

Civil society, *sensu lato*, usually denotes political entities, including the state under rule of law; social institutions, such as markets and other associations based on voluntary agreements among citizens; and a public sphere where citizens can engage in public activities and debate among themselves, as well as with the state about matters of public interest.¹ In a more modern and restricted sense, the term normally refers to social organization apart from the state per se, thus opening up the idea of power sharing and a pluralism of interests among government and various elements of civil society.² At the best of times there is often a convergence of these interests, as numerous institutions and other entities find something in common across the boundaries that usually separate the state and civil society, and therefore are in a position to create something civic. Naturally enough, the identity and quality of urban spaces are also at stake during these moments of social and political interaction, although less frequently, unfortunately, with the same sense of mutual purpose and élan as one finds, say, in the contemporary city of Barcelona. There an uncommon balance was struck between the undeniable need for a diversity of urban space on the one hand, and an overriding sense of places belonging to a new Barcelona and *Catalunya* on the other.

THE URBAN PUBLIC SPACES OF BARCELONA

Completed between 1981 and 1987, the urban public space projects of Barcelona represent a large and impressive body of public works at widely different scales, spread throughout a city of some 1.7 million people. The program officially began in December 1980 when the mayor, Narcís Serra, appointed a five-member town planning commission to assess the urban issues confronting the city.³ The members were: Josep-Miguel Abad, the vice mayor; Oriol Bohigas, a legislative delegate; Signor Galofré, a consultant; Gairalt Puidgomènec, a planner; and José Antonio Acebillo, an architect. After examining the Outline City Planning Scheme of 1976, the commission strongly recommended the immediate

development of highly specific and much needed open-space projects, both to establish a strong public presence and to help renovate the city. In addition, the commission recommended general adoption of the 1976 planning scheme—a broad metropolitan master plan—although largely as a medium-term reference tool and a normative device covering property transactions among businesses and the general populace within the city. By favoring adoption of a program of specific projects, the commission clearly recognized that the urban space needs of Barcelona were relatively well known and nothing would be gained from pursuing the abstractions of further master planning exercises. In these regards, the commission was also following in the footsteps of earlier contributions to Barcelona's urban realm, such as Idelfons Cerdà's remarkable nineteenth-century extension, the *Eixample* or *Ensanche*.⁴ Moreover, the underlying rationale was much the same, namely the improvement of public health and alleviation of poorly serviced and overcrowded living conditions.

Under the direction of Acebillo, a special urban design team was formed in 1981 at the *Ajuntament*, or City Hall, known as the Office of Urban Projects.⁵ The first commissions were then quickly conceived and constructed. During the early stages, all public improvements were confined to the project sites themselves, and there were no displacements of population or viable urban functions from surrounding areas. Furthermore, projects were undertaken in all ten districts within Barcelona: Ciutat Vella, Eixample, Sants Montjuïc, Les Corts, Sarrià-Sant Gervasi, Gràcia, Horta-Guinardó, Nous Barris, Sant Andreu, and Sant Martí. This was to be a program for the entire city, but one that would eventually operate in a decentralized manner, fitting the needs of particular geographic locales and groups regardless of their socioeconomic and physical circumstances. Apart from being a local jurisdiction, each district also corresponded to a distinctive area within the city that warranted special urban design consideration. Gràcia, for instance, like several other districts, was once a small town on the outskirts of Barcelona, which eventually became engulfed by urban development during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as Barcelona made its way north from the sea to the hills. Gràcia has an irregular arrangement

of small streets and modest-sized buildings for which small paved plazas and pedestrian areas are most appropriate. Sants Monjuïc, by contrast, is more open and diverse in its physical conformation, thus warranting larger-scaled open-space projects. In the beginning, design personnel within the Office of Urban Projects were assigned specifically to each district to become familiar with local needs and to work with citizens, businesses, and other interest groups.

