

Hold up your hand, the Catalan Human Tower Museum in Valls and the heritage process of the castellers

Introduction

Marta Casals, the wife of the famous cellist Pau Casals, justified the passion her husband from El Vendrell had for the world of the *casteller*, the human tower builders, by saying that, for him, they were the soul of the nation. Indeed, over the past half century *castells* have become, even more so, an ineffable symbol of Catalan identity and culture, breaking out from the Camp de Tarragona and Penedès area, spreading throughout Catalonia, and even beyond. This popularisation of tower building has led to a huge increase in the number of groups practising the pastime as well as *diades* – the special days where the groups come together to build *castells*. This has happened in parallel to the process of granting the practice heritage status, something that was particularly supported by governmental bodies and the community of *castellers*, and which reached a peak in 2010, when human towers were included in UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. As part of the dynamic of assessing the heritage value of *castells*, the creation of a museum or cultural institution to become a permanent emblem of the tradition has featured prominently: the Museu Casteller de Catalunya, based in the town of Valls.

This work is devoted to the new centre, soon to be added to Catalonia's museum map, which should focus the heritage activity surrounding these

human towers, and become a stable beacon of this intangible practice. The hitherto unsuccessful idea for a *casteller* museum originally surfaced half a century ago, making it necessary to look at the activity's chronological evolution, the actors involved, and the formal changes that have been made. However, there is also the question of how this intangible heritage can be displayed in a museographic form, and the challenges posed by the management of such heritage.

Likewise, the decision to place the museum in the city of Valls is a response to the semiotic characteristic of the *castells*, but within the city the fact that the old quarter has been designated as its home, opens up a new topic of debate. The area is partially depopulated and has visible structural degradation, but efforts are being made to remedy this situation, including the siting of the Museu Casteller. It will be interesting, then, to see whether or not urban regeneration or remodelling is possible through the creation of cultural spaces. This is an act technically known as gentrification and has recently been undertaken by several, relatively nearby, cities, like Paris, Barcelona, Bilbao and Santander.

In short, it involves laying on the table the network of cultural, social, urban and cultural processes in Valls that is being woven around the Museu Casteller de Catalunya as a focus point, from



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the museum's own history to how this entity is seen by member of the Valls community, as well as what its arrival in the old quarter of the city will mean.

The Human Tower Builder Museum, more than half a century of projects

The Museu Casteller is somewhat of a paradox, since despite not being up and running it has almost sixty years of history.

By going through local periodicals such as *Juventud*, *Cultura*, *La Crònica de l'Alt Camp* (digitised by the Alt Camp Regional Archive and available online) and newspapers such as *El Vallenc*, as well as other national publications such as *Destino* and *La Vanguardia*, you can construct an accurate timeline of the relationship between Valls and the Museu Casteller.

The idea of building a museum centre dedicated to human towers, and

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The new square created inside the Museu Casteller (May 2017). ALEX REBOLLO

more specifically the Xiquets de Valls group, was first mentioned in print in November 1958, when the local magazine *Semanario Juventud de Valls* ran a small article entitled “Un Museo de los Xiquets de Valls”, explaining the desire to reserve a room in one of the town’s public buildings as a place to exhibit photographs, trophies, souvenirs, and other objects related to *castells*. The initiative was lauded from the pages of the magazine *Destino*, in January 1959, by the photographer from Valls, Pere Català Roca. Indeed, as of that moment,

— Lately, *castells*, or human towers, have been strengthened as a symbol of the Catalan identity in parallel to them being raised to heritage status, attaining the highest official distinction as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as recognised by UNESCO. Because of this, there is a need for a central base where this pastime can be permanently exhibited: the Museu Casteller de Catalunya, in Valls. The article reviews the history of the museum (conceived more than half a century ago) as well as its inclusion in the heritage status process of *castells* and the urban regeneration involved in it being situated in the old quarter in Valls.

Català Roca must be considered one of the project’s main supporters.

