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Peter Rowe (Rotherham, Reino Unido, 1920) ha publicado más de una docena de libros, entre los cuales *Civic Realism* (1998), *Making a Middle Landscape* (1991) y *Design Thinking* (1990) han hecho contribuciones significativas a las teorías de la arquitectura y el urbanismo. Desde 1985 es profesor en el Graduate School of Design de la Universidad de Harvard, que condujo como decano de 1992 a 2004. Desde que dedicara una sección de *Civic Realism* a proyectos en Barcelona, ha mantenido lazos estrechos con la comunidad arquitectónica de la ciudad. Rowe acredita la idea del libro *Building Barcelona* a José Antonio Acebillo, arquitecto, cerebro de los Juegos de 1992, director de desarrollo urbano de la ciudad y más tarde el director general de Barcelona Regional. Además, Rowe reconoce la influencia de su «buen amigo... y ahora colega de Harvard» Joan Busquets.

Building Barcelona es un relato detallado de las espectaculares transformaciones urbanas de la ciudad desde la década de 1970 hasta la de 2000. Es una narrativa optimista sobre el renacimiento arquitectónico de la ciudad y se une a la legión de textos celebrando el "modelo Barcelona" de desarrollo urbano. Sin embargo, destaca por subestimar los proyectos arquitectónicos: no se centra en imágenes brillantes de espacios urbanos provocadores, más bien centra su atención en los mecanismos políticos y económicos que permitieron la construcción de estos espacios.

Comienza con una síntesis perspicaz de historia cultural, política, economía y arquitectura. Mientras que Rowe señala que los esfuerzos para «recuperar Barcelona» comenzaron antes la muerte de Franco, su narrativa apunta a un cambio radical de dirección entre el franquismo y la Transición. Reconoce que los movimientos sociales urbanos iniciaron el cambio pero luego resta importancia a la oposición de la comunidad a los programas de desarrollo que siguieron después. Los actores principales en este renacimiento son los dirigentes políticos y los innovadores de la financiación pública y administración, especialmente las empresas.

Rowe describe los mecanismos complejos que operaron tras los proyectos. Esta perspectiva inevitablemente descuida un diagnóstico social más amplio de contexto e impactos. En un recuento de este tipo, la Plaça dels Països Catalans recibe elogios por sus bajos costes de mantenimiento pero no recibe ningún comentario sobre su actual estado de degradación, y la Vila Olímpica por la creación de un «microcosmos de la condición histórica de Barcelona», a pesar de su flagrante borrado de tejido histórico. Rowe se acerca más a la crítica con el Fórum del 2004, al que etiqueta de «inquietante, incluso distópico» pero al que excusa porque representa un liderazgo audaz e innovador.

Rowe ha aceptado el papel de los arquitectos en los esfuerzos para promover la competitividad global de una ciudad, para mejorar el acceso a los mercados, las comunicaciones e infraestructuras. En *Construir Barcelona* ofrece una penetrante mirada sobre cómo los líderes en las comunidades políticas, económicas y de arquitectura han guiado ese crecimiento. El fragmento seleccionado es una reflexión crítica, aunque uno desearía que se hubiera integrado en la narrativa del libro o que hubiera suscitado una mirada más cercana a los impactos del "modelo Barcelona" en la vida cotidiana de sus ciudadanos.

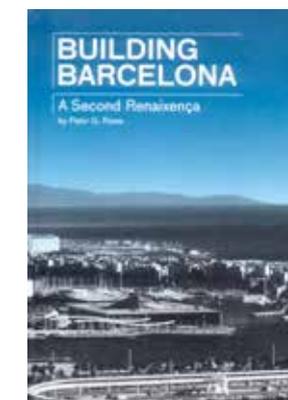
David de la Peña

Building Barcelona: A Second Renaissance

Autor: **Peter G. Rowe.**

Edición: Barcelona Regional – Actar, Barcelona, 2006.

Fragmento seleccionado: Páginas 142 a 147.



Too Far, Too Fast?

