

**BARCELONA, SPAIN: ECONOMIC AND
URBAN/REGIONAL REVITALIZATION IN
THE POST 1976 PERIOD**

*A REPORT FOR THE FORUM FRONTERIZO COUNCIL
GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT OF SAN DIEGO- TIJUANA
PROJECT*

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One of the great twentieth century success stories in urban economic development is the city/region of Barcelona, Spain. As I shall outline below, Barcelona's success can be tied to a combination of history, urban/regional culture, politics, good urban and regional planning strategies, with a focus on design, and a strategy of marketing and promotion in the global economy. Only two decades ago, Barcelona, was in a state of disarray. Industry was shutting down, and unemployment rising. Freeways choked the downtown with traffic, while rows of high rise block apartments and factories blanketed the placeless suburban outer ring. In the urban core, the Gothic quarter and nearby historic districts were in a sad state of deterioration. The waterfront, lined with abandoned warehouses and factories was cut off from the city and lay in ruin. A city planner told me that during that period he drove his car down to the Mediterranean Sea near the old port; when he got out to survey the scene, he was forced to flee back to his car, as a gang of large gray rats chased him down (Ferrer, 1997).

Twenty years later Barcelona is one of the most celebrated urban planning success stories in the world. Galvanized by the 1992 Olympics, Barcelona has transformed its waterfront, improved traffic circulation patterns in the center, revitalized historic districts, built or redesigned over 100 new parks and public spaces, fortified its economy, and generally enhanced its appearance and well being. One British architecture critic has said of Barcelona: "It is the only truly great success in large scale urban planning since the Second World War" (Moix, 1994- 232).

Historic context

While it may be difficult to connect distant events to contemporary Barcelona's economic and urban redevelopment, a sense of the historic context of the city explains some of the urban/regional cultural factors that contributed to the evolution of a political environment and civic will to proceed with major transformation decisions of the last 25 years.

Barcelona began as a small port in the fifth century B.C. By 100 B.C., it was called Barcino, and was a Roman city of walls and sixty eight towers (Busquets, 1992). Like much of Spain, it passed under Muslim rule during the Middle Ages, with the Roman street grid and other developments partially destroyed. By the Gothic period (1300 AD), Barcelona was once again a thriving port, distinguished by its trade market (*llotja*) and by the growing dockyards (*drassanes*). During this period, the Catalan empire dominated the Mediterranean, with Barcelona as its primary urban center. By the late 15th century, Barcelona's fate was forever changed, as it came under the hegemony of a unified Spanish kingdom through the marriage of King Ferdinand and Isabela. The so called Hapsburgh royal family would rule Spain for the next two hundred years.

Several of Barcelona's key urban construction projects occurred in these early periods. The opening of the medieval wall in the 14th and 15th centuries expanded the Old City (Ciutat Vella), adding a new neighborhood--*el Raval*. This led to the construction of a third wall around the new addition to the city. In the space left by the torn down medieval wall was born the *Rambla*, whose name is derived from the river-like drainage of rainwater through it and into the Mediterranean. While in its early incarnation, it served as a moat and sewer along the city wall, it soon became, in the words of one scholar, "... the first urban space of grand dimensions for strolling, leisure, fairs, and periodic markets" (Busquets, 1992: 58). Because the Rambla once defined the edge of the medieval town, important commercial activities had always clustered along its edges-- this later led to the location of the main city market, or Boqueria, here. Gradually, the Rambla began to attract important land uses-- convents, then the university, aristocratic palaces, and an opera house. The formation of the Rambla established an important tradition of urban public life in this Mediterranean port that continues through the twentieth century.

The Modern Period

Most observers consider Barcelona's modern period to begin in the middle of the nineteenth century. Catalonians were fed up with the Bourbon monarchy and with the physical manifestation--city walls-- of the royal family in their capital city, Barcelona. Barcelona's greatest urbanist thinker and activist--Ildefonso Cerda-- emerged at this time. Cerda was trained as a civil engineer, but his vision of the city went beyond the science of structure, incorporating questions of politics, social equity, economy and culture. His 1867 work *Teoria General de La Urbanizacion* (General Theory of Urbanization) may be one of the greatest early works on modern cities ever written, and in Spain, Cerda is frequently referred to as the "father of the science of urbanism" (Center for Contemporary Culture, 1994).