In addition to the Office of Urban Projects, numerous other designers, particularly young architects, were commissioned to carry out projects. Pasqual Maragall, Mayor Serra's socialist successor in 1983, enthusiastically embraced the urban space program and continued to expand its influence. Joan Busquets, a faculty member of the University of Barcelona, also joined the City Hall staff at this time in a supervisory role.⁶ By 1987, when Barcelona began to focus its attention on hosting the 1992 Olympic Games, more than 100 urban space projects had been completed, beginning with small-scaled urban plazas and ending with extensive improvements to the Moll de la Fusta along Barcelona's waterfront. Today the number of completed projects stands in excess of 140, as each of the separate districts undertakes its own projects, following the lead of the earlier public works program. Attention has now been turned toward other sorts of related public improvements in housing and transportation.

Three kinds of urban public space projects—plazas, parks, and streets—were completed under the initial program. Some, such as the Plaça Reial and the Parc Güell, were renovations or restorations of existing urban places, whereas many of the others, such as the Plaça dels Països Catalans and the nearby Parc de l'Espanya Industrial, were new improvements within the city. Some plazas, such as the Plaça de la Mercè to be found in Ciutat Vella, or old town, as well as those found in the district of Gràcia, were relatively small, discreet, and hard surfaced. Others, like the Plaça dels Països Catalans, or Sants Plaza, were far more extensive with more dynamic boundary conditions, although equally hard surfaced. Neighborhood parks, such as the Parc del Clot and the Plaça de la Palmera, contain a variety of recreational activities, as well as public artworks by major international artists like Bryan Hunt and Richard

Serra.⁷ In the Plaça de la Palmera, for instance, Serra's curving walls are an integral part of the park's life, creatively dividing serene, well-planted, and contemplative spaces from the active terrain of youngsters' games. Other parks, such as the Parc de Joan Miró, on a site formerly occupied by a slaughterhouse, are more extensive and were intended for citywide use. Here varied settings of well-planted areas, open plazas, and sports facilities are found within a single site. Street projects such as the Avinguda de Gaudí, focusing on the well-known Sagrada Família, and the multilevel Via Júlia—the main street of a low-income neighborhood on the outskirts of Barcelona—have created well-appointed pedestrian environments where only vehicular traffic congestion and dilapidated storefronts once existed. Others, such as the early Passeig de Picasso, provide straightforward definition and pedestrian relief on heavily traveled streets, whereas the Moll de Bosch i Alsina, or Moll de la Fusta, extending along much of the city's harborfront, is both a park and a street system combined, simultaneously rerouting traffic, providing a public face to the city, and accommodating leisure-time activities.⁸

Throughout the urban space program, a shared intellectual idea of Barcelona accompanied the strong conviction that the city was in large part something tangible, objective, and capable of renewal. Given this common agenda, however, there was also a tolerance of formal design diversity reminiscent of other moments of Catalan modernism, such as the earlier periods of Antoni Gaudí and Luís Domenech i Montaner, or of Josep Lluís Sert. Among the contemporary projects, this diversity extended from the minimalism of the Plaça dels Països Catalans, by Piñón and Viaplana, to the expressionistic contextualism of the Parc de l'Espanya Industrial, by Peña Ganchegui and Rius, as well as more prosaically from softly planted surfaces to the traditionally hard-paved plazas. In the final analysis, a broadly based and authentic Catalan style of place making emerged.

Most of these shared intellectual ideas centered around the University of Barcelona during the 1970s, and teachers such as Manuel de Solà-Morales, author of the Moll de la Fusta, José Rafael Moneo, and particularly the head of

the School of Architecture at the time, Oriol Bohigas. Throughout the school, and in special units such as the Urban Planning Laboratory founded by Solà-Morales, the city became a preoccupation. No project rose above the city in importance, and all contributed to what became a shared urban idea. Central to this idea was the perception of Barcelona as an aggregation of different and distinctive quarters or districts, as noted earlier, rather than as a general system of functions. Considerable emphasis was also placed on continuing the significance of the city's traditional morphology, but in new urban-architectural ways, and on a shared regional past of considerable architectural merit. Through a process that Bohigas likened to metastasis, local projects were to be deployed as catalysts for upgrading the overall quality of the city.⁹ Thus the value of public improvements could be leveraged substantially and the interaction between elements of the government and civil society stimulated accordingly.

