopianism, suggests that there would be no present without the remembrance of the past and without the desire of a future. The urban, the dwelling, the living in the city is a mix of what is and what could be. Similar in that sense – yet, entirely different –, Henri Lefebvre suggests that a utopia is inevitable as well as doable. Lefebvre proposes a way of understanding utopias as we do cities; they are dynamic; they are not set in time nor in space. The idea of the *no-place* or the idea of the *good-place* do not seem to be jeopardised by his theory. Lefebvre says that a utopia is the exposure of multiple different futures from the place that is the present and that the present itself is the product of such different futures of a past moment. He encourages the reader and the user to think of radical futures, it is only by thinking in utopias that we achieve a disruption between the now and the linear future, and thus we create new possibilit-

ies of new forms of life. Following up, he suggests that utopias should be put into practice by those holding the right to the city, them who conceived them initially.

As it can be understood, it is of none relevance whatsoever if the initiative is top-down or bottom-up. However, the first might seem more complicated and might fall into the risk of becoming an authoritarian plan. Lefebvre says that utopias are not achievable entirely but that we can create experimental utopias whilst trying some of these ideas out and observing, fixing and repairing both, the built environment as the thought itself.

Utopias become, in a sense, an imaginary of the future. The urban imaginary works then threefold: on the one hand, it helps picture an idea of the future set on the values of society and of what "we" consider the right path, e.g. the good city. While it is difficult to think of a promising future, we must consider a basic agreement from all citizens which is what holds communities together; based on this idea, John Friedmann and Susan Fainstein suggest aiming for a common good – proposal that will be taken. It (the imaginary) also works as the identity of the city, in this way, before a utopia becomes experimental, the *real* city that will be intervened owns an identity; this is as relevant as the first. Just as utopias *cannot* be built from scratch nor tear down a city to do so, it works the same with the imaginary. A utopia can only be considered as achievable if it is not built from zero or ruins. Tearing down the imaginary of the city to substitute it with a new one is similar to spatially and temporally tearing down a city.; it – in a way – ceases to exist. The third is the imaginary as a form of crafting the utopia. Parallel to the thought of Lefebvre, the idea of crafting an imaginary arises from a sentimental city; a city lived by its citizens, citizens with the right to the city and so on. The most significant risk is falling into the labelling of the city – not because it is dangerous *per se* but instead because there is a possibility of predisposing the city to a faith that it is not 'destined' to pursue.

This build-up helps to set up an ontological basis to the understanding of the research question and to solve it further. As part of the problem statement and of the central hypothesis – which ties the research question and the case study together, lays the idea of urban acupuncture. As a sub-category of tactical urbanism it suggests activism from bottom-up initiatives, these must not be started from the marginalised or segregated but can also be encouraged and engaged by the municipalities and the different organisations. What makes urban acupuncture more appealing than mere tactical urbanism is the echoing effect. Tactical urbanism as a broad form of action wants to achieve the maximum effect by using the least effort. It is a form of an experiment of a possibly *more permanent* future. While this is also valid for urban acupuncture, this second form of action suggests an expanding effect, in which it is not only the least energy, consumption and work used to make a change in the area but it is the least energy, consumption and work used to make a change in the area that again will make a change in the surroundings, i.e. like the droplet of water. Having this under the glass, the Barcelona super-block project seems to be a

possibility of studying the phenomena of utopias and at the same time prove or disprove the hypothesis. Why Barcelona and why the super-blocks?

Barcelona seems to be a city that invites planners to build utopias. Along with the different traditions of utopias, the plan itself has been changed over and over again, always or almost always starting from zero. Cerdà, the engineer that developed the plan of the grid, suggested something already similar to what Salvador Rueda is suggesting now. Both thinkers agreed that the land should have mixed-use and that one of the main aims of their respective projects should involve well being. Cerdà created the grid as a clean approach for hygiene, a matter that is today as relevant as in the nineteenth century. He planned green alleys, streets for transportation (cars were not invented yet) and most of all, walking distances for people from all classes to get to the basic needs: school, hospital, markets and public administration offices. The city accepted Cerdà's plan; nevertheless, they reorganised the blocks, making them denser, they eliminated green areas, and they did not respect the idea of equal housing ability for all. It was a utopia that failed to be accomplished for its purposes, but at least, gave the city a new canvas.