Cerda became a politician and lobbied for the tearing down of the old walls around Barcelona, a project that would last through the second half of the 19th century. His 1859 plan for the expansion of the city into a zone called the *Eixample* (addition) was originally rejected by Barcelona's city government, but it was awarded to him by higher authorities in Madrid, possibly because his socialist philosophies appealed to the liberal Madrid leadership of the times (Hughes, 1993). The Cerda plan for the Eixample put into practice many of his ideas about planning, social hygiene and equity. The layout for the Eixample emphasized a geometric hierarchy of blocks and streets that would allow residents of different social classes access to the new growth zone. Strict construction standards would control density and congestion.

Despite a number of changes that compromised Cerda's original plan, the preservation of the Eixample through the 20th century leaves one of Barcelona's greatest urban planning legacies at least partially intact- and its emphasis on hygiene, social equality and open space is an important reminder of the key influences on the modern city. One positive adaptation of the Cerda plan, was the building of private streets- called *Passatges* (passages)-- lined with wealthy homes and gardens which illustrate the proper ratio between built space and open space that Cerda had intended for all residents of the Eixample.

Several great urbanist enterprises marked the transition to the twentieth century in Barcelona. As more industry relocated in around the city, wealthy entrepreneurs sought bigger and more impressive buildings. The late 19th century Universal Exposition (1888) had inspired Catalan architects and artists to search for a regional style, a Catalan architecture. This led to the emergence of a growing commitment to new building styles generally termed

"Modernismo." The style tended to combine modern materials with historic designs. Antoni Gaudi and a collection of talented architects and artists transformed Barcelona's cultural landscape in the first decades of the twentieth century. Meanwhile an impressive new park system was being put into place. The old fortress had been torn down and converted into a great neoclassical park. Now the land on Montjuic, the mountain overlooking the harbor, was formally designed as a park, and new parks were added, including one designed by Gaudi himself- the Parc Guell.

The Civil War and subsequent ascendance to power of Franco in the decades of the 1940's, 1950's and 1960's ushered in a period of decline in innovation in urban planning in Barcelona. Ironically, this was a period when the city most needed the great tradition of progressive urban design, since there was massive rural to urban migration into the city, and a demand for solutions to urban overcrowding. While Franco's government was busy building monumental infrastructure- highways in particular irregular housing shanties were growing on the periphery of the metropolis. The solution to the housing crisis came in the form of massive residential *poligonos*, tower block residential complexes on the outskirts of the city. Meanwhile, densification of the inner city continued, traffic increased and a sense of chaos reigned.

Urban Recuperation: 1976-present

The story of Barcelona's recovery begins with the death of Franco, and the subsequent transition toward a national democracy in Spain in the late 1970's. Franco's death was one of a confluence of macro forces and events that would set the stage for the dramatic transformation of the Barcelona metropolis. The late 1970's and early 1980's marked a period of European (and Spanish) economic revival. Particularly important to Spain was its integration into the European Community's trade bloc in the mid- 1980's. This meant not only increased trade possibilities, but higher credit ratings, greater potential for attracting global investors and more national confidence in the economy. By 1982, with the election of a Socialist government in Spain, it was clear that regions far from the national capital might be faced with a more favorable climate for cooperation in economic development than before. This was especially important since Barcelona was in the midst of a huge economic crisis. Heavy industry was in decline. From 1978-1983 the city of Barcelona lost 100,000 jobs, while the metropolitan region lost over 300,000 jobs. Average income in 1979 was about \$4200/ year; this would jump to nearly \$13,000/year by 1993, the year after the Olympic Games (Borja, 1996).