Also underlying Barcelona's open-space program was a strong commitment to diversity in the social arrangement and expression of projects. Indeed, physical and expressive variety among local projects, once broad norms and intentions had been established, was seen as a matter of both progress and survival. In these regards the urban public spaces of Barcelona embraced a broad range of functions, with many of the parks equipped for specific recreational and leisure-time activities. The architects and public officials were keenly aware of the plurality of interests confronting them as various groups in civil society began to assert themselves. The Parc de l'Escorxador or Parc de Joan Miró, by Antoni Solanas in conjunction with the Office of Urban Projects, for example, provided facilities for organized basketball and football games within its expansive landscape. Less formal but nevertheless significant venues were also established within a garden setting on the same site for other organized recreational pursuits such as bowling. By contrast, many of the small plazas within the city, such as those in Gràcia and within Ciutat Vella, simply provided the opportunity for respite from the bustle of daily city life and were far less programmatically specific. More often than not, these paved spaces provide outdoor public "rooms," as it were, within the otherwise private realm

of the city and are conformed to enhance the surrounding architecture. The small plaza alongside the venerable Santa Maria del Mar, for instance, admirably achieved both civic purposes, while serving in its own right to memorialize the Catalan martyrs of 1714. In addition, considerable emphasis was placed on multiple uses of public spaces. Almost all in some way accommodate the daily rituals of meeting, strolling, and simply being together in a public place—all strong cultural characteristics of Barcelona's life. Indeed, among various parks, plazas, and streets, these straightforward yet crucial activities were provided for amply. Many, including the Plaça de la Mercè and the Plaça Reial, for instance, also now accommodate and were designed for more formal collective gatherings of commemoration, political expression, and celebration.

Two other related aspects of this functional and formal diversity also deserve special note. First, throughout the urban public space program, an inventive and productive awareness was apparent concerning differences between various open-space functions and the degree to which those differences should be reflected in design. Sometimes, unfortunately, the formal variation of urban space, in general, can be accomplished too readily for its own sake, rather than as a reflection of vital cultural interests. Conversely, social diversity can be denied, in principle, through an overly monolithic insistence on a particular style or approach. Fortunately, in Barcelona a sensitive awareness of appropriate design difference in various links of the roadway network, for example, is spatially very apparent. Here one immediately confronts essential differences among streets for traffic, avenues that accommodate both traffic and people strolling, and the *passeig* or *paseo*, which accommodates both activities and yet has a higher-order civic role to perform as a gathering place. Within the physical realm of Barcelona, for example, the new versions of Via Laietana, the Avinguda de Gaudí, the Passeig Colom, and the Passeig de Picasso can hardly be confused, although on the city plan they may all appear to be nothing more than major roadway segments.

The second important aspect of formal and functional diversity was realization of an appropriate level of indeterminacy in design. Once again, a

proposal can be so specific as to rule out reappropriation of public spaces for other desirable yet unforeseen uses, or designs can be so vague and bereft of ideas about use that they become alienating and intimidating. Fortunately, in places like the Parc de l'Espanya Industrial, for example, by Peña Ganchegui and Rius, the stepped inclined edge that forms an exuberant backdrop to the park itself is routinely used by spectators at outdoor events as well as by a plethora of more informal users for sunbathing, reading, lounging, or simply socializing. Similarly, the surfaces of the Avinguda de Gaudí, by Quintana, are a haven for skateboard riders, hopscotch enthusiasts, street vendors, strollers, and delivery men on lunch breaks. Likewise, the Via Júlia clearly demonstrates that the traditional repertoire of streets can be cleverly rejuvenated to accommodate many modern exigencies of both transit and repose. Large portions of Via Júlia, for instance, are nonspecialized areas, allowing for a considerable amount of local invention to occur. The trellis area above the train station, partially buried beneath the project, contains a large sitting area for afternoon conversation, a market held at least once a week, and a festival site or area for community gathering and public functions. Dominated by a large lantern tower that marks its intersection with the adjacent high-speed ring road, the Via Júlia has become both a *rambla* and a center of neighborhood activity in a dense, low-income area of the city.

