

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE EIXAMPLE IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF CONTEMPORARY BARCELONA REVISION THROUGH TWO ADMITTED MISCONCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Barcelona Extension proposal, the Eixample, by Ildefonso Cerdà is undoubtedly the most important urban transformation of contemporary Barcelona. These days, the vast area of the Eixample is the largest and densest symbolic centre of activities. It is a key piece that unites contemporary Barcelona and its metropolitan area. Its layout, zoning, real estate, urban development and trees lining form a characteristic urban landscape, endowed with an order and a clear internal cohesion, which is clearly distinguishable from the old city, and from the bordering neighbourhoods.

Although the current celebration of the 150th anniversary of the adoption of Cerdà's project is prompting new and important contributions in the line of investigation conducted in recent decades that have greatly enriched our vision of the project and the formation process of the Eixample, there tend to remain some misconceptions that significantly distort the most common readings.

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The first misconception is caused by forgetting that the order and cohesion of the project not only emerge from the project, but also from the collective practices and continuity of the processes. Hence, the Eixample is often considered as a designer work. This assumption betrays Cerdà's own ideas. He was fully aware of the limitations of the project as a tool for the construction of the city, and in an extraordinary forward-looking, analytical effort, he did not try to define a finished definitive project. Rather, he tried to understand the practices and forces that would likely build the city to consider the devices that would regulate an open process of formation, which would lead to the establishment of operating principles of a topographical, technical, legal and economic nature with a capacity to adapt to changing historical circumstances, and that would be fulfilled in the ways of building the city, as governed by the Laws of Extension.

The second misconception arises from the current perception of the landscape of the Eixample, which almost naturally overlaps and associates Cerdà's project with the many "modernist" architectural features that today characterize its most significant core. When one considers the flaming belligerence in the decades at the turn of the century from the anti-Eixample and anti-Cerdà modernist generation, we realize that this association greatly distorts historical reality. It can be said without exaggeration that the works of Gaudí, Domènech and Montaner - now World Heritage sites - and of so many contemporary architects are authentic manifestos against Cerdà and against his Eixample.

The objective of this proposal is a critical review of the process of urban transformation of Barcelona throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which will analyse the process of urban, architectural, cultural and social shaping of the Eixample, with the intention of dispelling the admitted familiarities to which we have referred. Moreover, we will search for a better understanding both the project and the process of the shaping of the Eixample. We will also seek to understand how, in the 1960s, the current account of the Eixample and about Modernismo was constructed, which nearly inevitably incorporate these misconceptions in our way of perceiving.

INTRODUCTION

The valuation of the figure and work of Ildefons Cerdà has changed substantially in the last 50 years. Between the centenary of the approval of his project for the Eixample (meaning “expansion district” in the Catalan language), which was celebrated in 1959, and the present celebration of its 150th anniversary, a colossal advance has been made in our knowledge of this figure and of the Eixample’s gestation and building processes. In parallel to this increase of our knowledge, Cerdà has gone from being the practically unknown author of a project imposed on Barcelona by the Government in Madrid to become the most internationally acknowledged figure of Barcelona’s modernisation period covering the last 150 years, together with the architect Antoni Gaudí and Modernista architecture. Despite the significant growth of our knowledge about the construction process of Barcelona’s Eixample, however, some misconceptions persist in its most common perception, misconceptions which are probably derived from the role that Cerdà and his Eixample have assumed as an expression of the singularity and international interest of Barcelona’s modernisation in the city’s inevitable marketing.

Two of these commonly accepted misconceptions stand out from the rest: the first one involves the interpretation of Cerdà as an “author” and of the Eixample as his work, while the second is the almost natural superimposition and association of Cerdà, the Eixample and Modernista architecture. Although reasons exist for establishing this type of connections, the Eixample should not be confused with Cerdà and neither should a harmonious continuity be postulated between Ildefons Cerdà’s ideas, the building of the Eixample and so called Modernista architecture. We propose, therefore, to dissipate some of the generally held commonplaces so as better to understand the formation process of the Eixample and to comprehend the misconceptions which our gaze habitually embraces



Figure 1. Photomontage of Cerdà's Expansion Plan (1863) and an aerial view of Barcelona.