Judging from what's either already in place or under construction and what's moved substantially through the planning process since the late 1990s, Barcelona has progressed forward towards re-positioning itself within its regional if not global context. Major infrastructural improvements, though overdue and not in place as yet, promise to provide a much stronger and thicker network of linkages and processing facilities necessary to sustain the city as a major, if not the major, transportation and distribution hub in the region and a major center in Southern Europe. The construction and improvement, to an international scale and international audience, of convention and trade venues –probably the largest aggregation in Southern Europe– together with ancillary support facilities like hotels and places of entertainment, also places Barcelona in a more competitive position and both recognizes and anticipates the need to nudge economic production, within the city, further in the direction of the service sector. Likewise, a broadening of the base of cultural urban tourism, through better linkage and accommodation to the outside world, as well as a bolstering of its cultural programs and capitalizing further on the distinctive urban-architectural assets and leisure-time activities available within the city, has made Barcelona a primary European destination. Furthermore, a plethora of different kinds of commercial construction, although somewhat less so in housing, continues to be attractive to outside investment and business re-location, again enabling an economic shift in the direction of the service sector. Also, the city began to move more strategically towards 'new economic' activities and began actively courting markets involved in information technology and related knowledge industries. In addition, there appears to have been no diminution in the perception of Barcelona's chief asset—its high 'quality of life', along with its good business environment. Indeed, the city is a more attractive place, by these kinds of measures, than it was five or six years earlier. Finally, strong leadership from the top in municipal matters, by now following well-honed administrative and technical procedures, again was successful, or at least by and large accepted, in guiding Barcelona towards yet another or continued re-incarnation of itself as a city.

Favorable macro-economic circumstances also came into play, as Spain's economy grew by nearly 19 percent since 1998, around 7 percentage points more than the euro area as a whole.

Between these broad, positively-inclined brush strokes, however, there are several disquieting issues, trends and limitations that might qualify such a rosy picture of Barcelona. Mainly, they concern specific aspects or projects within the city's recent round of transformations, but collectively

raise questions about whether Barcelona and its leadership was moving too far and too fast, in some instances; while underestimating circumstances to be overcome for imagined outcomes, in other instances; getting the balance right in further instances; and generally pointing up limits to the process of successive re-invention that Barcelona has embarked upon over the past twenty-five years or so. The case for the 'new economy' and 22@BCN, for instance, seems unlikely to be as successful in the manner that may have been expected originally. Initiated when the world-wide 'dot.com bubble' was still inflated, the city's strategy, nevertheless, ignored or seemed unaware of what have proven to be some of the immutable realities of sustained, successful establishment of centers of information and related high-tech development and application. To be fair, Barcelona and Poblenou is not the only place this seems to have happened. There are as many failures as there are successes elsewhere, in this regard, and as discussed earlier in this chapter. In fact, the 'Silicon Valleys' and Bangalores of this world are rather more the exceptions than the general rule. They have come about by virtue of close proximity and interaction with relevant world-class institutions of higher learning. They have been the recipients of heavy, long-term governmental and industrial support for their programmatic activities, and they have developed, again over time, internal labor and managerial cultures, albeit differently, that are self-sustaining, usually with high premiums placed on general environmental ambiance and quality. At the moment, anyway, and into the foreseeable future, Barcelona has few of these virtues or they are only weakly present there. Also, as discussed earlier, 'Silicon Alley' in New York, which served as the model closest to Barcelona, business is far from booming, even with levels of support that are probably higher than those that could be mustered, realistically, in Barcelona. In short, nagging questions remain about the efficacy of there being an operational 'new economy', as imagined, in Poblenou. Certainly, moves have been made to encourage location and re-location of centers of higher learning in or near the area, stretching the center of gravity of such places from other more established areas in the city. However, is it enough, of the right kind, and of sufficient pre-eminence? Just as certainly, plans have been made and are being carried out to physically transform the area into a variety of commercial, service industry and related residential functions, with a keen eye towards different requirements of would-be investors and tenants, be they small, moderately-sized, or large. However, as the recent history of entrepreneurial aggregations in the so-called 'new economy' have suggested, firms can be highly foot-loose and their terms of locational preference can be unpredictable and even fickle. Somewhat less certain, but a plausible basis for Barcelona's immersion in information technology and related knowledge industries, is its high standing, at least in the Spanish-speaking world, in publishing and related media. However, isn't this already underway and in other parts of the city and metropolitan area? Then, beyond these essentially physical facilitations of 22@BCN, over which the city can rightly exert its energies, there are much larger-order issues, well beyond such influence. Huge amounts of research and development capital, for one, appear to be in a much larger national and international bailiwick, with substantial competition from other claimants. A spontaneous culture of entrepreneurial inclinations of the right kind, for another, does not come readily to Barcelona partially for the reasons described earlier in this chapter. At best, the planned transformation of Poblenou, under the 22@BCN program, should probably be viewed more simply as another urban renovation and renewal of a district and neighborhoods with what that implies, including resistance on the part of locals for what they might construe, at times, as going too far into unnecessary gentrification. It seems unlikely that the projected 130,000 new jobs will turn up any time soon and the recent decision to increase the proportion of residential development does not seem inappropriate, as well as the plans for further public open-space improvements.