As any other city, any other plan, any other utopia, any other intervention and even any other revolution, cities are tied to the power relations. The region of Catalonia has been in tension with the national government of Spain. A large part of the population of the region wants to become independent, and many of the movements come from the Capital of Catalonia, Barcelona. This constant fight has been going on already for centuries, but it became stronger during the Regime of Franco and also during the Neo-liberalism boom in Europe. Repeating, cities are tied to power relations. Barcelona was an object of *re-modelation* for one of the greatest architects of modernism in the twentieth century. Together with a group of local architects, Le Corbusier planned the displacement and reorganisation of one of the most "problematic" areas of the city. Whereas this plan was built or not (*it was not*), it raises the same question of identity, of misuse of power, of responsibility for someone else's everyday life in order to benefit the *elites*. People living in the Old City, were going to be misplaced to a new area on the outskirts of the city under the discourse of a better life promise for the working class and the Old City would have been rebuilt with an aesthetically appealing project. As a mere assumption, the working class would form a Ghetto and become even more marginalised. Again, a utopia that was never carried out (because of Franco) and that successfully failed – for its results would have been criticisable.

The Barcelona after the regime also entered a fight for growth. The discourse of tourism, production and consumption boomed. A discourse promising progress and leading to an uncontrollable chaotic growth. And to a discrepancy in political matters after the crisis in 2008. Salvador Rueda was at the time already preparing everything to put into practice the plan he has been working on since the late 70s; at

the same time, bottom-up groups (e.g. *Indulgentes Barcelona*) started helping the city recover from the financial crisis.

The super-blocks seem well contemplated. They cover the main idea of focusing on well-being. They are small enough that they can be applied, yet adaptable enough that they can be changed in form for different scenarios. The super-block does not only promise to increase life quality at a very local level but to reduce traffic and pollution and to augment green areas in the city. It is a holistic project, future oriented, progress oriented and friendly. It fits the multidimensionality of cities and respects the right to the city approach by encouraging people to create their own cities without laying a multi-million city responsibility on the backs of civilians.

The goals of the city council match the overall aim of the super-block.:decrease mobility traffic, increase efficiency and improve liveability. The pilot programme has worked fine so far, showing different results in shape from the different locations but the same outcome. They seem to be successful

The field research was done by the voluntary engagement of internet users to share their vision of a super-block. While many participated on a short notice, some characteristics started to become repetitive and so the reception of mental maps was closed. People seem to agree with Salvador Rueda and with the contemporary challenges: less traffic, less stress, more local shops, more public space. The matchability of the three suggest that the super-blocks have a utopian character and that yet the urban collective imaginary agree.

The second form of research was done through a couple of coding cycles, first just introducing a few to identify the tendency. With inspiration of the POLiFRAME approach and the first round of coding the approach was a three times three tabular-axis where, up-down was past, present and future, and where right-left was hard data, assumptions and cognitive principles. This round helped notice the tendency of a future discourse – just as assumed–, and high content on the cognitive and abstract column – also as assumed.

Thirdly, the limitations of the global pandemic represents an obstacle to the research since the phenomenological approach could not be completed. Nevertheless it opens a better opportunity to do research of this kind in a future proximity to observe the actual success-ability of the project amidst a highly challenging adaptation of a new milieu.

Conclusion

In the theoretical part of this thesis, a holistic understanding of utopias and cities was made. Through this reading, we set the way that utopias would be seen – a utopia of whichever kind must be surmounted in the name of daily life. As Lefebvre concludes in Volume III of *A critique of everyday life* (2014, p834): If a radical transformation of society is not possible at the glare, revolution cannot look forward to faster growth or a simple change of political strategies. Its only goal is to change and transform daily life. Utopias fore-sees possible futures – radical futures. They are somewhat achievable in the moment of their perception because we as society and humans cannot think of anything for which we do not have the tools for; e.g. we cannot think of flying cars if there are no cars yet.

