WALKING THE CITY
BARCELONA AS AN URBAN EXPERIENCE

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Inés Aquilué

Is an architect and PhD candidate in the Urban and Regional Planning Department at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya · BarcelonaTech (UPC). She holds a Master’s Degree in Urban Studies at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid (ETSAM-UPM). She teaches various subjects at the Escola Tècnica Superior d’Arquitectura de Barcelona (ETSAB-UPC). She has received a scholarship from the Spanish Ministry of Education to develop her research into cities under conflict and urban complexity.

Renata Gomes

Qualified as an architect at FA-UTL, Lisbon-Portugal, and holds a PhD from the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya · BarcelonaTech (UPC), Spain. With more than ten years of professional experience, she is an associate professor at the Escola Tècnica Superior d’Arquitectura de Barcelona (ETSAB-UPC) and is a member of the Architecture: Representation and Modeling (AR&M) research group at the same university. She has lectured at EINA (Spain) and, as a speaker, has participated in lectures and conferences in Spain, Portugal and Brasil. She has been a member of several juries and has taken part in international workshops. In the field of art, she works on paintings, urban installations and sound art and has participated in several national and international events in cities such as Lisbon, Oporto, Barcelona, Berlin, Tokyo and New York, amongst others.
WHAT IS THE CITY BUT THE PEOPLE?

Walter Benjamin, in his posthumous book Arcades, states that Charles Baudelaire realized that modernity in Paris signified that the bourgeoisie discovered the spectacle of arcade shop windows with fascination; and states that some of them did this with such tranquility that, instead of bringing a dog, some brought a tortoise. This change of customs took place in the 1830s.

The fact that covered shopping arcades did not appear in Barcelona until 1940 was very logical, as they are a phenomenon that is closely linked to the climate. Paris, Milan, Brussels and many other of the finest cities are governed by the cold, the wind and the rain, and the always fearful bourgeoisie required covered spaces to parade themselves and practice the sweet pleasure of social relations whilst strolling.

When outsiders ask me to define Barcelona in one word I answer without hesitation: Mediterranean. "Mediterranean" means many things; having that great portal, that large expanse of water, a sea overflowing with history, that facilitates communication with all varieties of cultures and civilizations. Before Columbus and his discovery, that was the world. But “Mediterranean” also means having such a friendly climate that it is a predisposition to hedonism.

Barcelonians interact in a very special and sensual way with the outside. They stay at home as little as possible and tend to enjoy public spaces as much as they can. When a Barcelonian says "I'm going for a walk" it means that the street is considered a gentle, natural, and affective continuation of the home. This fact has a very deep meaning. If Steiner ordained that the Café embodies the soul of Europe, I consider the street to be the soul of Mediterranean citizens.

The style that embodies the Barcelonian who goes for a walk is the Barcelonian that daydreams: this kind of aimless stroll, with no sense of hurry, where one must be very attentive to everything that happens in the streets and squares and what’s on show in the shop windows. And in this context I find Shakespeare's almost philosophical observation in Coriolanus more than accurate: "What is the city but the people?"

The sublimation of all this in Barcelona takes place in La Rambla, its name of Arabic origin means "water collection". As a result of its urbanization in 1775, La Rambla began to garner pedestrians. An exciting phenomenon, still present today, it was perfected into a space for walking but also into a space to just be.

Lluís Permanyer
Barcelona has generated a comprehensive compendium of its urban experiences that has been described by many authors, from Manuel de Solà-Morales to Joan Busquets, through Josep M. Huertas Claveria, Lluís Permanyer or Alexandre Cirici and Itziar González, among others. Their contributions present the history, urban events or relationships between public institutions and citizens. This book, however, presents the essence of a teaching and research project course format, organized by way of visits and city tours as part of the teaching program at UPC’s Escola Tècnica Superior d’Arquitectura de Barcelona, which uses the city as a classroom and laboratory.

Its aim is to deepen one’s knowledge of the city through tours as a way of approaching architecture, urbanism, sociology, history and the rest of its components.

The project’s long history has created a rich background which has been generated year after year, from the contribution of teachers and students, mainly from other universities around the world, and has led to a solid knowledge base with a permanent and timeless line.

The methodological basis of the teaching project involves three innovations: The first consists of the tours, led by experts, through the city of Barcelona; the second is the graphic record of all things urban; the third is the introduction of new information and communication technologies (ICT) in both the interaction and exchange of graphics and audio recordings.

Through the application of this new methodology, knowledge is acquired in situ and moreover through the implementation of collective processes of urban reflection and a graphic record of the city which are shared interactively on the web. The project has won prestigious awards for quality in university teaching, including the Jaume Vicens Vives Distinction for Catalan Universities and the UPC 2011 Award for Initiative in University Teaching Quality, both academically renowned and prestigious awards. The experience has been exported to other universities such as Rome, Medellín, Montevideo and Lisbon, and has recently acquired a larger dimension through collaboration with the Consortium for Advanced Studies in Barcelona (CASB) program, in which prestigious American universities participate.

CASB is a collaborative initiative involving nine high-caliber U.S. universities that provides students with a unique opportunity to have direct access to and full immersion in four distinguished Spanish universities. The program fills an important niche in education abroad in what is arguably Spain’s most dynamic and avant-garde city. CASB is made up of the following U.S. universities: Brown, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Duke, Harvard, Northwestern, Princeton and Stanford.