Ildefons Cerdà's anticipations

Cerdà's extraordinary personality and vision often cause it to be forgotten that Barcelona's Eixample is in fact the outcome of a collective building process, and often cause us to assimilate it abusively to the work of a single author. We have a tendency to associate the unity and consistency of its layout (which is clearly distinguishable from that of the Old Town), its division into plots, its urban development and even its buildings with the exceptional figure of Cerdà and with his project's ambition. However, today we know that order and cohesion are often not built exclusively from above, from the project, but that ways of doing things, practices, local actions and processes that are coordinated over the course of the project generally make a fundamental contribution to their achievement. Indeed, Cerdà himself adopted an attitude that was openly opposed to the prevailing academic aestheticism and to the signature urban design proper to architects (Soria, 1971). He set this out in his *Teoria de la Viabilidad Urbana* of 1861: "Up to now, when it has been proposed to found, reform or expand a town, no one has concerned himself with anything other than the artistic and monumental part. The number, class, condition, character and resources of the families who were to occupy it have been completely overlooked. The political and social economy of the town or its inhabitants as a whole, which logically enough should be the true starting point of studies of this nature, have been sacrificed to the beauty or grandeur of specific details" (1061/ TCC, 1859).

Cerdà was fully aware of the limitations of the project as an instrument for the construction of the city. For this reason he took a both realistic and very ambitious approach. He was a self-declared proponent of the positivism of his times and, to avoid the casuistic approaches that responded to problems with solutions of a particular nature, he adopted a scientific approach aimed to lay foundations of universal validity. The case of Barcelona thus became the

starting point of an ambitious doctrinal elaboration that sought to establish on solid foundations, since it could not be based on experience or tradition, a comprehensive framework for the development of a modern city. In this way, his project became an ideal schema, a tool which was to allow him to establish systematically operative principles of legal and economic character, with the capacity to adapt itself to the various changing realities. It was not a matter of providing answers to concrete questions or of defining a finished project, but rather of considering the great urban issues in a unitary way.

His very diverse and systematic studies on the case of Barcelona show his concern for social and hygienic matters, which are essential aspects of “the political and social economy of the city as a whole, or of its inhabitants”. Possessed of a distinctly liberal vision, however, he trusted basically in the mechanisms of the market. The city had to be a growth factor and, consequently, it could not have limits. It was solely a question of assuring viability, salubrity and the economy. He did not believe that the development processes of the city could be predetermined: for example, he refused to establish a differentiated hierarchy of streets since the circumstances and uses that each street would go about acquiring were unforeseeable.

As a civil engineer with a precisely defined ideology of progress, he adopted an abstract structural interpretation, mindful of functional logics. This interpretation was especially concerned about the consequences of the new transport means and about the connections of the major territorial infrastructures, particularly including the railways and the port, which became the principal structuring elements. For Cerdà, Barcelona was an eminently industrial and commercial city that had to provide solutions to a major increase in traffic, an issue that was gaining relevance in light of the planned opening of the Suez Canal. For this reason the plan that he submitted attributed great importance to the interior reform of the Old Town and especially included the project of a new port by the engineer Josep Rafo. On the basis of these criteria, he established the general skeleton that defined the layout, direction and breadth of the streets, squares, boulevards and gardens, in order to differentiate clearly the spaces for public use from those intended for private use.

On the other hand, the new city’s urban development mechanisms and practices were more difficult to conceive. Neither the experience of the opening of streets in the Old Town nor the widely tested practices of forming new neighbourhoods of one-bay single-family houses according to an emphyteutic census, which had become consolidated in many urban centres in Catalonia, could serve as a model. In this respect, Cerdà was clearly aware that the necessary anticipative effort was much greater and, although he sought to establish the essential mechanisms that should model the formation of the Eixample, these mechanisms required a political negotiation process and a process of practical ponderation that could not be foreseen.

Accordingly, the Eixample is not only the outcome of Cerdà’s thinking: its final result is the expression of a whole generation -that of the liberal revolution- and of a period -the reign of Isabella II- imbued with the notion of progress and especially formative from the legal, institutional and economic standpoints. The new legislation relating to the Eixample is therefore naturally inscribed among the numerous fundamental laws that were enacted during this period to assure

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the deployment of the railway, the banking system and businesses, etc. (Bassols Coma, 1973).