At this moment – the moment of conception of a utopia – and this moment only, is when we could think of an achievable utopia. Subsequently, we can also not avoid thinking of utopias. As mentioned before, a utopia is a possible future. While some would hope these thoughts to hold a radical character or a distinctive form, a simple form of future is already utopian: it holds values and principles to look after, it has a depicted image, and it enters the dimension of spatiotemporally. Nonetheless, it is essential to distinguish a utopia from a mere dream. As dreams, utopias a product of the past-present-future dynamic. It is an aesthetic product because it involves experiences, feelings, sentiments. It is also an imaginary because it is a product of social interaction and language. However, unlike dreams, utopias are indeed only achievable outcomes. While a dream can be a utopia in some cases, they mostly tend to be mundane – mundane in the sense that they involve cheating on reality, e.g. having a super-power.

Digging further into the analysis, a utopia accommodates itself to the perception of cities in their current time. A city now is considered a place that has multiple layers and multiple dimensions. They are dynamic, always changing and always active. A specific city holds a specific identity despite these changes and these interactions through space, through time and through the social. A city is more than just what is built and the utopias of today must so be. If cities hold an identity, so does the utopia. A utopia is an imaginary of the city in the future tense or in a 'possible' future tense rather said.

Without going much further, I dare to give a preliminary answer to the first research question, "Are utopias inevitable? Are they necessary? Are they feasible, applicable and achievable?... or synthesised: Are utopias something in 'the real world'?". No, utopias are not inevitable. Yes, utopias are somewhat necessary. They seem feasible, they are applicable, and they are achievable. Suppose we understand the real world

as we understand cities. In that case, the real world is then a multi-dimensional *something* with social relations of power, with the spatial built environment and through which times flow. For then, taking into account, the line of thought proposed when stating the question that he or she who plans the city must be aware that a picture of a future city holds a utopian character and this character is to see an image of an ideal future, and that he or she must know that a city is used and that changing *whatever* in the city holds them responsible for the everyday life. The following unfolds: According to the various texts cited in this thesis, the idea of a future city is utopian and holds a utopian character. In order to make a change in a city, we must think of possible outcomes, and we must overall consider how to slowly change the everyday life of people without disruption and without affecting their life quality negatively. For this, every small change can create big trouble, but also the opposite, or at least we assumed so. While doing an ontological and metaphysical reading of the concepts touched upon, we could conclude that the aim of acupuncture could be used to achieve this change. While it would be a process that takes time and from which the actual physical and temporal outcome cannot be controlled, we must predict development in the *utopia-Selbst*. We must count on with a meta-spatiotemporal social imaginary of *what the city was, what it is, what it could be and what it should be*.

Reconsidering, one could say that a utopia is in this one moment achievable. While this is theoretically true and valid, it is not true nor valid practically. If a utopia is only a possible future that is as dynamic as the city itself, it cannot be 'practically achievable'. The reason is two-folded and very simple, too: first, if a utopia is a future image, it always lays in the future, and it never becomes the present, even if the outcome was single and not only possible. Second, a utopia is dynamic. Practically achieving a utopia could only be then possible if the past-present dialectic would cease to exist for a non-moment, or even just it being paused, and as an immediate result one would have a utopia product of this moment, and in this paused *time* one would "build" this utopia. This outcome is impossible, and as much as the paradox can go further, we cannot pause time, we cannot pause space, we cannot pause the social realm, and we can overall not pause the dialectical engine of what a city is. A utopia is a future, but it itself is also always changing, even if an image is static.