For a process of urban refurbishing and remaking to take hold among an urban populace, and to become adopted as a fundamental part of a new image for the city, those in government and civil society naturally must find the right level at which decision making matters most. In urban design, this invariably means identifying the scale at which there is sufficient congruence between city form, social purpose, and cultural values to make a palpable difference in the daily life of citizens. Unfortunately, such decisions often vary between the abstractions of plan making and broad social programs that attempt to satisfy everyone and yet often end up enfranchising very few, and the construction of favored local projects that have become the pet causes of powerful interest groups. Fortunately, the City of Barcelona appears to have avoided the pitfalls of both positions. From a social perspective the urban public spaces program

addressed one of the city's most pressing problems—namely the need for viable open spaces within what was a dense urban fabric of buildings. Whether it was in fact the most pressing need could be argued, although an obvious competing issue like housing appears to be more one of distribution than of sheer insufficiency. From a political perspective, the program offered the important potential of relatively quick, prominent, and tangible results from public investment. Furthermore, the relative cost-effectiveness was high, allowing projects to be distributed throughout the city, leaving few of its citizens unaffected. Even large improvements, such as the Plaça dels Països Catalans and the citywide parks, were relatively inexpensive to construct, and the effect of the design results on urban space users was almost instantaneous.

Along with the creation of an appropriate vehicle for making public improvements, however, comes the need for strong political will and vision. On both counts it is clear that the local government administration was formed and aggressively led by Mayors Serra and Maragall. Not only did they enthusiastically endorse the urban public spaces program, even during times of controversy, but both men also had an unusual tolerance for experimentation. Narcís Serra, for example, was directly responsible for the prolific installation of contemporary public art. However, without diminishing the central role of public officials, an interest in novelty and experimentation can partly be explained by the larger historical circumstances of the urban space program. For some time during the Franco regime, very little renovation had occurred in Barcelona. The democratic elections of 1979 signaled a strong break with the past, not to mention the dawn of a new political era for which there was enormous popular enthusiasm. Under these circumstances it is little wonder that a return to traditional approaches would be eschewed in favor of confidently striking out in a new contemporary direction. Moreover, technically speaking, no adequate indigenous precedents existed for many of the spatial conditions that had to be resolved. Thus in most cases, invention was the only recourse.

One of the most noteworthy innovations was the extensive use of hard paved and masonry surfaces, the *plaza dura*.¹⁰ Although controversial, particularly when expressed on the vast scale of the Plaça dels Països Catalans, there

are several reasons behind this rather consistent choice of surface for public open spaces. First, immediate and pragmatic use could be made of available materials and an available craft tradition, which obvious cost and socioeconomic benefits. Second, the hard surfaces were durable, relatively easy to maintain, and symbolically gave an immediate appearance of project completion. Third, a broader culturally based decision was made that Barcelona belonged to the tradition of no trees, rather than vice versa. Among the intelligentsia of the design community at the time, there was a preference for hard urban plazas in a Mediterranean tradition, such as those found in Italy, and skepticism expressed about the image of trees in the presentation of an emphatically public plaza.

