



## **CULTURE AS AN ENGINE IN PALO ALTO'S URBAN REGENERATION PROCESS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Changes in the economic base of old industrial cities have been characterised by urban regeneration processes, transforming their industrial districts into new innovative, technological and creative territories. While maintaining the industrial vocation, this shift promotes the reinterpretation of industrial production and of the territory's historical past into new symbolic meanings and values, constituting assets in the global city competition scenario. From these new forms of industrial production territorial changes result, with culture and innovation being a leading engine in such transformations. This article discusses the results of these economic based policies in Palo Alto's urban regeneration process. This complex is one of Barcelona's leading examples of industrial reconversion into a creative hub, through the uses of entrepreneurial initiative, cultural production, heritage valorisation, and the creation of new public spaces.

**Keywords:** Barcelona, Palo Alto, urban economics, urban regeneration, industrial heritage, culture, public space

### **RESUMEN**

Los cambios en la base económica de las antiguas ciudades industriales se han caracterizado por procesos de regeneración urbana, que transforman sus distritos industriales en nuevos territorios innovadores, tecnológicos y creativos. Mientras se mantiene la vocación industrial, este cambio promueve la reinterpretación de la producción industrial y del pasado histórico del territorio en nuevos significados y valores simbólicos, constituyendo activos en el escenario de la competitividad global entre ciudades. A partir de estas nuevas formas de producción industrial resultan cambios territoriales, con la cultura y la innovación como motores de estas



transformaciones. Este artículo discute los resultados de estas políticas económicas basadas en los procesos de regeneración urbana, en Palo Alto. Este complejo es uno de los principales ejemplos en Barcelona de reconversión industrial en un *hub* creativo, a través de la iniciativa empresarial, la producción cultural, la valorización del patrimonio, y la creación de nuevos espacios públicos.

**Palabras clave:** Barcelona, Palo Alto, economía urbana, regeneración urbana, patrimonio industrial, cultura, espacio público

## RESUMO

As mudanças na base econômica das antigas cidades industriais têm sido caracterizadas por processos de regeneração urbana, que transformam os seus distritos industriais em novos territórios inovadores, tecnológicos e criativos. Embora mantendo a vocação industrial, essa mudança promove a reinterpretação da produção industrial e do passado histórico do território em novos significados e valores simbólicos, constituindo ativos no cenário da competição global entre cidades. Destas novas formas de produção industrial resultam mudanças no território, com a cultura e inovação a serem um motor de tais transformações. Este artigo discute os resultados dessas políticas econômicas baseadas nos processos de regeneração urbana, em Palo Alto. Este complexo é um dos principais exemplos de reconversão industrial num *hub* criativo de Barcelona, através da iniciativa empresarial, produção cultural, valorização patrimonial, e da criação de novos espaços públicos.

**Palavras-chave:** Barcelona, Palo Alto, economia urbana, regeneração urbana, patrimônio industrial, cultura, espaço público



## INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, the economic base of many old industrial cities shifted to new modes of industrial production, based on the knowledge economy. Such changes brought the cities' re-industrialization, based in new creative, technological and innovation industries. These policies have been supported by the European Council (2000, 2010), with the clear intention of forging the global scale competitiveness and economical growth of our common territory by this knowledge-based production. Implemented on both national and local scales, these structural changes are supported by major strategic projects developed by large-scale policies, regarded as profitable in terms of investment, qualified labour, and linked to growing sectors such as tourism and culture.

Several European cities have redoubled their efforts for the promotion and attraction of investment for their culture and creative industries. The implementation of specific policies for the exploration of their symbolic capital follows the lines of action promoted by the European Union. It emphasizes the economic importance of the cultural sector, and presents it as a strategic engine for the cities and regions' growth and development, with high profit rates.

At the same time, there is an increased need for an economical legitimacy to justify the different forms of cultural production, the transformation of public into consumers and of the cultural content into merchandise. Industries related to the production of culture, knowledge and innovation, requiring high levels of qualification and specialization, tend to concentrate in urban conglomerates, with specific infrastructures, connections and services, including those related to the financial sector. The formation of these networks, determining the success of cities and their rise in the global economy, has been less and less a public determination of national, regional or local governments: the private sector has markedly gained power over decisions relating to the urban territory, with local partnerships between the public and private sector becoming increasingly common. This re-industrialization process is linked to the trend of municipal management models based on business tools (Harvey, 1990).