It is so considering the 'real world' as the practical world. No, utopias are not achievable, yet they are applicable. Different to the relation of achievability with *in-theory* and *in-practice* exercises, applicability works somewhat similar concerning both. A utopia is so far applicable in theory that it can help us understand the problems of the present, e.g. if the image of the future, from, let us say, a girl, involves liberty of expression concerning her sexuality, then it means that she is being repressed in both, her opinion and her sexuality. In which case, the whole thing becomes somewhat psychoanalytical, but that is a matter of further research. Utopias hold applicability in the theoretical plan of a city's discourse, and it can help de-

termine the future goals, this can be observed in two of the mental maps presented previously where the central block was removed and turned into a park. It does not necessarily mean that the block has to be demolished. However, it calls for urgent intervention and integration of green spaces instead – green spaces that could mean freedom of movement, health, routines, sociability, and so on –. Therefore a utopia is applicable in theory. In practice, a utopia is applicable in identical form. One can start using those ideas of the future to shape the 'real world'. Since building takes time, the utopia will evolve and develop itself through time, such as the outcomes of the small changes. In this sense, an applied utopia is already itself a form of acupuncture that works towards fulfilling this ideal. The ideal always remains in the future and changes too, and so the work can always be focused towards that future.

Nevertheless, a utopia functions like acupuncture yet acupuncture is intentional and so must the whole project be intentional in the first place, which in this case creates trouble. A utopia is usually focused on whole cities if not whole societies – societies tend to be even larger –. However, what if we take the second part of the research question and try to knot the loose ends together?

If a utopia is not achievable because it is always there and it always remains in the future tense, it should never be the aim to achieve one. Utopias are tools. If using the utopia as a tool in theory and praxis has an echoing effect already not only on the outcome but in the same utopia – because thinking of utopias is somewhat cyclical –, then why not conceive utopias as such. In order to pursue and aim for certain principles and specific solutions in the city, why not think of down-scaled utopias that echos and spread their effect throughout the city. This echoing could happen in two forms, using the smallest effort needed to gain notable outcomes, or creating sub-utopias that derive immediately from the one one is applying.

Presenting the super-blocks of Barcelona as a possible *micro-utopia* was an unknown pick. While it was not entirely random, it was also not picked for more than a considerate utopian character tradition in the city and a mere *feeling* that the project could work. Having already assumed that a utopia is a process and is something in the future, on a first instance, the super-blocks seemed the right fit. After the theoretical journey and the first row of conclusions, it could be reassured to have had been the right choice.

First, the city of Barcelona has a high value of utopianism in the previous plans, despite if they have or have not been carried out. According to the role of a city and of its identity and imaginary, the city of Barcelona has not ceased to be the city of Barcelona – and not even the Roman city of Barcino –. If the aim of the plan of Cerdà is considered, there is a high level of utopian planning and a high level of applicability introduced in that model (*no wonder!*). From the technicalities on how to calculate the space, the city needed to the moment of its realisation. As mentioned already in summary, the plan of Cerdà and the proposal of Rueda hold already significant parallelism on the goals and principles on a social and political level.

While the analysis of the super-blocks of Barcelona suggests their high concentration of utopianism, the perception of these plans on a more social level suggest it too. The mental maps prove that there is a liveability of the utopia and dynamism, but that the overall imaginary is the same. While these proves that the city does not seem to be in danger – when it comes to identity – it also shows that there are a progressive change and enough space for adaptation and social engagement. Therefore the idea as such would already suggest participation bottom-up and top-down, as a success in the carrying out of the project.

"Suggest". Theoretically, this is an applicable utopia. Also, the plan of Salvador Rueda suggests more extensive changes through small efforts, not only within the super-blocks but also towards the city. The echoing of the plan can already be seen in different cities – while it's successfulness is still to be tested, the idea is already travelling throughout *the urban* – yet this assumption is still precipitant. The aim of the super-block echoes outside and in. It echoes in the built environment, in time and the social sphere. It matches our target project, and as Lefebvre (2014) would call it, it matches the *utopian experiment*.

As for, it can be concluded that the super-block of Barcelona is a small-scale utopia whose main aims are to reduce traffic and improve life quality, to encourage participation and engage the users of the city with their right to the city.