Employment losses spurred political leadership to contemplate immediate changes. The feeling among leaders was that Barcelona was still in the position of having a relatively strong economic and industrial base. The national transition toward democracy was met by a similar political transformation in the Barcelona metropolitan region. Two mayors-- Narcis Serra in the late 1970's and early 1980's, followed by Pascal Maragall understood that a good redevelopment strategy for Barcelona was not isolationist-- but was built around embracing both Cataluna and the rest of Spain (1996). Their strategies to promote foreign investment through large scale projects like the Olympics were born not only through local networks, but by selling the idea to national politicians in Madrid (Moix, 1994). Their vision was one of Barcelona as the future capital of "the north of the south of Europe" (Hughes, 1993), a center of industry and cultural innovation, with strong cross-border economic and transport linkages to the French cities of Montpellier, Marseilles and Toulouse, as well as across the Mediterranean.

Equally impressive was the vision of local politicians and leaders in understanding that to grow economically, Barcelona had to reinvent itself as a city. Mayor Maragall stated that "cities are places for invention, for creativity, for freedom." (Hughes, 1993: 37). He also told a writer at

La Vanguardia, the major newspaper of the region, that "the principal attraction of the city is its urbanism, that is, the ensemble of public works that it has taken on and completed" (Moix, 1994: 78).

Barcelona's reinvention began with the appointment of a Catalan architect-- Oriol Bohigas-- as the head of the urban planning office, called the *Delegacion de Servicios Urbanos* (Office of Urban Services). Bohigas developed a close relationship with the new mayor (Maragall), and crafted a practical and politically astute planning strategy for the city, built around three central principles- 1) an emphasis on tangible projects, rather than "plans" that would gather dust on the shelves of urban bureaucrats; 2) neighborhoods (*barris*) would be at the center of all redevelopment; 3) decentralization. Taken together these three strategies led to an amazing Renaissance of the city in a little more than a decade and a half

1) **Tangible projects.** The tangible projects element of the Bohigas strategy centered around a set of key structural changes in the city: reorienting traffic away from the center, through the construction of two new beltways (the Ronda del Mar, and Ronda de Montonya); construction of underground parking spaces; reclaiming the waterfront; recycling abandoned spaces into parks, plazas and other public spaces adorned with sculpture. By moving traffic out of the historic center (*Ciutat Vella*), the city was free to engage in a massive rehabilitation of the old city. This rehabilitation would be centered around controlling the circulation of cars and people through the historic quarter, and strengthening the identity of the quarter's four principal neighborhoods-- Raval, Barrio Gotico, Barceloneta, and the Casco Antiguo. New and improved public spaces helped strengthen neighborhood identity, as did control of the one million visitors who descend upon the central city on weekends (Pera Cabrera, 1997).

The emphasis on tangible programs produced over 160 new projects in a decade. These projects reveal a salient theme in Barcelona's transformation- the importance of design (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1987). So important was design that one of the major books about the city's reawakening is titled "city of architects" (Moix, 1994). As one former city planner stated about its redevelopment strategy, "everyone recognized that design sells" (Calvet Mollea, 1997). The thinking in the government was that by designing great places for people to meet and circulate the city would both improve the quality of life of its citizens, and enhance its competitiveness in the global economy. Barcelona's attraction to businesses and global consumers (including tourists) was enhanced by its image. Its image began with the natural environment, but was refined and given substance by architecture and urban form. So, the civic leaders decided, what better way to uplift the city's image than to improve and beautify the places where people mingle and gather.

The city embarked on a campaign to create new and spectacular public places, as well as redesign older ones. In a little more than a decade, public monies were used to build some 160 major projects, including new promenades, gardens, parks, plazas, playgrounds, public monuments and other gathering places. A former slaughterhouse was recycled into a magnificent park, embellished by one of the last great sculptures of Catalan artist Joan Miro. Factories and quarries were transformed into neighborhood parks and community centers. Artists, sculptors and architects were brought in to create colorful works of public art throughout the city.