In order to understand the gestation of the Eixample and Cerdà's contribution, however, it is also necessary to inscribe it within a bustling historical context which had its epicentre in the Barcelona of those years, where the debate on the Eixample had long been under way among the social forces of Barcelona. Cerdà's vision was in harmony with many of the concerns of hygienists and industrialists, but it did not deal with some of the aspirations of urban signification and embellishment which were very much a part of the final phase of the debate. Just like the Ministry of Public Works, Cerdà considered Barcelona's Eixample to be a great public work of interest to the State. They did not consider it at any time to be a question of embellishment or signification, so it became basically a matter of accessibility and of the land market (Sagarra, 1998).

Throughout the whole process, superimposed on this fact was the conflict between the Central Administration of the State and Barcelona City Council, derived from the extremely centralist character of the Municipal Act. This law granted the City Council a merely deliberative function, considering it technically unqualified in the matter of the Eixample. Even so, for the City Council this lack of legal prerogatives did not mean either its renunciation to influence the process or its relinquishment of the idea of the Eixample that was upheld by the local institutions. The call for tenders by the City Council in 1859 was a public act of resistance and the confrontation of



Figure 2. Expansion Plan (1859) for Barcelona by Antoni Rivira I Trias



Figure 3. Expansion Plan (1859) for Barcelona by Ildefonso Cerdà (1859)

Rovira's winning project with that of Cerdà, which was backed by the Ministry of Public Works, clearly shows the discrepancies (Santa.Maria, 2009, López, 2010). Rovira's project was more concerned with the planning of the urban spaces and of the public buildings, with the definition of a setting for the new elites and with the monumental messages than with providing effective solutions for infrastructures. It offered a solution that was closer to the interests of private property and to the cultural and symbolic aspirations of a city that sought to assume manifest values of capitivity. That is to say, it was more concerned with what Cerdà intentionally avoided.

These arguments were inscribed within the tradition of embellishment which had built, and continued to build, the great European capitals, and which aspired to transcend utility in order to achieve a monumental expression. In accordance with this, the city was associated with a "work of art" in the sense that it should be the bearer of a lofty message and value which, in the urban context, were condensed above all in the city spaces, in the public buildings, in the monuments and even in the names chosen for streets and squares.

In the end, although Cerdà's project prevailed, these aspirations were not relinquished. Cerdà's project would be modified over the course of its construction. In fact, the reading which the city made of it throughout the building process may be expressed in this way: "The Cerdà project was established and began to be developed, but it did not predetermine and does not predetermine that this plan should be free from the need to undergo major reforms as the times unfold, times in which the advances in adornment, interior life and policy of peoples demand imperative modifications that they must perforce impose." (La Vanguardia, 25/01/1887). From its very first steps, the Eixample required adaptations. Indeed, Cerdà himself, as an advisory expert of the State between 1860 and 1865, had no objections to modifying it, as long as

its general structure was not altered (Urbs i Territori, 1994; López, 2010). The Eixample's systematic conception and its layout, based on almost abstract circulation forecasts, and its often schematic, ambiguous and in no way binding definition, gave shape to a quite flexible framework that was capable of adapting itself to a historical development that was hard to foresee, and capable of absorbing modifications that were particularly critical of the project itself.

The building of the Eixample: legal mechanisms and the real estate market

In view of the almost non-existent intervention of the municipal administration, the operation was driven basically by private initiative through the so called Expansion District Enterprises, which were real-estate public limited companies of considerable scope and eminently local capital that were founded almost immediately, intervening decisively in the urban development and growth of the Eixample (Corominas, M., 1990). These companies acquired large plots of rural land and took charge of the works of urban development, surveying, levelling of streets and covering of torrents and streams, together with the opening of roads and the building of pavements, paving and the planting of trees. This vigorous start was cut short by the crisis that arose in the spring of 1866, a crisis that brought about the collapse of Barcelona's stock market and the fall of the Expansion District Enterprises. In subsequent years, the building industry underwent its worst crisis of the last half of the 19th century, and after this disaster the leading role was taken over by the Eixample Board, which arose from the Act of 1864 and had its own budget as from the accounting year 1868-1869.

Neither was this political and economic context very favourable for the resolution of the major infrastructures, which were so important in Cerdà's conception. The works on the new port advanced very slowly, the matter of the connections with the various railway lines was left pending, and the skeleton of major thoroughfares planned by Cerdà was jeopardised by the persistence of the municipal limits that fragmented the territory concerned, and particularly by the Ciutadella, a key sector of the project which, with its vicissitudes, formed a compendium of the difficulties involved in carrying out the programme of infrastructures and facilities envisaged by Cerdà and by the city itself.