Although the display room for the Xiquets de Valls group never came about, it did give rise to the February 1964 exhibition entitled “Vida e historia de los Xiquets de Valls y de los *castells* en general”, the life and history of the Xiquets de Valls and of human towers in general, set up specifically to raise funds for the monument to the Xiquets de Valls that the county town of Alt Camp wanted to build. It is, however, inter-

— En paral·lel a la patrimonialització dels castells, darrerament s’ha esdevingut un procés de consolidació d’aquests com a símbol de la identitat catalana, els quals han assolit els màxims distintius oficials i han estat declarats Patrimoni Cultural Immaterial de la Humanitat per la UNESCO. Per això els cal una seu estable on mostrar-ne la pràctica permanentment: el Museu Casteller de Catalunya de Valls. L’article repassa la trajectòria del museu (ideat fa més de mig segle) i la seva inclusió en el procés de patrimonialització dels castells, així com el vessant de regeneració urbanística que suposa ubicar-lo al Barri Antic de Valls.

esting to see how this exhibition was just the first museographic act relating to the world of the *castellers*, not only in Valls but throughout Catalonia. Four years later, in 1968, the city of Tarragona picked up the baton at the Santa Tecla festival, with a new human tower exhibition at Casa Castellarnau. In this case, the *casteller* groups of Valls, El Vendrell, Vilafranca del Penedès, and L’Arboç all participated, as well as those from Tarragona itself. It was a remarkable achievement as it broke away from the local character of the earlier exhibi-

— Últimamente se ha producido un proceso de afirmación y patrimonialización de los castells como símbolo de la identidad catalana. Estos han obtenido los máximos distintivos oficiales y han sido declarados Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial de la Humanidad por la UNESCO. Por eso necesitan una sede estable donde mostrar su práctica: el Museu Casteller de Catalunya de Valls. El artículo repasa la trayectoria del museo (ideado hace más de medio siglo) y su inclusión en el proceso de patrimonialización de los castells, así como la vertiente de regeneración urbana que supone ubicarlo en el Barrio Antiguo de Valls.

tion in Valls, and took strides towards a universality that would become the key to the project. The report on the exhibition in the *Diario Español* was written by a journalist from Tarragona, Lluís Mezquida (under the pseudonym of Petrofilo) who, seeing the success, advocated for the creation of a folk museum in Tarragona – without doubt the predecessor of the current Casa de la Festa – where the *castellers* had their own space.

Years later, in 1976, in the context of the annual get together of the Colla Joves dels Xiquets de Valls human tower group, the city's mayor Romà Galimany announced the council's serious desire to create a *casteller* museum, anticipating it opening in 1978. Although this deadline was not met, in 1978, the Institut d'Estudis Vallencs, through its Folklore Commission, joined the project as an independent commission to give a boost to the museum. At that time, the IEV, was also looking for a place for its activities, causing them to suggest the facilities of the old Sant Roc Hospital as both the headquarters for the Institute and the Museu Casteller. Along the same lines, during the 1981 Festes de la Candela celebrations a *casteller* exhibition was held with part of what was to be museum funding.

In parallel to what was happening in Valls, there were discussions at the territorial scale relating to a museum dedicated to human towers. Once again, Pere Català Roca was the one who pushed to give the topic greater visibility, initially in the 1977 Congress of Catalan Culture, and then more strongly in the First Congress of Traditional and Popular Culture in 1982, for which he was part of the advisory committee. In the conclusions to the *casteller* section of the congress, in the seventh point, the need is expressly conveyed: to promote the creation of a human tower museum

setting, proposed for installation, by the groups in Valls. (Department of Culture, 1984: 94)

As a result, the Catalan Government, through the Museum Service, intervened with the intention of revitalising the project. Therefore, in 1984, Daniel Ventura Solé, a painter from Valls, was appointed director and a large exhibition on the museum was held in the old Sant Roc Hospital. The display was accompanied by the official presentation ceremony for the museum project, chaired by representatives of the institutions involved as well as *casteller* groups from around Catalonia.

The unsuitability of the old Sant Roc hospital building led to the search for a new space, which would eventually result in the building of Ca Segarra, in Plaça del Blat. During the main Sant Joan festival in 1985, the doors were opened to a permanent exhibition on the *casteller* world, housed on the first floor of the building. However, this exhibition was not regularly open to the public, but was for specially booked visits, in particular coinciding with the town's main festivals, such as Santa Úrsula and the Christmas festivities.