The successful reclaiming of the waterfront was given a great jolt by the Olympic redevelopment project. The 1992 Olympics attracted more than two billion dollars for infrastructure development, with one of the major emphases on rebuilding the waterfront. But, what Barcelona's planners did was argue that sports facilities should not be the ultimate goal of the Olympic investment (as it was in the Los Angeles Olympics). Rather the

Olympics would be used to supplement and complement the overall urban redevelopment strategy. Thus while the Olympic monies helped build the "olympic village" along the waterfront, it also provided a catalyst for a larger waterfront renovation project that included five new seafront parks, 5 kilometers of public access beach, a waterfront promenade, and space for offices and new residential development.

2) **Neighborhoods.** During the late 1960's and early 1970's, owing to the poor quality of life in the periphery, and the housing crisis, new social movements had arisen in the barrios. These movements created spontaneous political forces called *Asociaciones de Vecinos* (Neighborhood Associations). These groups represented a powerful political lobby as Barcelona began to rethink its urban planning strategies in the late 1970's. The General Metropolitan Plan (1976) called for decentralization of the city, and redefinition of its spatial order in response to changing conditions. Again, the emphasis was on redevelopment by delivering more to the peripheral lower class neighborhoods. Some planners have argued that the problem at that point was not the housing, but the quality of life in those barrios (Ferrer, 1997). Thus, the Bohigas strategy began by building new parks, plazas, promenades and commercial redevelopment in the poorer zones of the city. Many of the 160 new projects mentioned above were located in the working class communities.

3) **Decentralization.** The renewed attention to neighborhoods overlapped with the larger strategy of decentralization. The idea was that Barcelona's redevelopment needed to recover the city's traditional sense of neighborhood. Thus, as one writer put it "the center should not be showcased at the expense of the periphery, and run down and shapeless places all over town be brought back..." (Hughes, 1993: 41). One way to do this was with Oriol Bohigas public space projects, which would not be concentrated only in the tourism sections of the old city, but rather be dispersed throughout the working class barrios. These would then be the focus of what Mayor Maragall referred to as "a set of urban spaces-- parks, squares-- of high urban and design quality throughout the city" (Ibid.). Adding to the momentum toward decentralization was the introduction in the 1980's of a new planning strategy called "Areas of New Centrality". This strategy defined twelve urban activity centers that would be emphasized as new "business districts" to take the pressure off the old city-Eixample core. Four of the areas of new centrality were Olympic zones, while the others were decentralized, high density activity areas including the port, rail stations, cultural zones, and commercial corridors (Borja, 1996).

Decentralization also involved reorganizing the territorial economic and spatial structure of the region. Barcelona authorities view the city of Barcelona as part of a "metropolitan network of cities," in which the city of Barcelona is well connected by transportation and communication with its 26 suburban towns and cities. The government emphasizes "recentralization" of existing outlying towns, especially where new high tech industries can be located. At the same time, such a territorial strategy, is only workable if the political, economic and historic "nerve center"-- the city of Barcelona-- is adequately outfitted with appropriate infrastructure to connect with the ring of cities around it (Adjuntament de Barcelona, 1999a)

Economic and urban planners in the Barcelona region see the coastline as an important regional development connector to the region. Table 1 summarizes some of the planning projects envisioned by the government. Two rivers-- the Besos and the Llobregat-- flow from the hills toward the waterfront, and out to the Mediterranean. The state and local governments are committed to rehabilitating the rivers, both of which have been ecologically degraded, and redeveloping the towns and cities along them, which ultimately will connect to

the city of Barcelona. For example, south of the Olympic Village, a large-scale housing and economic revitalization project will convert the rundown industrial district and working class barrio of Poblenou into a vital economic center, a second Olympic Village. The Besos River sub-region will be ecologically reconditioned, its decaying industrial uses converted to a park, with housing, light industry and office space around it. A new port and waterfront open space at the Llobregat River will enhance this environmentally troubled industrial district. Much of the financing for this second phase of waterfront development comes from the Catalonia regional government, from the municipal government of Barcelona, and from the private sector.

