

The Waterfront Image and Urban Culture. The waterfront as the City's Facade. Barcelona Case

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Current urban waterfront reforms question the role of harbor cities' coastal space, and specifically, the conception of this role as part of a physical and cultural system within the city, and not as a place different from the city.

In the course of the nineteenth century –with the introduction of the steam engine, the advent of the industrial revolution and of new means of transportation, such as the steamboat and railroad, the creation of new forms of government and, mostly, the emergence of a modern economy based on trade– “the modern city” appears.

The modern city deals with a new organization of working hours, which include a time for rest or free time, in order to improve the efficiency and productivity during working hours.

From the end of the nineteenth century, alternating port-related activities coexist in the port area with sport and pleasure activities.

I will highlight how different and contradictory aspects of the industrial revolution are carried out in two city-planning projects for the city of Barcelona at the beginning of the twentieth century, and how the vindication of Barcelona as a marine city, as a “resort” that demands a seaside walkway similar to those in marine cities at the end of the eighteenth century, and/or as a “business card” to show to tourists, has a long history up to the present.

The waterfront, in relation to the city-territory, the city and its geographical characteristics, and with the global city, through the sea, oscillates between established city rules and becoming a “Potemkin Corridor”¹, or a constructed place in order to commercialize its image.

We can consider the waterfront as land on the edge of a body of water, as a limit zone between city-sea, considering the ships that dock at the port as vectors between the city and the rest of the planet. In the waterfront there are local, regional, and global processes involved and it is interesting to realize which of these factors most affect the construction of the city façade, considering that the image of the façade is

1 Rem Koolhaas, *Igual que los rusos construían pueblos mayores y mas sano que lo reales bajo la direcciones de Potemkin para las inspecciones del zar, estos Corredores Potemkim, que se construyeron con relación a los movimientos por el país del presidente Mao, que daban lugar a largos strips, con un nivel optimo de equipamiento, en los anhelos de la revolución se habían alcanzado como por arte del la magia. cada uno de estos corredores sugiere que estas mas allá de la realidad.* in Mutaciones, Actar, Barcellona, 2001, Pg. 330



something shown in order to “sell”, to improve the city in relation with other port cities. The façade is the identity of the city (local aspect) and what the city wants to show to other cities (global aspect).

The waterfront is presented as a zone where aspects of “globalization”, understood as a place of exchange and economic exploitation of the image, were present from the beginning of its construction in the fifteenth century.

There are two city plans that I will compare, while outlining the problems arising in the Waterfront plan that Barcelona is developing in preparation for the Fòrum 2004.

In particular, I will review the Jaussely Plan of 1907, the Macià Plan of 1934, and the new eastern profile of the city based on Ferrater’s project for the Litoral coast, and the plans for towers at the end of Avinguda Diagonal, designed by Jean Nouvel, Jacques Herzog, Dominique Perrault, Richard Rogers in order to show in which way local and global forces or trends have influenced the construction of the waterfront.

I will outline, first, the concept of the border or the limits of the city in general that emerge from the master plans, and second, the concept of coastal area in the case of the coastal city, divided in different topics:

- the functional role of the port, the role of the coastal façade,
- the image of this part of the city, and its role and meaning as an interface between sea and city and city and world.

1.- The Romulus Plan

The Romulus Plan by Leon Jaussely (1876-1933) winner of the “*Concurs internacional d’avantprojectes d’enllaç de la zona de ‘Eixample de Barcelona I els pobles agregats’*”², held by the city in 1903, describes a city delimited by ring roads, which place a boundary on the growth of the city³

The ring roads act, in this manner, as a border and/or container of the city within the territory. In the Jaussely proposal the port as a specialized part of the city is projected on the west part of Barcelona, connected to the transportation system specifically for the port itself. The architect imagines that the port activities related to industrial production have a zone of influence much larger than the metropolis contained within the ring roads.

Not only does he place the port on the West side, but he also foresees a *Paseo Marítimo* (seaside promenade), placing into evidence the representative role of this part of city.

The architect foresees a series of functions that are actually conflicting, without resolving the relation between ring road, rail-way track, factories and the *Paseo Marítimo*.