In keeping with other broad themes of the urban space program, this new tradition of the plaza dura also allowed for considerable expressive variety among separate projects, partly promoted by specific design circumstances. The Plaça Reial, by Federico Correa and Alfonso Milà, for instance, concerned the restoration of the original plaza created by royal decree beside the Rambla and originally designed in 1848 by Francesco Daniel Molina. Incorporating several civic monuments, the plaza was paved throughout, with furnishings forming an inner plaza parallel with the surrounding building facades. Tall palm trees were planted at regular intervals, conforming in plan to a complex axial arrangement. Unlike the original, however, the entire plaza can now be comprehended immediately as a singular spatial entity. Similarly, the nearby neoclassical Plaça de la Mercè, by the Office of Urban Projects, is a renovated space. Modestly understated and civic in outlook, the plaza is paved simply, with a fountain and a nineteenth-century sculpture found in a nearby warehouse serving as a central focus. Finally, the controversial Plaça dels Països Catalans, by Helio Piñón and Albert Viaplana, was also a new installation, although unprecedented, as noted earlier, in its minimalist expression. Formerly the site of a large parking lot in front of Barcelona's major commuter rail station, the new plaza was designed to avoid interfering with surrounding traffic systems, including the rail lines underneath. Under these conditions the paved surface and skeletal structures

are understandable, yet the result accomplishes far more than a basic material utility. The dynamic formal abstractions of frames, bollards, benches, and light stanchions bring order to an otherwise vast and disparate space in an extraordinarily parsimonious manner. The result is at once functional—providing shade, places to pause, and a certain definition for pedestrian traffic—yet sculpturally engaging, drawing attention to the material conditions surrounding its genesis and the capacity of frames in a field to articulate, effectively command, and volumetrically define the space.

Another noteworthy innovation of Barcelona's urban spaces program was the emergence of a regionally distinctive type of park, involving a strong sense of enframement that simultaneously distinguished the park from surrounding areas and provided for an expressive autonomy within the frame itself. In planimetric terms, it resembled a carefully framed painting on which various overlays were rendered, and in almost all cases where the contrast between hard and soft surfaces, between water bodies and land, and between sculptural installations and their field were often accentuated. Moreover, one geometric order, such as the planting of trees, was overlaid on another, such as systems of pathways, so that differences between the two orders remained intact rather than being resolved into a third. This process further gave the affected areas of the parks a heightened abstract, three-dimensional quality that they might otherwise have lacked. Specific elements within the overall composition tended to be finite and discontinuous, serving as accents and foci within the normally ordered field of the park. Invariably, one or more of the boundaries took on an irregular, organic shape in stark contrast to the orthogonal and linear forms of surrounding features. In fact, this emerging genre of modern park has become perhaps even more distinctive in Barcelona than the better-known plaza dura.¹¹

Less abstractly, in the Parc del Clot, by Dani Freixes and Vicenc Miranda, for instance, enframement was delivered by retaining the outside masonry wall of the large factory structure that formerly occupied the site. A rough division was made on the east side of the park with a bermed, well-planted, and predominantly grassy area, and on the west by a partially sunken paved

plaza. Undulations in the ground plane, from the prospect at the top of the berm, provided a singular well-defined sweep of space. The predominant building elements in the composition were bridge structures that literally spanned the berms and paved areas. Other features, such as an aqueduct-like water body and public art installation by Bryan Hunt, completed the improvements. In another instance, the Parc de l'Espanya Industrial, which also occupies the site of a former factory complex, was carefully enframed by a steeply inclined wall of steps, rising from a sunken area of the site. Again, there is a substantial interplay between soft grassy and well-planted areas. The pervasive imagery of the park, though, differs greatly with the Parc del Clot. It has an idiosyncratic, expressionistic quality, especially in details such as the huge light and observation towers that help define one edge. In addition, both the Parc de la Creueta del Coll, by Martorell, Bohigas, and Mackay, in the hills overlooking Barcelona, and the Parc de l'Estació del Nord, by the Office of Urban Projects, closer to the center of the city, possess many of the same general spatial features, as does the Villa Cecilia garden complex by Elias Torres Tur and José Antonio Martínez Lapeña.