Table 1: WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT PROJECTS: BARCELONA

Project	Date completed	Capital Outlay (millions of pesetas)*
Olympic Village	1992	161,888*
Poble Nou waterfront	1999-2000	20,000
Diagonal-Mar project	2005	207,000
Besos River park/ waterfront development	2004	2,700**
Llobregat port		200,000

*denotes 1992 pesetas, otherwise 1999 currency

** estimate for River park only, budget not available for waterfront project

Source: Adjuntament de Barcelona, 1999a; Borja, 1996

Global Strategies for Economic Development

The 1992 Olympic Games became the catalyst for more than urban redevelopment—they became a means by which to begin to resituate Barcelona in the international marketplace. Indeed one government study stated that the city needed to "take maximum advantage of the investment in infrastructure and image developed for the Games to definitively situate Barcelona and by extension, Catalonia, in the international agendas and financial circuits" (Borja, 1996). The strategy for Barcelona centered around two notions: a) to market Barcelona in a way that attracts high level business, tourist and institutional groups (conferences, meetings, etc.); b) to create a "Barcelona trademark", a set of products and services that international investors would want to purchase.

To achieve this international marketing goal, city leaders crafted an economic development approach with seven strategies (Borja, 1996) that would make Barcelona:

- 1) a first class manufacturing center for Europe, especially in the areas of design and industrial systems development;
- 2) a distribution center for merchandising in southern Europe and the Mediterranean;
- 3) one of Europe's six largest tourist centers;
- 4) a major convention center city, among the 6 largest in the world;
- 5) a center of higher education, particularly in the areas of architecture, design, engineering, and business management;

- 6) a city of medical services, health, nutrition, pharmaceuticals and food;
- 7) a European financial center based on new products to replace those that the city would lose as a result of globalization.

If one examines these seven globalization strategies, it becomes clear that what can generally be regarded as Barcelona "trademark" was central to their success. The trademark was immensely fortified by the international image of Barcelona's 1992 Olympic Games as a huge organizational and managerial success. Further, the Olympic Games served as a conduit to promote the beauty of Barcelona as a place to visit, hold conferences or do business. City leaders successfully utilized the comprehensive physical improvements of the Olympic investment to enhance their permanent image. In fact, the attraction to global businesses today lies squarely in Barcelona's "quality of life" image—truly, many investors realize that Barcelona has become one of the most attractive cities in Europe to live in, and to do business in, and this impacts their decision to invest here.

These changes in image and design partly filter back to the success of the seven global marketing strategies. For example, the first objective, to make Barcelona a first class manufacturing city, is built around the premise that the competitive edge in manufacturing lies in design, of furniture, factories, work spaces, etc. These are also some of the new products that underlie objective #7, making the city a European financial center based on new products. Further, to become one of Europe's largest tourist and convention centers (#'s 3 and 4), the city would need a spectacular design. In doing this, it would attract students from all over the world to its great universities, many to study the design professions, thus fulfilling objective #5, creating a global center of higher education. Finally, to enhance its ability to be a distribution center and a city of health and nutrition services, Barcelona's image as a clean, well designed city serves an important role.

It is important to point out also that the international tourism strategy revolves around the concept of "urban tourism" as opposed to "mass tourism." Where mass tourism tends to bring in tourists into controlled locations, "urban tourism" envisions a broader strategy of integrating high-end visitors into the everyday life and spaces of the city. This post-Fordist strategy envisions attracting not only traditional tourists, but also those who take advantage of a work trip combined with a few days of tourism. This expands the tourism sector to include a vast array of business trips, conferences and conventions, and a variety of combined travel arrangements (Garcia and Claver, 2000). A consequence of this strategy is an expansion of the service sector within the Barcelona labor market, as illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Barcelona Wage Earners by Economic Sector, 1994-1996

	1990: total	percent	1992 total	percent	1996 total	percent
primary	NA	NA	NA	NA	556	0.1
industry	216,000	29.3	188,001	26.2	124,889	18.5
construct.	56,936	7.6	46,074	6.4	30,035	4.5
services	470,307	63.1	483,129	67.4	502,037	74.5
unspecif	0	0	0	0	16,634	2.5
TOTAL	745,556	100	717,204	100	674,151	100

Source: Garcia and Claver, 2000.

