

Alina Maciejewska, Ewa Jarecka-Bidzińska
Politechnika Warszawska

Selected New Public Spaces in Revitalisation of *El Raval* in Barcelona

Summary

El Raval is one of the few examples of successful revitalization in degraded, historical districts. The level of gentrification does not threaten district's social identity and character. New public spaces are attractive and vigorous: *La Rambla del Raval*, Angels Square, *Placa de Castella*, *Placa de les Caramelle*, *Placa de Salvador Sequi* or *Plaça de Télèci Moix*. Cultural and science institutions, such as: MACBA, CCCB, Maritime Museum, Filmoteca, Universitat de Barcelona has attracted economic potential. Barcelona "recovered" historical city center – Ciutat Vella, as a result of effective revitalization. Area attracts further services of culture, science and tourism. District with great potential, which is still transforming – is an example worth further study.

The aim is based on authors researches knowledge, about problems and effective solutions used in creating new public spaces in Barcelona, *El Raval*. That may be used to shape public spaces and system of their relations in many areas of degraded metropolitan Polish cities. Such research supports good practices in urban and spatial planning with creating urban landscape harmony. Topic was presented on the conference: "Good practice in urban and spatial planning" organized by Poznań University in 2017.

Key words: revitalization, public space, *El Raval*, Barcelona.

The aim of study

In Polish literature, there is hardly any research related to problems of shaping public spaces in *El Raval*, Barcelona in a field of urban planning, concerning social and identity aspects. The issues of town planning and city structure in general were discussed by prof. Eng. arch. J. Gyurkovich. Culture studies were made by cultural scientists A. Kula and dr K. Jagodzińska, who presented the new museum – MACBA way of functioning. Authors of this article intend to construct detailed analyses of new public spaces in the degraded *El Raval* district, covered by the revitalization program.

One of authors, E. Jarecka-Bidzińska, is writing a doctoral thesis entitled: "Praga – Północ as an art district in comparison on the background of other examples from Europe (*El Raval*, *Covent Garden*) and USA (*Greenwich Village*)". Part of a necessary research has therefore been done. Received grant, which enabled a further research, analysis and shaping of conclusions as well as individual evaluation of processes and their consequences, based not only on literature analysis. Main goal is a multifaceted analysis of new public spaces in revitalized, degraded medieval tissue of *El Raval*, Barcelona as well as understanding

Illustration 1**Bird's-eye view on *El Raval* above Barri Gotic district**

Source: photo E. Jarecka-Bidzińska, Sept. 2017.

Illustration 2**Satellite view of the northern part of *El Raval* with the marked border of the district**

Source: Googlemaps used, author same as Illustration 1, Sept. 2017.

problems and an effective solution used to create a new public space. Knowledge from researches may be useful for Polish institutions to improve revitalization programs, designing new public spaces in degraded historic districts and building the quality of existing ones, without losing the place identity.

Methods

The basic research method is case study. The other methods have been used to conduct a comparative analysis of the public space cases discussion and are less important. Interview with residents was only a supplement and is not included in this article.

Other methods used to make case study:

1. Analysis of descriptive, documentary sources;
2. Literature criticism;
3. Method intuitive – the definition of general scientific problems;
4. Observation method;
5. Analysis of author's own photographic documentation.

Introduction

"It takes a place to create a community and a community to create a place"¹.

Great urban spaces according to urbanist and activist J. Jacobs and an organization Projects for Public Spaces are those, where: events take place, socio-economic changes are visible, there is a variety of services and trade is target for groups, which differ in: culture, status and age social. In good public spaces: there is a sufficiently high density of population, people meet for social purposes, there is a penetration of cultures, a place has a distinctive identity, there is spatial order, has an advantage of historical buildings, quarters are small, buildings have a human scale and pedestrian traffic is privileged. Such spaces are courtyards of public institutions: libraries, town halls, churches, museums, houses, schools, with many interactions between society and city authorities. Well-functioning public spaces are also a scene for social life (*Economic Development Plan Ciutat Vella 2016-2021*). A. Duany and E. Plater-Zyberk wrote: "Cities and towns are made up of multiple neighborhoods and districts, organized by corridors of transportation or open space". (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, Speck 2001).