Understandably, problems have been encountered with such a definitive design approach, even with considerable local district participation. Administrative naiveté and oversight, for instance, prevented the allocation of adequate resources for project maintenance, leaving several of the earlier projects in need of considerable refurbishing. The piecemeal character of project organization, in the absence of a more coherent overall plan, sometimes led to a lack of design coordination. Novelty and experimentation also had their prices. The absence of immediately identifiable furnishings in several parks has been a point of contention with neighboring residents. At the Parc del Clot, for example, banners draped from upper-story windows in surrounding apartment buildings ask, *When will a real play area be built?* Nevertheless, children enthusiastically continue to play, apparently oblivious to distinctions between contemporary and traditional building practices. It was also not the first time that Barcelona's leaps of civic design came under criticism. No less an architectural



The Parc del Clot in Barcelona by Freixes and Miranda.

figure than Josep Puig i Cadafalch, for instance, strongly objected to Cerdà's plan for the Eixample as being far too abstract, egalitarian, and uninteresting for Barcelona's needs, preferring instead Antoni Rovira's less undifferentiated and hierarchical proposal.¹²

Another aspect of the historical circumstances surrounding the urban public spaces program that warrants closer examination is the timing of economic cycles. During the Franco regime, the 1960s and 1970s in Barcelona were periods of private economic boom in which a considerable amount of speculative development occurred, especially on the outskirts of the city. Until recently, however, the immediate post-Franco period was a time of relative economic downturn, during which little private-sector development occurred on any scale. Because of the strong initiative taken by city government during this lull, public works could regain an exemplary status and be presented as models for action. In fact, the local administration was practically the only investor in urban development at the time. A situation in which the economy was sluggish, therefore, was successfully converted into one of considerable public leadership. Subsequently, when the economic pendulum swung back again in favor of private investment, a new administrative posture of joint public-private participation in urban development was established, with the local government acting from a position of strength and vision that it probably could not have attained without the earlier public works projects. This was certainly apparent during the Olympic Games preparations, which catapulted Barcelona, although not without further criticism, into another scale of urban improvements, including completion of a ring road, large-scale housing development, and 5 kilometers of public beach and adjacent park improvements.¹³

CIVIC INTERACTION BETWEEN THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

By now it is evident that at the core of Barcelona's successful urban revitalization lay a viable expression of the common purpose of local government—or the state—and the diverse needs and senses of identity of ordinary citizens and

of civil society. This was all the more remarkable or perhaps even facilitated by the relatively novel appearance of this kind of productive tension in post-authoritarian Spain. After all, Francisco Franco's predominantly fascist dictatorship had lasted from the end of the Civil War in 1939 until his death in 1975, and was preceded only a short time earlier, between 1923 and 1930, by the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera. In effect, Spain had enjoyed a mere half dozen years of any form of democratic republican rule in the past half century. This was all to change, however, during the years of rapid development—*años de desarrollo*—which took place between about 1961 and 1973, as Spain's economic miracle and the early reorganization of civil society created a robust urban middle class for the first time, making the country ripe for democracy.¹⁴ At the very least, it made the transition between dictatorship and democracy much smoother, and the typical Spanish jump from the lower to the upper classes far less abrupt. During the *años de desarrollo*, in the hands of the technocrats, the economy expanded 7 percent per annum, faster than any other country in the noncommunist world except for Japan. Material prosperity among Spain's citizenry also increased at a spectacular pace. Car ownership, for instance, rose from a ratio of about one in one hundred inhabitants in 1960 to around one in ten by 1970—a tenfold increase in just ten years. In comparison to the rest of Europe, however, Spain remained comparatively poor, with per capita income in 1973 slightly less than half the average of E. E. C. countries, and only 30 percent of U.S. figures. Imports still outstripped exports, only to be offset economically by earnings sent home by Spanish laborers working abroad and by receipts from tourism.¹⁵

From the outset, Franco's authoritarian regime was heavily reliant on other elements of society including the army, the Catholic church, parts of the business community, and large numbers of peasant smallholders, as well as urban and semi-urban middle classes and other elements of an emerging civil society. In the age-old Spanish tradition of the *pronunciamento*—a process of favoring particular sociopolitical groups on the part of the military—Franco's regime overtly favored the fascist Falange, although more broadly dominated