To put in place these global strategies, Barcelona realizes it must commit funding to create a better global infrastructure. Table 3 below outlines some of the global infrastructure either already built or in progress. Clearly by expanding the airport, highways, high-speed rail, and telecommunications, Barcelona is better connecting itself to the rest of Europe, and by extension to the global market. Further, investments in the city's physical plant, in rehabilitation of the historic core, the waterfront and in hotels, the attraction to global tourism visitors will be enhanced. While the Olympic infrastructure investments were largely driven by financing from the Spanish national government, the investments in highways, airport expansion, high speed trains and telecommunications come from a combination of regional and municipal funding, as well as private sector input. Some projects, like the airport, also generate enough projected revenues to pay for themselves.

Table 3: Global Capital Investment in Infrastructure: Barcelona Region

Project	Year Completed/Expected	Capital Outlay (millions of pesetas)
Renovation of historic center	1988-93, ongoing	7,700.0
Olympic Games direct construction*	1986-92	313.0
Highways*	1986-92, continuing	249.7
Hotels*	ongoing	61.4
Airport expansion*	ongoing	470.0
Telecommunications*	ongoing	73.5
High speed train connections	2004	75,000.0

(* denotes 1992 pesetas, otherwise figures are 1999 currency)

Source: Borja, 1996; Adjuntament de Barcelona, 1999a,

Discussion: Lessons for San Diego

A number of factors contributed to the overall success of the global engagement strategy in Barcelona. They include:

** The political cohesion of the metropolitan region.* The city of Barcelona formed, with its 26 regional municipal neighbors, a group called the Assembly of Mayors, which created a binding regional approach to economic planning. Together the mayors of the region's cities and towns planned for water, sewage infrastructure, wastewater treatment, public transport linkages, highway construction, and new large scale projects that would benefit the region. A sense of shared commitment pervaded this process.

** Public-private cooperation.* One of the goals of the government, from the very beginning, was to create partnerships with the private sector, especially with new companies forming in

the region, and with small businesses through a program called *Barcelona Activa*. There has been a strong sense of new entrepreneurial spirit in Barcelona, and this spirit has extended into training programs for microbusiness in the working class neighborhoods.

* *Civic engagement* in the redevelopment project. The government quickly won over the public enthusiasm in its goals, partly by emphasizing improvements in the working class *barrios*, and also by promoting the positive benefits of beautification, and improved public safety, not only for international marketing and enhanced economic benefits to city dwellers, but for the quality of life of residents themselves. Obviously the campaign was aided by Barcelona's historic native civic spirit and strong record of designing great public spaces (the Ramblas, for example).

**Marketing and promotion*. The government successfully used the Olympic games as a catalyst for international promotion, but it also did a terrific job of promoting the redevelopment program locally. The use of festivals and fiestas in the neighborhoods, the improvement of public services (transport, hygiene, etc.) and of public spaces (parks, plazas, promenades) helped win over the local population.

**Ecology, recycling and regional development*. The government's urban and regional growth strategy is increasingly tied to the natural features of the region: waterfront redevelopment has been achieved by recycling former industrial zones into public and commercial spaces. Regional integration is being leveraged around existing rivers that feed from the interior toward the urban coastal corridor. Open spaces are being created along rivers and the waterfront.

**Urban design/ public space*. Too often in the United States questions of urban design are relegated to the back burner in urban and regional planning. But Barcelona realized it had not only an historic tradition of good design and public life (the Ramblas, Modernism, Cerda's Eixample), but also the Mediterranean coastal ecology as a selling point in its global marketing strategy. Urban design improvements (construction of public plazas or promenades) are relatively inexpensive, but can have huge dividends in creating an ambience that attracts global business, and the global visitor industry.

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