Such processes are patent in Barcelona. In this city, the "post-industrial" link between culture and urban regeneration is a continuous process, developing for some decades. Specifically, the reconversion of former industrial sites into new productive agglomerations – as part of the city's creative enterprises and its new public spaces -, has been a very significant process occurring in the old industrial Sant Martí district. One example is the Gal i Puigsech factory, converted into the Palo Alto creative hub. Due to its characteristics, it



represents a rich field of discussion on the negative and positive impacts of culture-led urban regeneration processes: namely, on real state speculation, private sector impulse upon the territory, industrial heritage protection, and the privatization of public space.

Public spaces are considered a basic element for the urban structure, for the constitution of social relationships and activities on territories. Recent projects in Poblenou regard and integrate its historical past – agrarian, industrial, and corresponding to Cerdà's plan – in its urban design. Rural paths and industrial activity determined Gal i Puigsech's development into the contemporary Palo Alto. This paper states the link between the productive base transformations with public space changes of Palo Alto. This approach to the territory allows a fresh perspective in the observation of the relationship between industrial transformation, supported by Barcelona's cultural policies and the entrepreneurial environment – in this case, specially related to the creative sector – with the configuration of the city's physical structure.

In the eighties and nineties, Palo Alto was representative of the creation of a dynamic of "artistic neighbourhoods" in Barcelona. Lorente (2009) uses this term to describe areas of the cities where there are located a large concentration of activities related to arts, such as: the existence of art in public space; artistic activities (such as museums, foundations, schools); or the influx of artists (measured by studios and artist residencies, and leisure sites linked to them). The author considers that the existence of one these aspects are sufficient to be considered an artistic neighbourhood. This process of the conversion of old industrial buildings by artistic activities occurring in Poblenou is similar to occurrences in other cities. Examples are the SoHo in New York, in the sixties (Zukin, 1982). Also Marseille and Liverpool in the seventies (Lorente, 1996), from where policies of urban renewal subsequently resulted, with the conversion of old industrial and/or heritage buildings in cultural complexes (Hospice de la Vieille Charité in the Le Panier district, in Marseille; and the Albert Dock in Liverpool, in the eighties).

This paper states these various stages of the urban regeneration process through culture in Palo Alto's history. The analysis relates the development of two parallel processes: the land uses, especially characterized by the recent changes into new cultural and creative industrial ones; and how the shift of uses defined processes at the urban level. This observation begins with Gal i Puigsech wool factory onset, in the nineteenth century, located in a previously agricultural area. And its posterior hosted productive activities: the "classic" industrial sector, the rental to the tertiary sector throughout the twentieth century, and their subsequent abandonment; and, ultimately its conversion into new creative uses. This process is included in the general dynamics of Poblenou's de-industrialization and reindustrialization, marked by the transformation of its old factories into new innovative industries, their



heritage valorisation, and the new symbolic features gained in the neighbourhood's urban landscape.

Different authors have studied these urban regeneration processes in Barcelona and in Poblenou. The interest in this territory multiple dimensions - social, morphological, economic, political - was in some cases accompanied by an interdisciplinary perspective<sup>1</sup>. Several publications highlight the historic and heritage character of Poblenou's industrial landscape (Tatjer and Vilanova; 2002; Tatjer, Urbiola and Grup de Patrimoni Industrial del Fòrum Ribera del Besòs, 2005, 2006; Checa Artasu, 2007); its social changes (Marrero, 2003; Dot, Pallares-Barbera, Casellas, 2012; Clarós, 2007). Martí-Costa and Pradel (2011) relate Poblenou's recent cultural past through the artists workshops installation from the nineties, with the economic model implemented later through the 22@ project. The authors do not mention the case of Palo Alto, whose typology of cultural activities is similar to the ones they studied, and, historically, previous. The present paper works with different assumptions from Martí-Costa and Pradel, considering there is a link - and not a contradiction, as they view - in the evolution of this cultural facility with the changes of Poblenou's productive base. In Palo Alto, this is symptomatic of the cultural sector professionalization, occurring while the link of municipal cultural policies to the economy develop.