Once again, structural deficiencies in the building obliged the display to close its doors, only two years after its start-up. Additionally, despite the fact that work began in Ca Segarra, it was not finished, and the building was never to house the human tower museum.

The first half of the 1990s was marked by talks between the town council and the Catalan Government, relating to the project's funding. In September 1997, the work was invigorated, with Josep Mañà and the Museu de Valls drafting the museum project, in order to resume the adaptation of Ca Segarra. At that time, the end of the work and the opening of the museum was planned for 2003.

However, the end of the century was also tainted by disagreements about the location of the museum: while the city council stood firmly behind Ca Segarra, the Catalan Government's Ministry of Culture was looking for other options, highlighting the shortcomings of the building in Plaça del Blat. At the start of the new century, alternative proposals arose, among which was a suggestion to use the old military barracks that was then being occupied by the Narcís Oller secondary school. With the change in municipal government after the 2003 elections, this last location gained favour and Ca Segarra was sidelined. The project was given a further boost when, on October 25, 2003, in the building of the former military barracks, the Minister of Culture, the President of the Diputació de Tarragona, the Mayor of Valls, and the President of the *casteller* association signed the consortium constitution that made the museum possible.

However, the saga of where the Museu Casteller de Catalunya was to be located does not end here; in October 2007, Valls town council published the construction of a new building for the museum, outside the town, in Partida de Ruanes. The new project was presented in October 2009 by its author, the Barcelona architect Daniel Freixes and his company Varis Arquitectes SLP, together with the top representatives of the administrations involved. The design included a new, 3,000 square metre building situated in an area of more than 10,000 square metres, connected to the city by several walkways. The siting of the Museum in that location was conditioned by factors including the ownership of the land – initially it was announced that a native of Valls had gifted it altruistically, but later it was specified that it must be bought. Likewise, the *casteller* museum was listed as part of the Residential Strategic Area (Àrea Estratègica Residencial; ARE) of Ruanes. But the

new destination of the museum was included in the demands of citizen protest movements, including the Valls Viu platform, created in June 2008 and which, in its founding manifesto, moved, among other things, to eliminate the ARE and transfer the museum to the old quarter of the town.

Finally, in March 2013, Albert Batet, Mayor of Valls, announced that the Ruanes site had been completely abandoned, the ARE withdrawn, and that the old quarter would house the Museu Casteller de Catalunya. This change necessitated a redrawing of the plans. Dani Freixes was kept on as architect but a more modest building was designed, to be located in the area of

Carrer Espardenyers, near Plaça del Blat. An agreement with the Institut Català del Sòl allowed the land to be obtained, with 29 buildings in ruins or extremely poor condition being redeveloped, integrating a space that had, initially, been reserved for the construction of social housing.

On March 27, 2015, on the site where the museum was to be built, festivities surrounded the start of the work, with the some thirty casteller groups taking part, the act witnessed by everyone in the human tower world.

Ultimately, on January 8, 2016, the winner of the ideas competition for the museography was announced:

the company of museographer and set designer Ignasi Cristià, with Lavinia Spurna Visual being responsible for the audiovisual production.

This new building modifies the urban layout surrounding it by creating a space that joins Carrer Espardenyers with Plaça del Blat, fashioning a square crowned by a large upright cylinder that cuts through the building and allows one to contemplate the sky. Within this emptiness rises a great quadrangular prism. This is a new vociferation for the verticality of *castells*, and through integrated lighting it highlights all the bright colours of the various groups. At the same time, the structure adds to and modifies the Valls skyline, establishing a dialogue with the bell tower of the church of Sant Joan, the tallest in Catalonia.

The interior of the museum, as well as housing the reception, shop, and café, is also home to the CEDOCA (Centre de Documentació Castellera). This publicly owned organisation brings together the largest documentary collection (graphic, photographic, audiovisual, etc.) on the world of human towers. The qualitative leap implied by CEDOCA's change of location, will no doubt be reflected in its users and the research they carry out.