For Cerdà the plot of the Ciutadella was a key piece in the functional articulation of the new city. In the early 1860s, when an offensive was waged to recover the plot of the Ciutadella, the principal arguments revolved around the need to expand the city's mercantile, industrial and port area. In the end, however, the impossibility of assuring a minimum amount of public and representative spaces and the absence of expectations with respect to the Interior Reform led to a highly significant change of perspective. When, with the revolution of September 1868, it became possible to recover the plot of the Ciutadella, the city's social forces and the public opinion were in agreement that it would be best to devote the area to the creation of a large public park. This was the expression of civic pride as a space devoted to the most visible modernisation and to the sociability and representation of the urban elites. Nevertheless, it became an obstacle to any possible extension of the Eixample

towards Sant Martí and by no means did it reflect the image of an industrial city or the functional logic that Cerdà proposed (“La dimensió urbana”, 1988).

The building explosion of the Eixample and the consolidation of an urban construction system. 1869-1885

From 1869 to 1885, a period of massive construction unfolded. This period coincided with the economic boom that ended with the episode known as “the Gold Fever” and the stock market crash of 1882. During this long phase of the 1870s and early 80s, an extremely strong impetus was generated, affecting most intensely the sector of the Eixample located between Passeig de Gràcia and Passeig de Sant Joan and, outside the Eixample, the neighbourhoods of Poble-sec and Hortafrancs. A comparison of the area built up in 1885, in what was then the municipality of Barcelona, to the built-up area in 1871 is sufficiently self-explanatory.

Also important in this period were the investments in infrastructures, to a large extent made by private initiative, and a significant set of public interventions, such as the definitive channelling of the works on the port and the planning and development of the railway connections. A consideration of the technical networks gives us another dimension of the great urban change which took place during these years, showing the clear and deliberate strengthening of a specific sector of the Eixample. As in other European cities, in the last half of the century there occurred a process of redefinition of the urban space which was closely tied to the technical revolution of the supply and distribution systems of water and gas, and the networks of sewers, electric lighting, telephones and, above all, public transport (“La dimensió urbana”, 1988).



Figure 4. Map of Barcelona, 1869 and 1885.

The Eixample’s great residential growth consolidated an active land market and an urban building system that was destined to last. This system allowed leased dwellings to predominate since the owner could envisage the recovery of his

investment through leases, which would grow steadily in step with the urban improvements (Llobet, 1984). In this way, the progressive construction of the Eixample would strengthen its homogeneity and cohesion, which were greatly potentiated by the application of the ordinances of 1857. These ordinances were extremely rigid in their figurative aspects, as was characteristic of the years in which they were approved. They established a maximum height of 100 palms (19.40 metres), without exception, and the only crowning that they allowed was “an iron railing built according to one of the models approved by the Municipality”, although they permitted prominent elements on the façade, such as belvederes or tribunes (in the centre of the façade and made of iron and glass) or towers and pavilions (respecting the central axis of symmetry). The photographs from these years show the basically repetitive cubic appearance of the structures, which gave rise to so much criticism among the Modernista generation. Cerdà, in his *Teoría de la Construcción de las Ciudades* of 1855, showed himself to be even stricter: “Any balcony, any tribune and, in a word, any type of projection from the general surface of the façade or from the alignment of the street is an abuse which should be banned because it constitutes an easement on the public way and the common right rejects it”. In 1887, the Eixample’s appearance seemed completely inappropriate: “One sees only city blocks that are more or less regular in their capacity, but in their form they are almost symmetrical. All the crossings of viewpoints look the same, producing fatigue and weariness. This does not happen in the big cities where the visual strategy and artistic perspective are carefully studied to avoid this defect.” (La Vanguardia, 9/02/1887)



Figure 5. Plaça Catalunya in the 1910s. Panoramic postcard by L. Roisin. Despite the square's indisputable centrality in Barcelona, the buildings demonstrate monotonous aspects denounced by modernist architects.