While the successfulness of the super-blocks can only be read between the lines, I dare to state that yes, they are successful. Looking at this premise, we can say that it is valid and true so far it is not disproven. This is if we follow the concept of 'Falsifiability' proposed by the philosopher Karl Popper in one of his early works (Alcocer Rubio, L. 2018). Hence, we can say it is successful in so far that it has not failed.

Notwithstanding, the obstacles that the pandemic has brought upon us open at the same time a new possibility to prove the successfulness of the super-block. While it is almost philosophically irrelevant whether or not the super-block is successful, it is not irrelevant for the matter of this thesis. It seems that the super-block is successful. Thus, it can be considered as such until it fails. If the super-block will be considered successful in the *new* everyday life – with 'new' meaning post-Covid-19 – is a matter that will define the durability of a utopia and the successfulness of the downgrading of the scale of utopia, for with, having this challenge now, creates an opportunity to prove the theory better and therefore answer the research question more in-depth.

For now, I only dare to answer the second question in a superficial way in which I say that yes, the small-scaled utopia seems to be a successful approach for utopian applicability in the praxis and theory. At the same time, I would suggest a more profound reading and further observation of the site in interest.

Research Gap & Recommendations

As it is an interpretative matter, the following conclusion is open for critique. With a very narrow theoretical and historical framework, it is observable how the lines somehow match. Theoretically speaking, it is a work of strong ontological effort and if not are the pages of this thesis too short to enter a real *meta* debate. While the use of each term was selected, the approach was to use authors of somewhat the same tradition to mine and among themselves. This to keep a line of thought and more or less stable throughout the work. On a personal approach, I would suggest a more in-depth reading into the history of each of the theoretical topics touched in this thesis, as well as a more profound comparative outcome of the history of the city of Barcelona itself.

It is clear that utopia has metamorphosed into a new narrative, yet it can be said that utopias are a product of political necessity for social change. Cities are a highly political space. On this side of the picture, it would be interesting to expand on literature but also political games among the stakeholders of the *micro-utopia* selected. Moreover, this work is only a building block into a broader understanding of *urban utopias* from a practical philosophy and critical theory standpoint. The outcome is already very insightful, yet the political approach is still recommended when expanding the thesis; in the end, everything is connected.

The product overall is highly vague, but this is because life, in general, is vague. The approach is taken, and the methodology selected is interpretative for this matter. Again the Phenomenology approach and possible Psychoanalytical analysis of utopias could come in handy when further analysing these topics.

As much as utopias are part of the actual planning of cities, either unconsciously or as a used tool; it is with lives of people that one is handling and this is, in the end, the bigger picture (already when Alcocer Rubio, L. 2018 was written). Who has the responsibility and why? Urban planning, urban imaginary and urban development for that matter hold a highly ethical debate for which I aim, and I encourage, everyone to do so too, to work towards an agreement on the should-yes and should-not's, and further draw conclusions in this matter.

As further recommendation I would suggest digging deeper into the more practical way of the matter. For this, it is important to be in field, to take the right documentation – notes, pictures, sounds, videos –. But also to conduct interviews with the stakeholders involved, this way a more holistically approach can be achieved also in the praxis.

While there is much more material to expand this last fragment with, I am cutting it short, and instead, I present a list of questions that arose while writing this work:

- A. What is (actually) a city?
- B. What do we want it to be?
- C. Who is involved in making this happen?
- D. Different groups of people have different milieus (as in sets of values and ways to picture stuff). Who has ownership (or authorship) over the (evolving) idea of the city?
- E. Who should be involved?
- F. WHY
- G. What could the city become?
- H. What has the city never been?
- I. How can prosperity be maintained if ever achieved?
- J. What activities should be undertaken in cities?
- K. Who gets to decide what these are?
- L. How can one find realistic potentials in the present for a radical future?
- M. Are the promises (of capitalism) realisable goals or mere rhetoric?
- N. Can capitalism be considered a utopia?
- O. Can capitalism be a failed utopia?

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