The permanent exhibition will, however, constitute the bulk of the museum's appeal. With 2,000 square meters and organised according to the casteller motto, *strength, balance, value, and sanity* (extracted from the work *Los Xiquets de Valls* by the composer Josep Anselm Clavé), the exhibition is based on audiovisual resources that convey information. Six major audiovisuals and two interactive displays comprise the main attraction, complemented by sensory experiences and participatory immersion that transport visitors closer to the values, sensations and experiences of the human tower builders. Some of



Rendered view of the inside of the Museu Casteller (2016).

IGNASI CRISTIÀ — MUSEU CASTELLER DE CATALUNYA



Rendered view of the inside of the Museu Casteller (2016).

IGNASI CRISTIÀ — MUSEU CASTELLER DE CATALUNYA

the exhibits also make up part of the discourse: there are displays of related objects, including some of the pieces from the CEDOCA art collection, the cups from the first *castell* competitions held in Tarragona in the 1930s, and historic instruments such as a 19th century double-reeded gralla and a brass *timbal* drum made by the metal worker from Vendrell, Francesc Badia (1869–1957). But there are also much newer incorporations for the *castellers*, like the helmets worn by members of the *pom de dalt*, the three uppermost levels of the tower, that have been used since the summer of 2006. Also on display is the certificate signed by the general director of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, dated November 2010, whereby *castells* were raised to the category of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Beyond formal details such as museography or architecture, little has moved on in other aspects, such as the management of the equipment. Although, as previously mentioned, the project is guided by three Catalan administrative levels (national, provincial and local) as well as the Coordinadora de Colles Castelleres, once the inaugural tape has been cut, it is not known who will ultimately take charge. In 2014, Valls town council employed the consultancy from Manresa, Quaderna, to draft a management and viability plan for the Museu Casteller de Catalunya. This public document carefully sets out the state of the question and context within which the future museum must be framed, from the perspectives of tourism, space, economics, and management. Although they propose a management model and funding sources, they do not do so officially, as it will be the political agents themselves who will have to do this.

The plans include a complicated framework deriving from the relatively minor tradition of tourism in Valls, and the high seasonality of the municipal-

ity's current assets: *castells* and the mild *calçot* onions. They also consider the poor public transport network and insufficient and decentralised restoration proposal. Geography also works against the museum, and, according to the report, the proximity of Valls to centres that are very attractive to tourists, like Tarragona, Poblet, and Montblanc, may not be favourable.

Nevertheless, the Management Plan forecasts the need to sell some 130,000 annual tickets in order to make the project viable and sustainable (Quaderna, 2014). This is a real challenge. As an example, in 2014 (the year in which the plan was drawn up) there were around 130,000 visitors (not tickets sold) to: the archaeological site of Empúries, which depends on the Archaeological Museum of Catalonia; the Museum of Jewish History in Girona; and the Gala Dalí Castle Púbol. Achieving those 130,000 tickets would make the Museu Casteller the most visited museum in the province, ahead of the National Archaeological Museum of Tarragona, which in 2014 received 85,801 visitors, and the Diocesan Museum next to Tarragona Cathedral, visited by 106,690 people in 2016 (Department Of Culture, 2014 and 2016). It goes without saying that the archaeological ruins in Tarragona, which are part of the Tarragona History Museum, are not taken into account as these are not in the Government of Catalonia's museum register. However, these spaces in Tarragona were visited by around 640,000 people in 2016.

Intangible heritage

The importance of the technological and audiovisual displays used by the Museu Casteller to construct its museographic discourse, is further evidence of the special nature of the heritage exhibited there.

The official recognition of intangible heritage was a long time in coming,

and there was much debate between supporters of the omnipresence of patrimony and those who restrict the meaning to everything that is not material. In other words, the first group claims that all heritage is intangible, since the value of objects – classified as material heritage – does not reside in the pieces themselves but in their meaning, i.e., an intangible quality. To give an example, a flag like those hanging on balconies around the region, would not be exhibited – apparently – in a museum, archive, or gallery. However, if this flag turns out to be the *senyera* that enveloped the ballot box containing the heart of President Macià and which the Tarradellas family took custody of while in exile, everything changes and it is justified that it be hung in pride of place, preferably in the Montserrat Tarradellas Archive, located in the Monastery of Poblet.

The truth is that this is not a new concept, and not one invented by UNESCO. However, the recognition gives official status to certain precepts that were embedded in other categories, such as folklore from the beginning of the 19th century, or ethnological heritage, that was booming during the 1980s.