The first *El Raval's* medieval city structure development dates to the 10th century – erection of the first buildings and monastery of *Sant Pau del Camp*. *El Raval* is a port district in Barcelona, centrally located in a medieval, intense urban structure. Before revitalization

¹ Organization Project for Public Spaces (NGO).

it was one of the most densely populated urban areas in the world, very degraded with high level criminality. Its urban layout in a shape of diamond figure is a result of the defensive character, typical for many medieval cities surrounded by walls. Social and place identity is very strong and unique there. Almost half of the population are immigrants mainly from Pakistan and Morocco, which is typical for a port district. Urban tissue is very intense: narrow streets and dark alleys. Due to industrious history (1850 – Industrial Revolution) of *El Raval*, living, hygienic and sanitary conditions of residents were and still are very difficult. Gentrification in the district is not high, in the south part many services are carried out by residents and targeted at to national minorities. The district's most important monument is *Palau Guell*. In the past *El Raval* was location for monasteries and later for a textile industry. Along with the confiscation of church property (the early 20th century), many sacral buildings were abandoned (monasteries, churches, hospitals) and with collapse of the industry – empty factories. All this provided a basis urban structure for the revitalization process.

Revitalisation of *El Raval*

Intense, radical and large-scale program of revitalization PER1 (*Plan Especial de Reforma Integral*, 1985) and the impulse associated with organization of the Olympic Games initiated a series of changes in the district. Public spaces are attractive and vigorous: La Rambla del Raval, Plaça dels Àngels, Plaça de Joan Coromines, Plaça de Téléci Moix, Plaça de Vázquez Montalban, *Placa de Castella*, *Placa de les Caramele* or *Placa de Salvador Sequi* and others. Cultural institutions, including: MACBA, CCCB, *Maritime Museum*, *Santa Monica art Centre*, *Filmoteca*, attracted economic potential. The socio-economic revival was also interfered by university campuses, including the University of Barcelona, Humanities Campus, URLL, UPF and *Conservatori del Liceu*. Barcelona recovered historical city center of the city – *Ciutat Vella* in a functional and economic sense as a result of the renewal program and indirectly the Olympics in 1992, which had a lasting impact on the city's development. Now, *El Raval* is attractive destination for tourists, academical society and city residents (*Plan of Old City Economic Development 2016-2021*).

In 1986, the Ciutat Vella group instituted the Integrated Rehabilitation Area (ARI), to face a process of urban intervention and housing in a historical city center of Barcelona. It was coordinated with the rest of public administrations, with the aim of developing the Comprehensive Action Plan (PAI)². PROCIVESA – mixed capital company (Promoció de Ciutat Vella SA) was created and responsible for the expropriations and demolitions of degraded buildings, as well as for the acquisition and rehabilitation of rebuilding. PROCIVESA was also in charge of the construction of new homes and infrastructure.

² Resulting from the harmonization of the different PERI (special internal reform plans).

One of the key priorities was to implement public facilities in neighborhoods (*the Drassanes Civic Center, the Polideportivo del Raval*, the MACBA, the Center for Contemporary Culture and the agreement with different universities centers: UB, UPF and URLL). The other policy was to create squares – strategic perspective of spatial expansion. Housing policy had a clear role, the demolition of old and obsolete housing. Approval of the General Metropolitih Plan (1976) was partially assumed during approved in 1985, the PERI process of the district of *El Raval*. Final project was consensus between society and council – PGM, preservation of architectural heritage of neighborhood and pre-existing social structure.

Selected new public spaces in *El Raval, Rambla del Raval*

Rambla del Raval is most popular public space in *El Raval* district open in 2000 as the “New *Rambla* for People”. This was accompanied by a slogan: “*Welcome Lady Light and Lord Space*” (Maza, McDonogh, Pujadas 2002). Currently, the promenade is 58 m. wide and 317 m. long. It was established on the site of demolished, old, degraded and very intense buildings. According to *Martí Abella*, implementation of *Rambla del Raval* was the largest operation in revitalization of the *Citat Vella* area. To create it, 789 flats in 62 buildings were destroyed, and 1800 people forced to change their places of residence (op.cit.). However, new public space introduced hygienic conditions into intensive development. *Rambla del Raval* is the only such a large area containing greenery in a district, palm trees and shrubs rows grow along. Due to high greenery and surface of compacted sand (not a concrete or an asphalt), the promenade does not heat up so much. Many tourists go along the promenade as parallel and alternative to main *La Rambla* promenade. It is not so popular urban space, as *La Rambla* or the *Rambla del Mare*, therefore the number of passers is moderate. This can be perceived as disadvantage or advantage. According to the authors it is a beneficial alternative for crowded main streets. Most of tenements surrounding the promenade are historic buildings. One of a few new ones is: UGT – trade unions headquarters and the *Barceló* hotel. There are restaurants and hostels on ground floors. Along the promenade, there are beer gardens. Roads in both directions are separated by a promenade and bicycle has a separate lane. Promenade ends in both northern and southern parts with roundabouts, which organize traffic. Square is accessible for pedestrians only. A bicycle rental is located next to the promenade. At the northern end of square stands several meters high urban sculpture, by Fernando *Botero* – *El Gato*³, one of the main elements of *Raval's* contemporary identity. It is a meeting place for older residents who sit on benches along the pedestrian path and observe passers-by. This popular tourist destination – public space, that meet requirements to organize mass events. *Rambla del Raval* is a great opportunity but also a threat to *El Raval*. A functional and aesthetic urban space is a chance for district development. Threat is

³ Engl. Raval Cat.

the lack of institutions such as the MACBA, which could animate this square. The problem is the insufficiently large and diverse offer of services and trade, what can generate illegal businesses and criminality.