On the east coastal zone, specifically, he designs:

- the *Paseo Marítimo*
- a ring road
- a rail system for passengers and for merchandise
- an industrial belt
- a housing development at the end of Avinguda Diagonal

On one hand the author drew the *Paseo Marítimo* with the intention of stimulating local tourism and the citizens’ practice of going to the sea, while on the other hand he did not image to eliminate the factories and the railway that remained in the limit zone from the city to

2 M. Torres y Capell “*Inicis de la urbanística municipal de Barcelona*” Ajuntament de Barcelona 1985, Manuel Torres Capell “*El plan Jaussely tres veces moderno*”, Arquitectura Bis, 1985,- Manuel Guardia i Bessols, *L’estructura urbana de Barcelona. De les annexions a la fi de la guerra civil*. In Historia de Barcelona, Vol. 7, Barcelona 1995

3 Manuel Torres Capell, *La formacio’ de la urbanística de Barcelona*, Mancomunitat de municipis de l’area Metropolitane de Barcelona, Barcelona, 1999, page 80

sea.

Two perspectives ⁴ describe the Paseo Marítimo on the east coast of the city and its relation with the environment. Jaussely studies the waterfront through a landscaping scale, imagining someone looking at it from the sea, faraway. The waterfront is described as a uniform skyline, where Montjuic is the prominent element. The architecture represented has a Beux Art language without any reference to the Catalan tradition either morphologically or architecturally, but respects Barcelona's traditional symbol of the sea facade, meaning he makes Montjuic stand out.

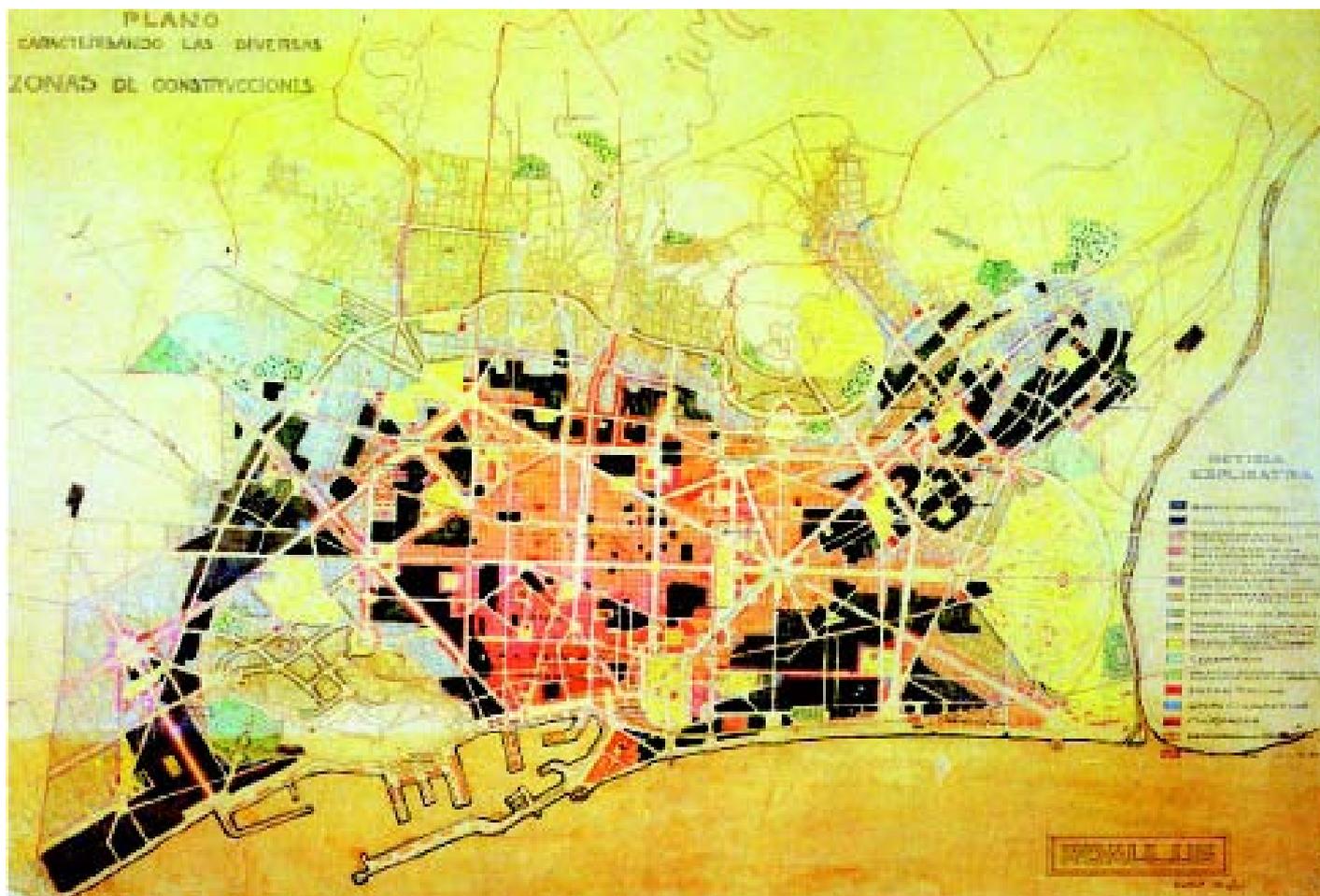
The promenade would have had to contribute to make Barcelona a winter tourist station, as is stated in the memoir ⁵, "Barcelona could easily become a winter city, perhaps the most remarkable and frequented of Europe".