At the UNESCO conference in Mexico in 1982, the supranational body cited the term intangible heritage for the first time, consolidating it in subsequent meetings, such as that held in 1993. It was not until the new century, that it would receive its final boost. In 2001, in Turin, experts from all over the world defined the term, as a preliminary step to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage, held in Paris in October 2003. This meeting, in addition to consolidating the concept, also served to create the first tools for safeguarding and protecting intangible heritage, such as the list of elements that require urgent protective measures and, in particular, the

Representative List Of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Castells, heritage status processes

In November 2010, *castells* were registered on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, under UNESCO's term "Human Towers". This was the result of its candidacy in 2007 as a fundamental pillar in the heritage status granting process and significance of this Catalan expression. It goes without saying that both the candidature and the entire heritage status granting process for *castells* deserve careful study, far removed from what follows, which only includes brief notes.

The means by which something ends up being granted heritage status is a process of patrimonialisation. This requires the creation of a scalar network in which there is a multiplicity of actors with different intentions. It involves a reinterpretation of the past based on contemporary problems, which can be characterised as a remodelling, reconstruction, or re-elaboration of the past, giving it a political-identity, social-community, or economic-tourist use (Roigé, 2014: 29). All assumptions involve dangers, such as that of misrepresenting the meaning when the motives are political or related to identity, or the commodification of the heritage to meet the demands of tourism. In this way, and in the case of intangible heritage, we can see how the dances of indigenous peoples that were only used in specific periods and with clearly defined motives, are now sold to the highest bidder and are danced based on visits by tourists, who observe them thinking they are authentic.

A new step in this path of patrimonialisation is the creation of a space that captures the heritage such as a museum or interpretation centre. For an intangible asset, this requires materialisation,



The certificate recognising *castells* as UNESCO Intangible Heritage (2010).

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making it a "thing" that can be put on display, sold, or exploited.

In the case of *castells*, a popular tradition geographically limited to the Camp de Tarragona and Penedès areas, these have become the symbol of an entire region. This undoubtedly derives from the political significance of human tower building, both at the beginning of the 20th century and especially since the 1980s following the restoration of democracy in Spain. The recognition, appropriation and projection given by the national administration to *castells* has resulted in the multiplication of *diades castelleres* – the festival days celebrating human towers – as well as the founding of more groups around the region and beyond, a key factor in the inclusion of *castells* in the Catalan idiosyncrasy. It is reflected in the fact that the opening ceremony of the Barcelona Olympic Games included 92 casteller groups building their towers under the whole world's gaze, making it the best way to show the planet that "we are" Catalans (or at least those who make *castells*). And more recently we have seen the political use of the pastime, through events such as that organised by Òmnium Cultural in the spring of

2014, *Catalans want to vote. Human towers for democracy*, in which eight European capitals were treated to the sight of human towers being built amid banners and proclamations in favour of a referendum on the political future of Catalonia to be held on November 9 of that same year.

Likewise, campaigns promoted by the Catalan Government and other administrative bodies are based on the image of the world of human tower building, to attract tourism, even programming *ad hoc diades castelleres* to make their festivals more attractive and increase visitor numbers. Nothing new there, at least nothing that had not been happening in cities like Vilafranca, Valls and Tarragona at the end of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th, but in a very different context in terms of tourism.

The *castell*-tourism relationship has been strongly ratified with the new century, the good standing of the groups and the many successes they have achieved help make the pastime yet more attractive to the public and popularise the act, which at the same time is encouraged as a governmental



Castellers in the independence demonstration on La Diada – Catalonia's national day (2014). DANI CODINA

strategy. However, the legitimacy of this process also involves obtaining certain distinctions that differentiate one's practices from others. In Catalonia, *diades castelleres* in some of the region's festivities are key in the cataloguing of the pastime as a Heritage Festival of National Interest. These include the main festivals of L'Arboç and Vilafranca del Penedès, the Festes Decennals de la Mare de Déu de la Candela de Valls, and the Santa Tecla festival in Tarragona, among others.

But the greatest recognition to which intangible manifestations can aspire is the aforementioned UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of

Humanity. The road started down in 2007 translates into this need to have an official seal from some prestigious acronym like UNESCO that legitimises the heritage status of *castells*.