Modernista architecture and the Eixample

Beginning in the early 1880s, the criticisms of the Eixample and Cerdà became more insistent. On the one hand, the criticisms that had already been voiced at the time of approval of the Cerdà Plan were intensified, demanding greater attention to embellishment and urban signification. The building of an extensive area of the Eixample where the urban development was not always fully consolidated, that had large vacant spaces and that was hardly transitable and was very unpleasant on rainy or windy days, as well as the monotony produced by the extreme regularity and repetition of its layout, alignments and façades, caused people to demand a reform that would set Barcelona on an

equal footing with the major cities of Europe. The absence of public and monumental buildings intensified this impression even more.

The Modernista generation was the most belligerent with respect to the Eixample and Cerdà. Its critical attitude was very similar to that which its contemporaries in other places in Europe showed towards the confident outlook of the previous generation's liberalism. The transformation process of Catalan culture led to a progressive modernisation of the bourgeoisie, who adopted an attitude that was more cosmopolitan and that was directed at the same time to the building of a properly Catalan identity. The emergence of the Modernista intellectuals and artists was a manifestation of this modernisation, involving the adoption of more active patterns of consumption and an aspiration of refinement, in sharp contrast to the values of moderation and decorum that had marked the middle of the century. Considering the abundance of criticisms, the Modernista creations in the Eixample should be understood to be implicit manifestos of opposition (Marfany, 1984). This is especially evident in some of the most prominent interventions, such as the ensemble of the Manzana de la Discordia (the Block or Apple of Discord), Gaudí's La Pedrera, or Puig i Cadafalch's Terrades House. Paraphrasing the expression that Carl Schorske used to contrast the Ringstrasse with the fin-de-siècle generation, it may be said that the Eixample is "the anvil on which Modernista architecture was forged" (Schorske, 1979).

Josep Puig i Cadafalch had published three articles between 29 December 1900 and 22 January 1901 in *La Veu de Catalunya*, entitled in translation "The Barcelona of the Years to Come", which were in fact a furious criticism of Cerdà's Eixample. He declared it to be "one of the world's greatest horrors" and compared the grid of its layout to the galleries of burial niches in cemeteries. He intentionally ignored the revision of the ordinances of 1891, which provided a greater leeway for surfaces and volumes, and considered the façades to be "lacking in space for any other termination than the tame headpiece or the horizontal openwork railing that are specifically prescribed by the rules of the Eixample and that, with a zeal worthy of a better cause, the civil servants of the offices and the Commission of the Eixample devote themselves to imposing, more intent on complying with foolish laws than with wise and prudent ones" (Torres Capell, 1985). More equanimous, Rogent i Pedrosa admitted that "the houses for lease of a former time, a time by no means remote, were reduced to large cubes with openings, completely lacking in taste or art", but the new ordinances of 1891 "have allowed the modern buildings to be given a more picturesque appearance that is more in accordance with the eminently plastic nature of architectural art" (Rogent i Pedrosa, 1897).

In fact, Puig i Cadafalch, for his part, accumulated arguments for "demolishing once and for all this whole administrative monstrosity that sets us on the track to achieving that the new city will turn out the way it is indeed turning out", adding that "the best action with which we could inaugurate the century that we are beginning, would be to break down the obstacles that cohibit us, such as the ancient city walls, obstacles that prevent Barcelona from being a modern city in the European manner (...). In his work, Cerdà repeats constantly the need to reform the old cities in order to adapt them to the new customs and this is something that should be applied today to his work, which has prematurely grown old. The reform of the Eixample must be studied, just as years ago the

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reform of the Old Barcelona was studied (...). We must make a break with the bureaucracy and adapt laws to art, not art to laws”.

The Connection project of Jaussely, the winner of the competition held by the City Council on the occasion of the Aggregation of the municipalities of the Plain of Barcelona, gives a fairly clear idea of what the city was like that was then considered desirable and it evidences how far removed it was from Cerdà's concepts. Indeed, if the approval of a plan had sufficed for Cerdà's project, the new culture of planning in formation required a much more complex and exhaustive documentation. In addition to the general plan, the new project provided plans of uses, tramways, sewers, green zones, population densities, the connection of Barcelona with its surroundings and the transformation stages, and a considerable number of details in perspective of the most significant spaces which had been designed. Likewise, it included the technical systems, to which it lent the maximum attention, seeking to locate activities through zoning, while attending to the urban landscape and its monumental dimension and anticipating the visualisation of a great city (Torres Capell, 1985).

