

“Un viento que sigue soplando”. - Motto *Cooperativa Gregal*, a socio-political entity representing the associative fabric of *el Besòs i el Maresme*.

The city of Barcelona has undergone rapid urban growth over the last century, driven by the establishment of the Cerdà Plan, the end of barracks due to the housing shortage caused by rural immigration, or the Olympic Games, and its consequent urban transformations. These changes impacted as well *El Besòs i el Maresme* neighborhood and, for this reason, understanding its history is crucial to comprehending the current situation of the area and its needs.

1. TERRITORIAL AUSCULTATION

Under the 1957 Social Emergency Plan, the Municipal Housing Board built 72.000 homes in the current *Besòs i el Maresme* in a massive manner. Due to the low-cost intervention and limited construction time, an important **housing deficit** existed in the neighborhood. In its origins, the area also constituted an “urban back” separated from the Eixample by train tracks, fields and industries. As a result, the configuration of the neighborhood represented a dialectical and social battle between the traditional city and the modern urbanism. It took decades to sew the two urban fabrics together.

Moreover, during the establishment of this so-called “**city of polygons**”, **rationalist thinking** ideas were exposed. This can be seen in the large city blocks, initially lacking any kind of services or facilities, as well as the wide avenues and streets that function as gaps, due to their **oversized scale**. This rationalist thinking, defined by a tabula rasa approach, erased any past trace in the area and separated commercial and residential activities, turning the neighborhood into a **dormitory-city** for a working-class population. Consequently, the current commercial activity is not only inactive (23,6% of the ground floor commercial premises are vacant) but also considerably fragile, with commercial uses occupying only 2,4% of the surface area; much lower than Barcelona's 7.4% (based on data from *Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya*). This **commercial desert** also contrasts with the nearby Diagonal Mar Shopping Center, on a city scale.

Despite the high density of the neighborhood, the proportion of public space did not show a significant shortage per inhabitant, and it still does not at the present. In fact, *El Besòs i el Maresme* is connected to environmentally important areas and large adjacent extensions of green public space, such as, the Mediterranean Sea, *Parc del Fòrum*, *Parc natural del Besòs* or *Parc de Diagonal Mar*. However, these are city-scale parks and do not accommodate everyday uses or cater to the needs of the neighborhood's families and residents. Excluding these extensions, the urban parkland surface accounts for 4.7 m²/ inhabitant, well below Barcelona's average of 8.2m²/ inhabitant. Furthermore, the public space within *El Besòs i el Maresme* has resulted in **a rigid and low-quality space**, due to the parallel and systematic repetition of the blocks; a “grey” space lacking any identity or character, completely monofunctional and with undefined uses. It has become an empty space or “third landscape” as a result of the lack of concern for creating synergies in the urban scope.



Children playing in the street, 1968.

Despite all its urban deficiencies, the neighborhood has a strong sense of belonging and a long **tradition of community involvement**. Many existing social entities follow the legacy of the first associations in the 50s and 60s, such as **Cooperativa Gregal**, emerged with the aim of dignifying the area, at that time polluted due to its proximity to the chimneys of Besòs River, and experiencing odorous floods caused by *Riera d'Horta* (now *Rambla Prim*), during heavy rain periods. Thanks to the community struggles, the canalization of the *Riera* and subsequent urbanization of *Rambla Prim* before the Olympics, represented a significant improvement for the area and created a new commercial and walkable axis. The *Cooperativa Gregal* not only had an ecological and urban focus but also played a significant role in educational and social endeavors. Thanks

to its efforts, the neighborhood now counts with numerous formal education facilities as well as social initiatives, like *Menjador Solidari Gregal*. However, despite its relevant contributions, *El Besòs i el Maresme* still faces significant **risks of segregation and vulnerability**.

2. PARTICIPATORY DIAGNOSIS AND PROPOSAL:

After the **territorial auscultation** and an active understanding of the current situation, the proposal aims to reconnect **the proximity scale** of the urban voids to the dense city fabric at the larger scale, through a **holistic** approach. The proposal seeks to encompass the **ecological, living, social and productive milieu** to transform *El Besòs i el Maresme* into a resilient neighborhood, by addressing its vulnerabilities and introducing new inclusive and metabolic cycles.