2010, the year in which this supposed quality certificate was obtained, was also a milestone from which the exploitation and commodification of human towers expanded.

In this way, and with the desire to extend the experience beyond the intangible, we find the justification for products and packages aimed at visitors. These include practices open to tourists, and initiatives like *Tarra-*

gona, Ciutat de Castells (Tarragona the city of human towers) promoted in 2013 and that aims to immerse visitors in the “casteller universe”, involving: itineraries taking in the main squares where tower displays are held; guided visits to the home bases of the *casteller* groups; and periodic events during the *castell* season designed expressly for the foreign public.

A first step taken by the Coordinadora de Colles Castelleres in 2014, was the launch of the brand *Castells – Colles Castelleres de Catalunya*, together with its English version *Castells – Catalan Human Towers*, which were both registered in the Spanish Office of Patents and Trademarks. This act was supported by the Catalan Government and private companies, a symbol of the advertising potential of *castells*, as well as the possibilities for the business sector. According to the creators, the goal was to protect the image of *castells*, give the phenomenon projection, and take advantage of funding opportunities. For this reason, a proprietary line of merchandise was launched, and a tourist package was put together, including things like attending a group practice. In this way, for less than 25 euros, one can watch and join in with one of the practices of the Castellers de Sant, or Castellers de Barcelona, for example.

The link between heritage and tourism implies entry into the market. At this point, changes in our concept of success, or not, can come about, such as assessing visitor number instead of the quality of the activity. And ultimately, the offer will be based on the demand (Prats, 2006), a fact that explains the actions described above, but which also justifies the creation of the Museu Casteller de Catalunya. The definitive boost to a project that had never had enough momentum to finally be realised is, symptomatic of the time these human towers find themselves in, its link to national identity, its attraction

for tourists, and its emblematic status as intangible heritage of humanity. It clinches the deal with the opening of a permanent base where it can watch over and in some way fossilise the tradition, objectify it, and all under the academic aura linked to the word *museum*. The challenge that this type of proposal has to face is to not trivialise the intangible heritage, but make it accessible without decreasing its importance or emptying it of meaning (Grötsch, 2005). In Spain, other elements found on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity also have monographic museums, such as the Festes de la Mare de Déu de la Salut d'Algemesí and the Museu Valencià de la Festa; flamenco dancing and the Museo del Flamenco de Sevilla; and the Fiesta de los Patios de Còrdova with its interpretation centre of the same name. In Catalonia, the other great *masterpiece* of intangible heritage is the Patum de Berga (included in the list since 2005). Although recognition may appear to come at the hands of an interpretation centre or museum, in this latter case the project on paper has never become reality and the festival's museum offering is limited to the Casa de la Patum, a small dwelling where a few pieces are displayed, accompanied by image and sound.

The academic aspect is also vitally important to success. For *castells*, this is not a problem: here the link between culture and heritage is well known thanks to folklore studies by people including Joan Amades and Francesc Blasi Vallespinosa. Scholars, literati, folklorists, and historians, among others, have all taken *castells* and *castellers* as their object of study, evidenced by the extensive literature on the subject that exists right through from the 19th to the 21st century.

These days, there are monographic publications, specialised media, and even sections within the main national

headlines that give us news relating to human towers, from the heirs of the casteller journalists, initiators of a genre at the beginning of the last century.

Likewise, doctoral theses on *castells* and *castellers* prove how the subject has entered the highest educational circles, particularly within Rovira i Virgili University. Since February 2017, this centre, together with the Colla Vella dels Xiquets de Valls, has been promoting the URV chair for the study of human towers, as a tool for interdisciplinary reflection, debate, and dissemination of the culture and evolution of *castells* based on historical research excellence.

Museums and urban regeneration

Nevertheless, the construction of the Museu Casteller de Catalunya incorporates other interesting aspects that can be analysed, including its location.

Siting it in Valls is an obvious attempt to respond to the symbolism of the city as the home of *castells* and the cradle of the *casteller* world, as happened with the Coordinadora de Colles Castelleres, which is also based in Valls. But the fact the old quarter was chosen to house the museum reveals further intentions.