Illustration 3

Rambla del Raval, El Raval



Source: Author and date, the same as Illustration 1.

Horts de Sant Pau del Camp

Sant Pau del Camp Park is part of the same revitalization program. Town planners created a small park garden in a place of the former factory. It is located next to the *Sant Pau del Camp* monastery (formed before 911), one of Barcelona's architectural treasures. Park overwhelms old monastery with the scale and height of embankments. In area of greenery, has an evidence of post-industrial past. The main dominant part of this monastery took a form of a factory chimney and the terraces raised on rubble of the ground, create various levels. Enclave was built between 1990 and 1992. There is a small playground on the land surrounding church. Occasionally, the small park is visited by families with children and older people playing in boules. Park is not spacious. Single trees, no bushes, flowers and small architecture do not create an impression of relaxing greenery. It is not popular, consequently less secure neighborhood which generates accumulation of criminals and home-

Illustration 4

Sant Pau del Camp Park



Source: Author and date, the same as Illustration 1.

less people. That is why it degraded district's image and therefore it is closed during the night to reduce criminality. Despite greenery, residents do not choose it as an alternative walking route. They prefer to go down in dirty but safer street, because there is always someone observing neighborhood: drivers, residents or shop owners. Lack of services and houses within park boundaries and no cultural program, means "death of urban space in a social sense. Residents do not visit this park, which is also not recommended for tourists. Instead, local people prefer to spend time in dirty, narrow, familiar streets in front of houses. Unfortunately, this urban space is not a successful part of revitalization. *Jardins d'E-mile Vendrell* faced similar problems. Small number of visitors as well as lack of accompanying services have caused degradation and desolation.

Plaça Dels Àngels

Good example of the revitalization of public spaces in *El Raval* is *Plaça dels Àngels* – Square of Angels. Museum courtyard and MACBA⁴ building were designed by R. Meier. Two contemporary buildings define this space: MACBA and *Centre d'Estudis and Documentació del MACBA*. Main MACBA building is white, modernist with a scale slightly larger than surrounding buildings. Its color and glass façade contrasts with a neighboring slum and

⁴ Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) designed in 1995.

Illustration 5

MACBA, Angels Square



Source: Author and date, the same as Illustration 1.

stands out from an urban tissue. It is recognizable even from a far distance (Illustration 1). As far as people gather at a square, museum makes an impression of being empty and too big in relation to the exhibition needs. Glass wall does not work well, too much light penetrating interior makes it excessively warm. This complex combines new buildings and adapted historic ones, which is also one of the reasons of the space success. The MACBA contains: gothic convent, *Del Angels Chapel* (15th century), *Peu de la Creu*, the only renaissance chapel in Barcelona, adapted for temporary exhibitions and library.

There is a lack of greenery, benches or small architecture, but the fact of a location near an important cultural institution brings life into the public space. During all day many people pass through the square, making shortcuts. Skaters gather and use its floor, ramps and walls at the skate park and at the meeting point. According to the research of the author E. Jarecka - Bidzińska, this place is mostly visited rather by young people from other districts. What makes the square even more dynamic, is the neighborhood of northern part of *El Raval*, campus of the University of Barcelona, which was the element of revitalization.

Other successful urban spaces in *El Raval* are: *Placa de Salvador Sequi*, (next to Filmoteca), *Plaça de Télèci Moix* (next to CCCB), *Placa de Castella* (next to existing church – *Parròquia de Sant Pere Nolas Mercaderis*). Those squares are special because they concentrate local community. *Plaça de Télèci Moix* is next to the CCCB from the opposite side that *Plaça dels Àngels*. That is a place for children and youth teenagers. Contemporary building that stands next to the square is part of – Contemporary culture center complex

designed by *Pinon, Viaplana, Mercade*, architects. Historic building in CCCB complex has adapted the *Casa de Caritat* (monastery from 17th century). That urban space is spacious and open access public playgrounds, which is rather unusual in *El Raval*. Another attractive square – Placa de Castella is next to the church and offers low-budget bars, cafeteria visited by students.