Then, there is the venue for Forum 2004 and its after use. As mentioned, it is vast and houses a collection of numerous and somewhat specialized facilities for conventions, exhibitions, performances and other large gatherings, in addition to area-wide park and recreational spaces. Its capacity, during the Forum, was pegged at somewhere like 40,000 to 50,000 people per day, although that seems even somewhat low, given the size and spatial articulation of the site. In fact, it never actually reached near that capacity, let alone on a regular basis over the course of a long event. Even recognizing both the need and opportunity to construct an international standard of convention and other related facilities, the issues of size, or expansiveness, and degree of aggregation of facilities, still seems to remain, begging the question of what happens afterwards. Further, although Barcelona is a relatively compact city, as discussed earlier, and avoiding questions about any alternative sites, the venue is perceived by many to be distant from the 'center of things', so to speak, in the city. While this perception may be only a matter of the present geography and will change over time, once the area becomes more established, remedial action, as required at the site for Seville's World's Fair, may also become necessary to more fully and purposefully integrate the venue into the city. If appropriately managed, the benefits to the nearby neighborhoods in Sant Martí and in Besòs, socially and environmentally marginalized for so long, on the other hand, are likely to become relatively clear and useful.

Further, during this plunge into large capital projects by the city, other issues have also arisen without clear resolutions. On the broader environmental front, atmospheric emissions have continued to rise over the past ten years, as noted earlier. Periodic overloading of treatment plants, through a single rather than double system of pipes, continues to aggravate the danger of continued water pollution. Adequate fresh water resources may also become an issue in the near future. Beyond its immediate control, although within its realm of suasion as the leader in the metropolitan area, the Municipality is and should also be concerned with issues of mobility and sprawl. No doubt there is some resentment towards the city from its neighbors, due to its success and stance within the region, but there is a case to be made for the inevitable fact that 'they are all in much the same boat together', as it were, and that environmental issues rarely, if ever, stop at political boundaries. Also, substantial immigration, usually of poorer people as in the past, although now from both inside and outside of the Spanish-speaking world, are influencing the city's demography and creating some social and cultural tensions in what is otherwise a reasonably tolerant population. These range from very real strains on services, all the way through to misunderstandings about the accepted way of going about things in daily life. Again this is not peculiar or even particular to Barcelona. Much of Europe is beginning to feel the same tensions and pressures. However, being perceived as being a rich and progressive city, certainly within the Spanish context, can bring with it extra burdens and responsibilities in these regards. In addition, there is rising crime in the city and the quality of education and its relationship to employment opportunities, especially among younger adults, remains a problem, although again also moving beyond the city's immediate remit and resources. Then too, negative perceptions about strong government intervention into the dealings of the private sector have appeared, from time to time, just below the surface of what seems to be an amiable and progressive atmosphere of public-private relations. This may be simply a facet of strong public leadership and all to be good. At those moments, however, when the City needs substantial private sector participation, as in many of the projects now underway, too much paternalism and control can be counterproductive. In fact, partly because of some public reaction to this round of large capital projects, among other issues, Mayor Clos and his government received a more qualified mandate from the voters during the 2003 municipal elections, than they enjoyed previously. Although re-elected in coalition, the PSC lost five seats in the council and drew a proportion of the vote that was