However, Jaussely's project was of an ambition that more than exceeded Barcelona's possibilities, as was in fact acknowledged. Political vicissitudes delayed even more its effects on the urban planning of the city. When the City Council tried to revise the Eixample's self-management system in 1917 and to establish a mechanism that would allow the whole question of the city's urban planning and development to be dealt with effectively and comprehensively, the dominant sectors of the urban property owners, led by the Chamber of Property, opposed it head on

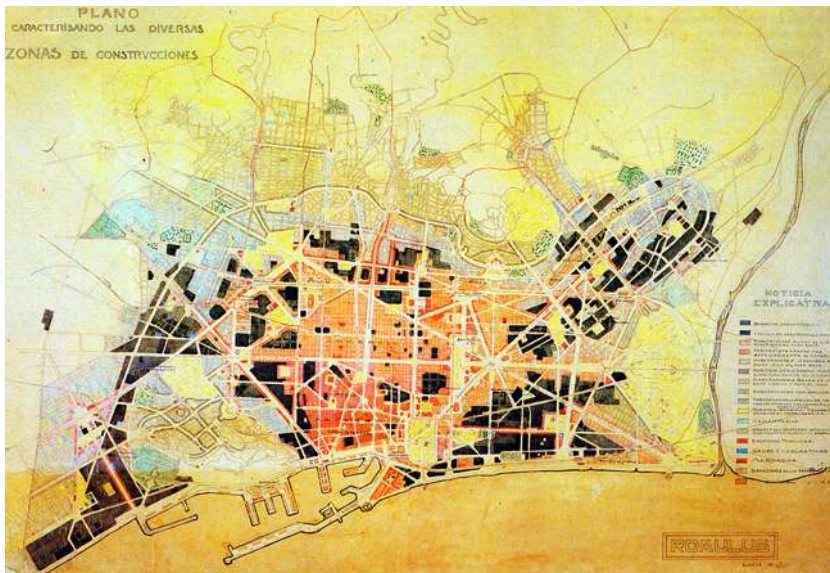


Figure 6. Connection project by Leon Jaussely For Barcelona, 1904-07

and made a fierce defence of the Eixample's management setup. Once again it proved impossible to unify the urban planning, thereby maintaining the sphere

of the Eixample apart from the rest of the city. Accordingly, in order to resolve the urban development of sectors with expectations, such as Avinguda Diagonal towards Pedralbes, or the development of the segment of Carrer Balmes above the Diagonal, it was chosen to increase the area of the Eixample, which allowed that privileged form of financing to be adopted (Llobet, 1984).

The building system of the Eixample which was instituted by Cerdà and his generation showed itself to be more resistant and operative than the more ambitious proposals of the Modernista generation or those of the GATCPAC architects in the 1930s. Indeed, it endured until the promulgation of the Land Act of 1956.

The change in the Eixample's narrative

The Barcelona experience is distinct from that of other European cities, where the great mutation between 1870 and 1914 from which the new contemporary metropolises arose, was based fundamentally on the interior reforms of the inherited cities. In the European urban world, the great challenge of the period was the modernisation of the city, which was then identified with what we call today the historic centre, while the areas of recent expansion preserved their peripheral character. Despite numerous attempts, in the case of Barcelona the barriers imposed on expropriations by the legal framework prevented a renewal comparable to those which were taking place in the major cities of Europe. In fact, despite the image which may now exist, for a long time the Eixample was a peripheral area which showed an insufficient urban development, which was exclusively residential and lacked directional functions, and which was not conceived as a central area. In his report of 1927 for the project of the Plaça de Catalunya, Puig i Cadafalch insisted on the need to break, for once and for all, with this imposed urban situation. He compared Cerdà's Eixample to a geometrical plague that invaded everything and collided with everything, immune to all adaptations and reforms.

This clear explicit animosity makes the strong identification that we now establish between the Eixample and Modernisme and the close rapport that we assume to exist between one and the other quite surprising. Two reasons of very distinct character help to explain this identification. The first one is a de facto reason. Despite the rejection that it felt towards the Eixample, Barcelona's bourgeoisie moved there with firm determination and it was the builders of the Modernista period who gave shape to the central and most valued part of the Eixample, known today as the Golden Square or *Quadrat d'Or* (Garcia Espuche, 1990). The monotony of its landscape was the challenge to be faced by the architects and master builders of the latter part of the 19th century. In time, the habit of associating the Eixample's landscape with the Modernista architects was to do the rest.