Conclusions

Public spaces are important because they: create society, provide an evidence of dynamic of social changes, spaces of political deliberation and agonistic struggle, symbols of heritage, identity expressions of achievements, aspiration and a power of citizens, city planners, leaders and visionaries. Neighborhoods are urbanized areas with a balanced mix of human activity; districts are areas dominated by a single activity; corridors are connectors and separators of neighborhoods and districts. According to professor W. Kosiński: “Friendly places constitute a measure of values in urban space, and the attractiveness of a cityscape. Their creation determines the criteria of a good project and good use of the cities. Through cultural and stylistic eras, alternately rational or irrational, the art of a making places: friendly and aesthetic, is provided by the craftsmanship of designers, and the satisfaction of users. This way, both the: good and beautiful constitute a couple of the highest values – proclaimed by thinkers, and implemented by builders, and finally assimilated by people” (Kosiński 2012).

The authors conclude, therefore, that the decisive aspects of the success of some urban spaces in *El Raval* were: the location of variety of contemporary and historic buildings with public institutions next to the square: museums, libraries, art galleries, schools, cafes, shops and services. However, according to Ch. Alexander importance of society is equal: “... towns and buildings will not be able to become alive, unless they are made by all the people in society...” (Alexander et al. 1977). Apart from that, the main factor of success of *Plaça dels Àngels* were: accessibility, proximity to services, residential buildings and better safety. In opinion of A. Kula despite the lack of greenery, benches and other urban facilities, it is attractive public space (Kula 2004). Authors conclude, that the square is not the most important in *El Raval* public spaces, but its immediate surrounding. Public space does not exist in isolation from historical and functional context. Additionally, all interventions in degraded urban tissue require an understanding of whole organism of district and city.

Because of revitalization, degraded district after some time, fills up with new life. In *El Raval*, Square of Angels is a scenery of numerous social activities: sports activities, artistic events, protests and demonstrations. The social significance of the *El Raval's* public spaces is visible only when it is compared to the institutions standing next to it. New urban spaces are the best proof of revitalization effectiveness. They are also an important catalyst for

change, like the large-scale architecture constructed in *El Raval* under the renewal program. New public spaces in formerly degraded *El Raval* district, constitute a crystallizing element in urban structure of medieval quarter. They constitute a key element of sustainable development in the revitalized area. New city squares and promenades introduce a different quality into intense urban structure, they are a place of integration for local community, they give possibility of various uses for promotional or cultural purposes.

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Wybrane nowe przestrzenie publiczne w rewitalizacji dzielnicy *El Raval*, w Barcelonie

Streszczenie

El Raval jest jednym z niezliczonych przykładów skutecznie przeprowadzonych rewitalizacji w zdegradowanej, historycznej dzielnicy w skali Europy Zachodniej od 1980 r. po chwilę obecną. Poziom gentryfikacji nie zagraża tożsamości społecznej. Wiele nowych przestrzeni publicznych jest chętnie użytkowanych i otoczonych licznymi usługami: *La Rambla del Raval*, Plac Aniołów, *Placa de Castella*, *Placa de les Carameles*, *Placa de Salvador Sequi* czy *plaça de Télèci Moix*. Powstałe w procesie odnowy instytucje kultury i nauki m.in.: MACBA, CCCB, Muzeum Marynistyczne, Universitat de Barcelona przyciągnęły potencjał ekonomiczny, czyli inwestycje prywatne i publiczne oraz drobną przedsiębiorczość. Barcelona w efekcie rewitalizacji „odzyskała” historyczne centrum miasta – *Ciutat Vella*. Rozwijają się kolejne usługi o charakterze nauki, kultury i turystyki. To dzielnica z wielkim potencjałem, która nadal się przeobraża i jest warta zbadania.

Celem jest poznanie problemów i skutecznych rozwiązań zastosowanych przy tworzeniu nowych przestrzeni publicznych w średniowiecznej tkance rewitalizowanej dzielnicy *El Raval* w oparciu o własne badania. Wiedza zdobyta w ramach badań nad przestrzeniami publicznymi może posłużyć zmianom w kształtowaniu takich miejsc i systemu ich powiązań dla wielu zdegradowanych dzielnic polskich miast metropolitalnych. Takie badania wspierają dobre praktyki w urbanistyce i planowa-

niu przestrzennym oraz budowaniu ładu przestrzennego w krajobrazie miejskim. Zaprezentowano niniejszą publikację na konferencji: Dobre Praktyki w Urbanistyce i Planowaniu Przestrzennym, na Uniwersytecie Poznańskim 2017.

Słowa kluczowe: rewitalizacja, przestrzeń publiczna, *El Raval*, Barcelona.

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Afiliacja:

prof. dr hab. Alina Maciejewska

dr inż. arch. Ewa Jarecka-Bidzińska

Politechnika Warszawska

Katedra Gospodarki Przestrzennej
i Nauk o Środowisku Przyrodniczym

pl. Politechniki 1

00-661 Warszawa

e-mail: dziekan@gik.pw.edu.pl

e-mail: ewa.jarecka@pw.edu.pl