The proposed actions constitute a seed of change for the urban landscape regeneration through a **multi-scalar dialogue** between different urban policies (from the XL- City scale to the XS-unit/building scale). The objective is to generate new ecological and social dynamics as a strategy for its transformation; a transformation that involves **physical, topological** (integration of different degrees of sharing, porosity, privacy), **organizational** (cooperative neighborhood), and **programmatic** changes (integration of new and **mixed-uses** for the inclusion of **intergenerational, intercultural** and diverse profiles), while ensuring the **coexistence of existing activities** and addressing the consequences of **climate change**.

Thus, the proposal reimagines the dormitory-neighborhood, which currently features generic, rigid and underused space, acting on the current modern urbanism, by moving towards a **multilayered and community-oriented neighborhood** with active and productive ground floor plinths. The approach pretends to "densify" the urban void of the neighborhood through the definition of a network of open spaces or "**pocket gardens**". These "second-hand spaces, will be developed as a strategy that can be implemented in **different scales and different stages**; creating a new walkable neighborhood with an involved, active and **participatory community**. It is essential to take into account that all these urban voids in the neighborhood are described with Code 18, as "Areas subject to specific volumetric" -private building properties-, in the urban planning, so there is even more reason to include the citizens in the future planning decision.

This new **hierarchy of open spaces** allows to connect and sew the neighborhood, not just at a physical level, but also ecologically and socially, given also its special condition as **a hinge** between the technological 22@ and the *Parc Fluvial del Besòs*; small incisions, realistic and conservative actions that, through an **acupuncture** approach, will create new catalyzing spaces and regenerate the neighborhood with and for its neighbors.

In this sense, the proposal studies and reinforces the following four different **urban fabrics/ milieus** to move towards a healthy neighborhood:

- a. **Green city** (*¡las calles para la gente!*): This milieu focuses on the urban and ecological fabric, working not only on environmental sustainability and climate emergency, but also on accommodating new urban narratives. Water and nature are seen as an urban and unifying language.

On a city scale, the project aims to stitch the territory together; improving the pedestrian and bike connection between the city with the river and the city with the sea, by using the landscape and **the climate change as project material**. Therefore, conservative improvement actions in Rambla Prim are proposed, breaking its scale, monotonicity, linearity and enhancing its accessibility (removal of architectural barriers, use of porous and non-slip pavements, improved lighting...).

At a neighborhood scale, the rapid urbanization of the territory resulted not just in the creation of fragile and low-quality spaces, but also in the **sealing and paving of the natural fabric** (currently less than 10% of permeable surfaces), replacing natural terrain and vegetation with asphalt, altering the hydrological cycle and causing **floods** during torrential rain periods (which has been a recent tendency in the city). Thus, the



Neighbors protest in the City Hall,



proposal aims to recover the natural heritage of the area, **closing and optimizing the water cycle**, and improving the relationship with the underground (Aqüífer del Besòs) through passive Sustainable Urban Drainage System (**SUDS**).

Also, to address the rising temperatures affecting the residents of this vulnerable neighborhood, with extreme heat episodes, a system of Micro-climatic (and social) shelters (**refugios climáticos**) is proposed. These shelters not only recolonize and **renaturalize** the urban landscape with local and low-maintenance greenery and biodiversity on the ground, backwalls and roofs, improving the thermal comfort and reducing the heat island effect by 2-3°C, but also serve as catalyst for the space, providing high-quality accessible social areas that ensure a mix of uses, generating urban episodes with a certain continuity, during different parts of the day.

These urban gardens reclaim public space back to the citizens (in a neighborhood covered in asphalt and full of cars) by pedestrianizing the streets and also creating new elevated **Community Park(ings)** in specific areas with parking lots for the neighbors below (at Ground floor level). This strategy provides a **cost-effective solution** for the removal of parking places in the area (underground parkings would require higher investment due the high-water table in the area), while **ensuring security**, avoiding shady or dubious streets, guaranteeing accessibility and accommodating diverse uses above, on first floor (urban gardens, playgrounds, sports/ cultural activities).

- b. Living City** (*¡por un barrio digno y seguro!*): A series of actions are proposed to repair and rehabilitate the vulnerable residential fabric and improve the existing situation of housing emergency and energy poverty caused partly by the architectural and urban deficiencies and poor habitability conditions of the aging housing stock.



The aim is to enhance the cadastral value and increase the living space per inhabitant of the housing units through the rehabilitation and 2 meters facade **extension**, increasing contact with the outdoors, while improving **accessibility** (new elevators, elimination of architectural barriers, roof rehabilitation...) together with **thermal comfort** (strengthening thermal insulation and sun barriers) **and energy efficiency** (especially in buildings without cross-ventilation). For this, prefabrication modules will be used, utilizing the same materials but with a wide variety of finishings, ensuring a cost-effective and faster execution. The proposal also creates new community shared spaces located on rooftops or empty ground floor premises for social, domestic (hanging out clothes) or productive purposes (urban gardens, energy production).