The second reason greatly strengthens this association. To a large extent, the Modernista architectures followed a fashion that did not take long to pass. The persistence of the rejection towards the Eixample was accompanied in the following decades by criticisms of the Modernista architectures. Curiously, in the central decades of the 20th century, opinion shifted from a shared rejection to an almost joint revaluation. The recovery of the values of Modernisme was easier. The criticisms of "the gaslight period" were accompanied by nostalgia.

In a situation of persistent world economic crisis -the succession of two world wars, the Spanish Civil War, the Franco regime, etc.-, from any ideological position everything led our local version of the Belle Époque to be remembered as a period of cosmopolitanism and effective modernisation. Accordingly, in the immediate post-war period there was a slow recovery of Modernista architecture and art, with the books of Josep Francesc Ràfols in the 1940s and that of Alexandre Cirici in 1951. Moreover, the most acknowledged historians of architecture, such as Giedion, Pevsner and later Zevi, Benevolo and Frampton, had already searched in that period for the roots and the context that explained the emergence of the Modern movement, even though Cerdà's name did not yet appear or only did so quite briefly.

Beginning in the 1920s, Cerdà's circulatory obsession was revalued as motorisation increased. The GATCPAC architects, for example, underscored the "rationalist" validity of the road layout and the efficiency of an architectural structure that allowed the elimination of the corridor street and the closed city block, leaving gardens in the large open spaces that were comprised between each two blocks (AC, n.13, 1934). In 1958, in preparation for the centenary, there appeared two articles by Antoni Bonet Castellana and Oriol Bohigas in numbers 33 and 34 of the journal *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*, and another by Pellicer in number 35 of 1935. All three articles sought to dissipate the polemic against the Eixample project and value it, recovering the considerations made by the GATCPAC in accordance with a functionalist view of the city. Oriol Bohigas also placed emphasis on the recognition of the great capacity of social cohesion (for the first time in the history of urban design) of the neighbourhood unit proposed by the engineer as the basic structure of the city. However, these units would only be feasible with higher densities than those suggested and that were more similar to those that had been reached in the various "adulterations" of the project.

Consequently, the renewal of the urban culture and practices of the 1950s - coinciding with the elimination of the mechanisms established in the various Eixample laws- was when Cerdà's work was revalued most decisively and when a radical change came about in the narrative of Barcelona's urban planning within the Catalan and Spanish contexts. With the celebration of the centenary of the Cerdà project's approval, this project ceased to be considered one more episode of centralist imposition and turned Barcelona into the object and scene of an absolutely extraordinary anticipation within the European framework.

Entre el Pla Cerdà i el Barraquisme by Oriol Bohigas (1963), which contains articles from the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 60s, forms a good observatory of this moment. Bohigas began his book with a chapter on "The Valid Elements of Tradition", in which he correlated his reading with those of Pevsner and Zevi. He underscored the transcendence of Modernisme and reviewed the gestation of the Eixample, acknowledging dispassionately the virtues of Cerdà's project.

On the basis of these data, the same keys were adopted for the reading of Cerdà, the Eixample and Modernisme, which came to form the most brilliant moments of an avant-garde thread that was wished to be recovered on emerging from the long night of the Franco regime. It was then that these aspects were recognised as privileged culminating milestones of our recent history and when the meaning that they now hold for us was essentially

established. It was a reading that was strongly conditioned by factors proper to that moment in history, but it has decisively determined our gaze and experience. They were recognised to have one same progressivist drive at a moment of extremely strong modernising ambition after the closed ominous Francoist autarchy. Since then these aspects are also amalgamated in our perception, in such a way that, despite our knowledge of the manifest animosity of the Modernista generation towards Cerdà and his Eixample, we tend to envisage them as forming a whole, with one as a necessary consequence of the other. This perception shapes a reality that is just as powerful or even more so than the selfsame historical reality. From this moment on, almost all the readings were to hit the same nail, until it was converted into an a priori form of our gaze.

Many years later, the exhibition “El Quadrat d’Or. Centre de la Barcelona Modernista” (The Golden Square. Centre of the Modernista Barcelona) (A. García Espuche, 1990) gave a rich dense rendering of this superimposition and carefully explained the phases of the historical construction of the most privileged part of the Eixample. More recently this subject has fundamentally become an object of urban marketing based on the valuation of density and diversity as paradigms of the sustainable city and at the same time, paradoxically, it has become a pretext for the multiplication of tourist routes.

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