The waterfront is constituted by four-story buildings, parallel to the sea, and by a road where Jaussely projects a widening of the streets in strategic points in order to provide space for a public square, a place where people can recognize their identity as citizens, taking advantage of the sea's scenic value.

The image of the waterfront on its west side is basically a port, the industrial city, modernity presented on the façade as technological progress, while on the east side Jaussely foresees a seaside walkway, as used in fashionable French resorts at the beginning of the twentieth century.

4. It is possible to see the perspectives in AAVV, *Historia del Urbanismo en Barcelona*, Editorial Labor, Barcelona 1970 and Memoria of the Jaussely project of 1907 held in Archivo Administrativo Municipal the Barcelona. In 1991 there was a fire that destroyed most of the documents regarding the Jaussely project.

5. Memoria del Plan del 1907, page 33.





2.- The Macià Plan of 1934

The Macià Plan of 1934⁶, was designed by the G.A.T.C.P.A.C (Grup d'Arquitects i tècnics Catalans per el Progres de L'Arquitectura Contemporanea), architects and carried out with the help of Le Corbusier (1887-1965).

The Macià Plan deals with a series of analyses of the city that take into consideration the architects' idea of the city's potential growth. Specifically, Plan III at a scale of 1:50000, defines a zone of influence and a future expansion of 30 km. The historic center of Barcelona is the center of the concentric rings of the city's development.

In this way, the coast appears as a fracture in the homogenous development of the city, and the concentric rings accent the architects' obsessive search to make the territory geometric. As opposed to the Jaussely Plan, which projects Barcelona's growth within a specific area (the ring roads) where the coast defines one of its sides (the walls which are transformed into roads⁷, in the Macià Plan Barcelona appears as a city with an interrupted expansion on its coastal side, because of the

6. Mirador, Issue 1934, AC, review 12-13, 1935 and Quaderns, review 90 and 94, 1972.

7. Cesare de Setae Jaques Le Goff, *La ciudad y las murallas*, Catedra, Madrid 1989

presence of the sea. It appears as if the sea has traced a cross section along the entire city, and that this offers the possibility of viewing the



city from the inside out to the surrounding areas.

This plan deals with subjects that are important for the image of Barcelona's façade: ideas that Le Corbusier elaborated in his sketches⁸ when he left the city by boat to Mallorca. In these sketches he designs the city's skyline, emphasizing the importance of Montjuic in relation to his proposal of building three skyscrapers: "*Il foudre gratte-ciel même hauteur que Montjuic*" ("The skyscrapers should be of the same height as Montjuic." T.A.).

Then, in another drawing, he outlines Montjuic together with the Sagrada Familia, the cathedral, and finally with the city skyscrapers.