Diversity and flexibility in the transformation of the productive uses of Poblenou's territory have been observed (Brandão and Brandão, 2012). The cultural role of such transformation has also been studied, as in the reinterpretation of Poblenou's industrial chimneys as public art (Gárate, 2011); and the growth of Barcelona's cultural industries, by the municipal plan of cultural facilities *Fàbriques de Creació* (Aparício, 2011).

The contemporary scenario of Barcelona's urban transformation processes related to cultural activities is a rich field of discussion. The economic and political premises, and their results on the territory, need to be analysed and reflected upon. These processes raise major questions about the welfare of society as a whole, and on the inhabitants of Poblenou in particular. In Palo Alto's particular case, such questions are intertwined with the acknowledgement of relevant elements of local identity – the consideration of factory buildings and chimneys into symbolic cultural marks. This recognition brings an impact on its urban landscape, aesthetically and by the effects of real state valorisation<sup>2</sup>. In Palo Alto, it also conveys the raising of

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<sup>1</sup> Studies upon interdisciplinary in urban design have been observed by several authors, with highlights to Brandão (2006, 2011); Brandão and Remesar (2010); Cunha Leal and Remesar (2012); Brandão, Castillo, Esparza, Oliveira, Padilla, Pinto, Ríos, Salas, and Sasa (2014); and Costa, Ochoa and Silva (2015).

<sup>2</sup> Such as in the perspective defended by Cunha Leal (2008), the construction of this territory has an ideological dimension. This paper underlies the idea that the analysed territorial changes are clearly anchored in political views linked to the primacy of capital,



questions related to its public space and to its subtle privatization, which unfortunately, is currently observed.

The task taken by this paper is to contribute to this discussion on Barcelona's economical base shift, exemplified by Palo Alto's complex. By analysing this factory's historical and physical transformations, the author firmed the basis for the observation and critique of its contemporary creative productive uses and its public space, allowed by its industrial heritage category. The combination of these elements - the building's heritage and the facility's innovation-oriented uses – has defined Palo Alto's, along with other Poblenou's industrial heritage, into new urban landscapes, essential for the city's marketing and to the definition of its brand and city image.

Palo Alto's singularity within Barcelona's cultural-industrial equipment resides in two linked aspects: in the time period it develops, and on its particular entrepreneurial evolution, from a cultural hub of artists and designers into an innovative global enterprise cluster. Both developments uniquely represents a three scopes' transformational process: 1), Of the productive model, from Fordism to post-Fordism; 2), Of its physical environment, from an Industrial Revolution factory into an artistic and innovation cluster - integrated into Poblenou's urban regeneration public policies by its heritage and public space; 3), Of its cultural model, with the progressive adoption of business tools to the complex management and consolidation.

For this purpose, the paper disclosures Palo Alto's historical and urban context: the industrial past of Poblenou's neighbourhood, until the recent post-industrial urban regeneration process led by the 22@ project. It details the historical development of the factory itself, concerning its uses and its relation to the surrounding urban transformations. From this analysis, it progresses to the direct observation and critique of Palo Alto's contemporary public space, highlighting questions of public and private areas, of industrial heritage conservation, and of the cultural and creative uses determining constitution. Finally, it derives conclusions from the role of culture and creativity in urban regeneration processes.

For elaborating this paper, the author used a methodology based in direct observation, with several Palo Alto visits, between 2012 and 2015. The investigation also included researching a vast array of resources: government plans and projects; scientific documents, such as the ones produced by Grup de Patrimoni Industrial del Fòrum Ribera del Besòs, which have influenced changes in the heritage plan of the district and the preservation of its

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and to the transformative power of technology and business innovation on the entire city. So far, such happened with detriment of social values, which were consecutively contested by society, through neighbourhood associations and specialized professional organizations - in particular, regarding heritage protection.



industrial buildings. The author also consulted architectonic building plans, local newspapers and certified websites.

### **PALO ALTO CASE STUDY**

This section first summarizes the historical development of Poblenou's neighbourhood urban regeneration operations, where Palo Alto is integrated. Then, it presents the development of the Palo Alto complex, both as an enterprise and as a catalyst of urban transformation, by which it represents the reconversion of old industrial buildings into significant industrial heritage, as well as in an innovation and creativity productive facility. Finally, it analyses its public space, which due to the precincts' configuration and to the lack of proper design, presents mostly a private use.