The old quarter is the least populated area of the town, the most run down, and which has the highest percentage of immigrants. Therefore, the action forms part of the urban regeneration project for the old quarter of Valls. In 2006, Valls council presented a comprehensive intervention project for this part of the town, and the same year sanctioned an amount of 15 million euros from the Catalan Government's Neighbourhood Plan Law. The Plan provided for the allocation of grants for housing rehabilitation, a list of commercial properties, and the construction of new facilities, such as the Espai Ca Creus including the Carles

Cardó library and a community centre. It also involved the restoration of heritage elements, like the old Convent del Carme, which houses a school and holds public events, the wall of San Francisco, where they seek to expropriate and demolish some urban blocks to free up space and recover the mediæval wall, and the anti-aircraft shelter in Plaça del Blat, which in 2011 was incorporated into the Memory Spaces of the Democratic Memorial.

The site of the casteller museum, up until 2013, was intended to accommodate social housing, involving around sixty homes as well as commercial premises. As mentioned earlier, the regulatory difficulties of Ruanes (the previously planned location), the need to resize, and the demands of locals who favoured the transfer of the museum to the historic centre, triggered this current situation. And it is justified by the fact that the housing blocks prevented the neighbourhood "breathing" (Quaderna, 2014). It does, however, involve dispensing with urban unity and the current street layout, to drop in a modern white construction with large windows that differs greatly from the neighbouring buildings. Just as has already happened with the nearby Espai Ca Creus. It is exactly this that causes a loss of heritage, if one believes the postulates of patrimony theorists who think of a town as a unique monument that includes topography, landscape, urban planning, and architecture. (Choay, 2007: 125-126).

The planning is neither new nor innovative, many other cities around the world have used culture to reverse the decadent tendency of urban spaces. Often, projects of this type are framed within the context of economic crises that force communities to redefine their activities, and many of them turn in the direction of the services sector. In general, the teams that direct



Carrer Espardenyers in the old quarter of Valls and the human tower museum in the background (May 2017). ALEX REBOLLO

and plan these reforms are composed exclusively of architects, however, as of the 1980s, the figure of the economist has also been involved. The aim is to squeeze as much economic profitability out of whatever had to be remodelled, and this leads to incorporating services that are attractive to tourists and passers-by who will part with their hard-earned cash in the area. So we find, among other things, seafronts and beaches opened up, shopping centres, museums, and galleries. These last are, above all, focused on contemporary art to make it easy to create a collection *ex novo*. Later, sociologists and human geographers will add their two pennyworth so that the processes does not focus solely on tourism. (Loriente, 1997: 11-13). These approaches include examples like that of Paris and the Pompidou Centre (1977), and Liverpool and the Tate (1988). Closer to home, places that opted to use modern art for regeneration were Valencia with

the creation of the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (1989), Madrid and the Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (1992), and Bilbao and the Guggenheim (1997). Others have focused not only on art, but include other infrastructure such as the Raval of Barcelona, especially in the surroundings of Plaça dels Àngels, with the creation of the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (1994), the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (1995), the University of Barcelona's Geography and History Faculties (2006), and the Communication and International Relations Departments of Blanquerna – Ramon Llull University (2010). The same is true of other spaces such as Carrer Robadors with the Filmoteca and the connected Rambla del Raval.

More recently, cities like Girona have also experienced this widespread growth in tourism. Back in Catalonia, Lleida has tried to use culture and

heritage to turn the city centre around. Along with the remodelling of streets, new projects are being launched, such as the creation of a new building for the Jaume Morera art museum and a desire to make the Turó de la Seu Vella a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This process parallels well with Valls, since both towns want to undertake urban regeneration based around an internationally recognised heritage element.