among the lowest in the socialist party's municipal electoral history. Their rival, the PP, however, and its candidate –Alberto Fernández Díaz– fared little better, gaining just one seat on the council, with the CiU losing a seat. Among other parties that fared well were the 'greens' –*Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds* (ICV)– which gained several seats.

Finally, returning to a point made earlier regarding Barcelona's consistent occupancy of the vanguard on matters of urban-architectural expression, a question can be raised about how extensively this more or less official stance can persist, without running into several outcomes that are less flattering than those that have occurred in the past. Looking back over the 'River to River Transformations', many of the projects, laudably, have been encouraged to take on different, sometimes seemingly experimental, and even novel forms. Well known as something of a laboratory for urban architecture in contemporary times, as well as at other times, Barcelona, during this recent binge of public projects, continued to set its architectural sights high and wide, but, did it go too far, or is that legitimately even possible to comment on here? The answer is probably yes on both counts, at least from several vantage points, and had little to do with the efforts of the architects involved. On the production side of projects, architects were selected and engaged largely on the basis of limited and invited competitions. Review of projects in process then came before 'quality commissions', as they were called, for comment, advice and guidance. These procedures were again all to the good. However, they tended to involve a group, often an international group, of like-minded people, who were also knowledgeable, sophisticated and largely open, in a worldly way, to design thinking from elsewhere, as well as locally. Consequently, matters of urban-architectural expression and, indeed, programmatic configuration, were pushed, unconsciously or not, in many contemporary if not avant-garde directions. At times also, a collector's mentality came into play, along with the architectural connoisseurship, leading almost predictably to a certain roster of architects, among others, or less specifically to particular formal pre-projections of projects that might be existing and architecturally interesting to have in the city, although perhaps only for some. In terms of advancing the 'arts' of architecture there is nothing much wrong with this orientation. Problems arise, however, on the reception side of projects, when pushing the proverbial 'urban-architectural envelope' outstrips popular taste or, in a city like Barcelona where this taste is well-developed and often tolerant of contemporaneity in design, when a point of sheer saturation is reached with regard to novelty and enough becomes enough. A similar response also comes about when the public, or when publics, who may be far from 'died-in-the-wool' traditionalists find themselves befuddled, perplexed and estranged by what they see and experience, particularly when the projects involved come, as they do in Barcelona, on the heels of other temporarily-inclined, public sponsored efforts in the recent past. As discussed earlier in chapters two and three, it is often difficult to judge, or pre-judge, such a threshold. Comments, for instance, like "I'm not sure where I am any more," or "all this is beginning to look, or looks, like somewhere else", heard, for instance, around the Forum, do signal some disquiet, although, from a critical-theoretical point of view, they do also beg the question of whether appearing to be from 'somewhere else' is still a valid projective position to take. It may well be that deeper impetuses behind 'somewhere else' are also present in Barcelona, although without much in the way of architectural revelation. It may also be that a whole program, or set of programs, is new to the city, although logically required in order to move forward and to make better lives for people, bringing with it elements of different scales and expressive strangeness. In both cases, thresholds of acceptance may or may not have been breached, or it is simply a matter of time and sustained acquaintance. One aspect of this kind of discussion is relatively clear, however. When the public becomes largely satisfied with their lot and physical circumstances, having bought into successive rounds of substantial urban-architectural novelty, transformation and

even experimentation, they will balk at more that is different. The current situation in Barcelona, surrounding at least some of its new projects, seems to have skirted very close to, if not over, this kind of threshold, raising the very real possibility that the city, while offering strong and otherwise responsible leadership, moved, as it were, 'too far and too fast'.