The old 1875 Gal i Puigsech factory is composed by five building blocks, one chimney, several open spaces, and a wall that surrounds the entire complex. Since 1987, it has been progressively recovered and transformed into the creative hub called Palo Alto, which is highly representative of the neighbourhood's economic and urban transformations. Being actively used ever since, it encompasses physical, productive and cultural changes, by a process of generation of real estate profits, linked to the production of culture, to the building reconversion into new uses, and to the consideration of this industrial building as industrial heritage. It is a relevant example of Poblenou's recent valorisation and reconversion of its industrial buildings, emblematic of culture's power in this territory: 1), By its heritage valorisation; 2), By the new cultural and creative productive activities; 3), By the way these industrial heritage elements determined the new public spaces created in their surroundings.

The emphasis on how the industrial heritage determined the configuration of Palo Alto's public space is also due to the fact that, in other Poblenou's industrial reconversions for economic transformation – such as Can Framis and Ca l'Aranyó factories –, we can also observe the attribution of new symbolic meanings by the process of conceding an heritage value to these factories, and, specially, to their chimneys. Such examples highlight the role of culture in the constitution of Poblenou's configuration as a new industrial district, where a model of economies of agglomeration prevails.

### **Poblenou's context: culture and urban regeneration processes**

In recent decades, Barcelona's municipal management model directs the city's new strategic objectives into their economic profitability, inserted in a context of global competition between cities. A key aspect of this model is the understanding of the city as a brand. In this sense, distinction is aimed:



through its beautification, urban landscape improvement is a path to gain international attractiveness, both to specialized companies and workers.

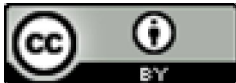
In several cities, culture has been a widely used tool in this urban regeneration policies and processes. Cultural and creative industries are recognized as having a high potential of jobs and economic growth, contributing to the cities' territorial competitiveness, aligned with consumption, heritage, and tourism (European Commission, 2010). Different branding has been used to promote these ideas. Romeiro and Méndez (2008) demonstrated the different branding used over the last twenty years to explain the cities' transformation. Nevertheless, along this time such diverse criteria have been firmed in the same structural concepts.

The success of Barcelona's economic base shift is, according Trullén (2001) partly supported on the relations between economy and territory. The author considers the city's transformation as representing an urban model, but also a specific economic model, combining general aspects of the new knowledge economy and singularities that add value to it. Muñoz (2008) noted, *"(...) during the last decades, few cities have been able of projecting an urban image in the global arena as Barcelona does"*. In this process, the design of its public spaces played a main role, responding to new society needs and to the economic base shift (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1999). Such goes in line with the perspective of urban design as fundamental to city competitiveness (Harvey, 1990; Remesar, 2005), involving process of differentiation and branding (Brandão, 2011; Muñoz, 2008) – concepts the present paper includes in the orientation of urban space into consumption, as previously conceptualized by Lefebvre (1974).

Among these criteria, there is the "creative cities". Widely used to promote and justify the transformations and policies occurring in cities such as Barcelona, it is firmly based in the global cities' competition scenario, with the investment in culture, innovation and knowledge leading the city's urban development. Exemplifying Landry's definition (1991), the creative cities label was used in Barcelona in three areas: 1), as city branding; 2), potentializing the city's cultural industries, and opening its scope into creativity – thus, including innovative production forms, linked to the knowledge economy; 3), being operationalized through urban regeneration projects, related to the educational, entrepreneurial and public sectors. Poblenu's transformation was highly based in such phenomena, whereby its public space was produced by the means of a new kind of urban design, which defines the territory, its urban landscape and actively participates in the construction of the city's global image. From these three dynamics, processes of real state profits production were achieved.

Such is the case of the main urban regeneration project of new millennium Barcelona: the 22@Barcelona, from the year 2000. Implemented in Sant Martí district, at the Poblenu neighbourhood, previously called the "Catalan





Manchester” due to its relevance during the Industrial Revolution. The 22@ project promotes the regeneration of significant areas of this territory, by reconvertng its productive base into the knowledge economy new industries. It is part of an urban development axis in the eastern part of the city, including the high-speed railway infrastructure and urban transformation in La Sagrera-Sant Andreu; and the renewal of the end of Diagonal, with major changes in the Diagonal Mar i el Front Marítim del Poblenou neighbourhood.