Technically, this type of process is known as gentrification: “the socioeconomic transformation of a degraded urban area inhabited by lower-class or marginal social groups characterised by the urban and architectural rehabilitation of the area and by the progressive arrival of middle-class or upper-class social groups. This leads to a change in the economic activities and, sometimes, the displacement of the most vulnerable social groups.” (TERMCAT) As a general rule, business



Immediate surroundings of the Museu Casteller in the old quarter of Valls (May 2017). ALEX REBOLLO

reforms entail increased land prices by opening the door to real estate speculation that forces the original inhabitants to leave, since they can no longer afford to live in the area, and these sites are replaced with homes for higher income families or tourist accommodation. Meanwhile, the area's improved image and increased safety favour a rise in private investment, although this is principally in the tourist sector, meaning small shops succumb to establishments such as bars, restaurants, fashion boutiques, and souvenir shops. In some cases, this comes in the form of franchises or large commercial brands. In any case, these are hardly compatible with the daily life of a neighbourhood and the need for food, leisure, footwear, and affordable clothing.

However, gentrification can improve the situation of an area by enhancing its aesthetics, level of safety, and relevance within the city as a whole. This also

involves risks, such as denaturing or even banalising the zone by generating a "theme park", or making it classical and elitist, a place where it is no longer possible to live. (Garcia; Beltran, 2011: 140-142).

Of course, each case is found within a different context, since all cities are different and, therefore, many other factors influence the outcome of these actions. But there does seem to be a certain trend towards these effects. Valls, therefore, is an example that cannot yet be evaluated as it is still only in an intermediate phase. A stage where there is still action to be undertaken, and to which we should remain attentive.

Conclusions

We are facing, therefore, the culmination of a journey that has been underway for more than half a century. Although the opening of the Museu Casteller de Catalunya in Valls will

bring this journey to an end, in truth it will be the beginning of an even more important road, that of bringing life, day-to-day, to this new facility. A unique museum in Catalonia, dedicated exclusively to the manifestation of intangible heritage and charged with the region's cultural symbolism. And there many huge challenges still to face, like capturing the audience necessary to enable its survival, and the need to keep up with the life and activity of the human tower building world.

A showcase displaying the result of the process of integrating *enxanetes*¹, *folres*² and *manilles*³ into the idiosyncrasies of the Catalan people, but whose origins we should also be aware of. Although, heritage-wise, we can have no further aspirations, having obtained the highest recognition of intangible cultural heritage of humanity, the challenge is how this is managed and what limits are imposed to preserve it. To what

extent is it possible to sell the image of *castells* for commercial purposes? Or what are the boundaries so practices and *diades* do not become void of meaning?

It is true that the *casteller* is healthy and has excitement in his DNA. As true as the fact that emotional intangible heritage is very difficult to obliterate. But that does not mean it is exempt of risk.

Just as there are dangers inherent in the processes linking urban regeneration and culture. Gentrification, in the majority of cases, ends up becoming a double-edged sword, introducing some conflicts while resolving others. It will be interesting to see, in the coming months and years, how the old quarter of Valls assimilates the actions that have been and are being carried out, and then evaluate their success or failure. What is certain is that a neighbourhood needs residents to revive it, and museums bring not inhabitants but visitors. This may be the reason many of the cities that have opted for this

strategy are only sporadically populated, by people who walk the streets and squares for only few hours, passing through, rootless and without time to create experiences there. It is therefore extremely important to make those inhabitants closest the new cultural centres, feel the need for them. Integrate them in the project right from the start and keep them constantly up to date. After all, it is they who will suffer the consequences of the building work, and they who will have to deal with the possible crowds after the inauguration, and, indeed, it is their taxes that will pay for it. It is imperative, therefore, to give the citizens a sense of belonging to the new museum, and not in vain, because if this is achieved, they will become the best advertising, guides, and attractive force that it will have. From a personal perspective, Valls does not appear to be doing this very diligently, and this attitude may lead to disaffection and indifference. It goes without saying, however, that it would be interesting to do a detailed study of the impressions, desires and regrets the Museu Casteller stirs up in

the citizens of Valls. A possible path for further research.

For all that, however, we will have to wait. To wait for the human tower museum to open to visitors, as well as local residents. To wait and see what effect it has on the town, in particular the old quarter. And also the evolution of the heritage status granting process of the *castells* and how they are used in the fields of economics, tourism, and politics.

The political aspect acting as the soul of the human towers. Not for nothing did Pau Casals say that *castells*: “are the living symbol of the Catalan people’s firm virtues.” ■

NOTES

1

The *casteller* who crowns the human tower.

2

The reinforcement for the second level of a human tower.

3

The reinforcement for the third level of a human tower.

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