The facades extensions or the addition of new balconies will also create intermediary **threshold spaces** between inside and outside, public and private-domestic; **soft porous edges** or different degrees of sharing for a more inclusive and sustainable development. Moreover, in view of the current lack of housing facilities, the proposal does not get rid of ground floor dwellings but instead proposes their "**dignification**". In this context, the creation of threshold spaces and soft boundaries will also be crucial.

- c. Social City** (*¡llenemos de vida las calles!*): Urban life is the result of a dialectic between the physical and social dimension. Thus, to reverse the current increase of vulnerability situations and social inequality, (with a particular impact on women, people of foreign origin, risk of social exclusion or elderly groups) and prevent the risk of segregation and isolation, it is proposed to strengthen and diversify the associative fabric.

This way, the proposal promotes **cultural and sports nodes** while reinforcing, creating and supporting existing and new local initiatives, facilities or **community spaces** (Cooperativa Gregal, Casal del Barri...). This strategy will turn into a more inclusive, cohesive and open community and will promote **collective memory and neighborhood pride** (public spaces are repurposed into community spaces, rooftops are adapted for communal use, unused lots are revitalized for neighborhood activities and new relationships with educational centers are strengthened). Moreover, to cope with the oversized streets and buildings-scale, the proposal

attempts to **recover the human scale** of the neighborhood while creating more **domestic public spaces** (new flexible and inclusive urban furniture and lightning with resting and also play areas, for both human and non-human, *urban dining-room, urban living-room...*).

The active involvement of families, citizens and the community in planning decisions will foster a **sense of togetherness** within the urban space and will create a new image for el Besòs I el Maresme. The singularization of the space will transform the neighborhood from generic and grey into **unique and idiosyncratic**.

- d. **Productive- economic City** (*¡levantemos persianas!*): Recognizing that local commerce plays a crucial role in the social fabric, the proposal addresses the current commercial desert that has diminished social relationships.

To achieve this, the project strengthens economic and interior **proximity circuits** to support the local and **circular economy**, revitalizing the urban space and promoting human-scale recovery. Additionally, the proposal encourages the reactivation of the local economy and daily dynamics through **temporal space appropriation** and the creation of new **spaces of opportunity** with new management models; **mixed-use** spaces that ensure maximum potential for the future, without overprogramming, and are **flexible**, porous and permeable. All these strategies promote as well a sense of ownership and belonging and thus, civil responsibility. Finally, the proposal promotes the utilization of rooftops for communal activities, urban gardening and **energy production** through photovoltaic panels.

3. OPEN AND COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

Through the work on these 4 different milieus (*ecological, living, social and productive-economical*), the regeneration of El Besòs I el Maresme revolves around an **open dynamic process**, a roadmap or management criteria rather than a definitive or closed project.

Recognizing the importance of public participation, the strategies include mechanisms for shared decision-making with citizens, empowering them as **co-creators** of the space and involving time and multidisciplinary actors from **territorial governance** (local government, municipal areas, territorial institutions) and also **external governance** (local associations, private sectors and citizens); inverting this way, the decision pyramid.



In the proposal, **time** is considered as an important agent in implementing sustainable milieus. Therefore, the project is structured in **different phases**, to be implemented within a span of 10 years, and with a focus on starting with the most vulnerable areas on the northern part of the site, to create a safe and walkable neighborhood, fostering a sustainable interface.

4. Implementation and evolution

As mentioned, "*Un viento que sigue soplando*" embodies an ongoing process without a defined endpoint. Thus, after its implementation and execution, **periodic evaluations** will be essential to assess the effectiveness, ensure adequate **maintenance**, and identify potential areas of improvement.

As described, the proposed actions aim to redefine the neighborhood through a **resilient, inclusive, feminist, innovative, social and energy-conscious process**; a process that incorporates new urban policies and cultural sensitivities, founded on metabolisms, gender logics and care strategies. The wide range of catalyzing possibilities presents an opportunity to enhance the neighborhood's synergies, creating a new sustainable interface. Through collaborative efforts and a shared vision, *El Besòs I el Maresme* can thrive as a vibrant and flourishing community for future generations.