In the Macià Plan he designs three towers concentrated in the financial district of the city⁹, (the contextualization of the Ville Radiouse) which would have been formed by stealing land from the basin of the port, close to the historic center, and which would have been placed in relation to the mountain, thereby providing a symbol of the city's economic power.

The strong image of the waterfront is concentrated in one single area, while along the rest of the coast there are houses and industrial constructions projected.

The three towers had to be the symbol of Barcelona itself and the symbol that Barcelona is one of the ports projected by le Corbusier. Both authors, albeit with different languages, express their ideas regarding the possible growth of the metropolis through their projects. In both projects the architects attempt to distance themselves from the complex reality of the city by developing a schematic image, using a very local-topographic scale at the moment of defining the image of the façade.

Both waterfront projects are related to the local, topographic and global aspects of the city.

3.-The extension of Avinguda Diagonal to the seafront

The extension of Avinguda Diagonal to the seafront and the construction of the eastern part of the waterfront, are long-standing goals, dating back to the time of the Cerdà Plan of 1859, which is gradually becoming a reality and which forms part of Barcelona's projects for the Fòrum 2004.

In Barcelona's waterfront there were contrasting processes which slowed down its construction: from the middle of the nineteenth century until the present day, the idea of "Barcelona as the pearl of the Mediterranean" contrasts paradoxically with the actual situation of the zone during the modern era, which was for a long time where industrial emissions, drain-pipes, and huts were present, along with centers

8. Le Corbusier, *Carnets, 1914-1948*, vol.1, Electa, Milano, 1981 Drawing 636 and 637.

9. Le Corbusier formulates a theoretical proposal, *La Ville Radiouse*, to resolve the problems of the contemporary city, applicable to the territorial-geographic aspects of any city. *The City*, the financial center of the city, is always thought of by Le Corbusier as the first visible element of the port city, as demonstrated in his proposals for Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Algeri. The city demonstrates its economic power, which is at the same time the communication node and the connection with other cities.



for heliotherapy, sports, and bathing.

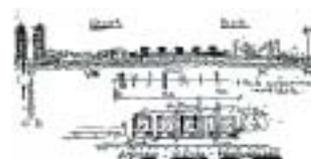
The waterfront is not only what is constructed along the coast, but all those elements which shape and provide a structure to the profile; in this sense, the vertical elements become very important. The transformation of the waterfront into a public space, with a seaside walkway and with the recreational use of the beach; the transformation of the waterfront into a presentable image; the transformation of the waterfront into a space within the infrastructure; these are concerns that to this day affect its construction. The plans executed along the coast for the Olympic Games have resolved the problem of the integration of the highways with open public spaces, including the beaches, the seaside walkway and the gardens, without, however, resolving the image of the eastern part of the waterfront. The problem of accumulation along the coast was clearly presented in the Jaussely Plan, who resolved it by juxtaposing elements rather than integrating them.

Two overlapping profiles of the city have been projected in order to define Barcelona's eastern waterfront: Ferrater's project of, a local architect, proposes five towers along the coast, recalling the dimensions of the Cerdà blocks. The second project defines a profile behind the five towers composed of skyscrapers on the end of Avinguda Diagonal clearly visible from the sea.

In this case, the economic corporative power of the city is reflected in the construction of the towers, emphasizing that the new economic center and the future of the city is being constructed in the eastern part of Barcelona. Le Corbusier had concentrated Barcelona's symbols as three skyscrapers placed in the port's basins, close to the historic center, while in this project the new skyscrapers indicate a diffused center, a route.

The waterfront has a double profile; where the dwelling houses designed by the architect Ferrater evoke the classical tradition in the construction of the city, while behind these buildings the skyscrapers state that *"the ascendance of information industries and the growth of a global economy, inextricably linked, have contributed to a new geography of centrality and marginality. National and global markets, as well as globally integrated organizations, require central places where the work of globalization gets done"*¹⁰.

In this way, perhaps, Barcelona wishes to speak the same language as the global cities—with the construction of a new skyline and the development of the Poblenou@22 quarter, where activities regarding new technologies will take place— completing in this way the waterfront's project begun more than a century ago.



10. Susan Sasken "La ciudad: lugar estratégico / nueva frontera", Quadrens 229, Barcelona, 2001 Pg 6-10