Fig.1. 22@ and the three surrounding projects – Glòries, La Sagrera and Fòrum/Besòs, which emphasizes this territory’s centrality within its urban context.

Palo Alto factory is located in one of the oldest referenced buildings in Poblenou’s near waterfront. According to Barcelona’s city hall (1995), in 1891 plans - both in the topographic by Garcia Faria as well as in the plan drawing by J.M. Serra -, a group of buildings can be observed in this area. It belonged to either the original Palo Alto factory – by then, the Gal i Puigsech textile factory, built in 1875; or to a sector of a nearby great industrial complex, named Macosa. These factories were erected in a territorial changing context: the construction of the railroad, the consolidation of Taulat street axis, and the buildings in the nearby Jonquera street. Both were part of Poblenou’s industry-driven neighbourhood.

In the next decades, the industrial uses of this territory developed. Together with the factory constructions, the infrastructural plans supported this area’s



industrial activity. The *Plan de Enlaces*, from 1903, proposes a train station in this territory; and Jaussely's proposal (1905), maintains the main industrial uses.

Posteriorly, the 1953 *Pla Comarcal* defined one of the dominant elements of the neighbourhood's morphology for the next decades: the railroad, which separated Poblenou from its waterfront. This 1953 plan also acknowledges the residential uses in Poblenou's old area (located between its Rambla and Bac de Roda street), and determines the industrial uses in this street course.

By the next decade, land use reconversion projects affected Poblenou, as the neighbourhood faced a progressive deindustrialisation. Since then, this area had several urban renewal projects. Its privileged geographic location, aligned with the obsolescence of its industrial uses, made it appealing for launching these projects, highly profitable to their landowners. Of these, the *Avance del Plan de la Ribera* must be highlighted. It was approved by the City Hall in 1968, promoted by society Ribera, SA, and followed by the *Plan del Sector Marítim Occidental*, approved in 1971. This plan allowed the conversion of land (especially those belonging to the companies Ribera SA and to RENFE), modifying its urban qualification and allowing intensive residential use (Solà-Morales et al, 1974). The capital gains production was guaranteed by the reconversion of the industrial parcels, introducing commercial and residential uses<sup>3</sup>. These projects were highly contested by the population, who achieved its blocking. Nonetheless, the same projects would later be highly influential in the development of Barcelona's waterfront (Caballé, 2010).

The 1976 *Pla General Metropolità* (PGM) introduced the 14b urban qualification, allowing the change of uses to residential and tertiary in this sector. This plan maintains the railway line parallel to the coastline, while adding a green zone (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1995). It also limited Poblenou's historical centre, while restricting the residential use as the main one in this area. The PGM integrated the area in an ordination located to the north, following the ideas defined by Cerdà's plan. Between this area and the railroad, it allowed the possibility of a specific reforming plan (PERI), which would substitute the industrial uses.

In the eighties, Poblenou's landscape was affected by an array of urban projects. There was a progressive change of uses, with residential and leisure being introduced to specific areas. Significant infrastructural transformations took form, such as the connection with the seaside and the regeneration of its waterfront. In Palo Alto's nearby environment, the scenario was still slowly

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<sup>3</sup> The "old" industries were, by then, already losing its power in this neighbourhood. Between 1963 and 1990, Poblenou lost 1326 industrial companies, both by the economical crises and by the industrial translocation to Barcelona's metropolitan area (Barceló i Roca, 1999).



evolving: the area wasn't affected by new projects, and its main uses were residential, small and medium scale workshops, warehouses and carriers offices

The substantial territorial changes brought by the 1992 Olympic Games affected both the uses and the morphology of a significant part of Poblenou. Regarding its infrastructure, three elements allowed its urban reorganization: the consolidation and sanitation of its waterfront; the redrawing and undergrounding of the railroads, located in the waterfront and in the final area of Meridiana Avenue; and the construction of the Ronda and of Parc Litoral (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1999). Regarding its uses, this project substitutes the industrial by residential and leisure uses in the Olympic Village sector.

Although it was a significant part of the 1992 Olympic Games urban project, Poblenou's opening to the seaside resulted from a process of coastal organization, elaborated by several entities: the city hall, the railway, and institutions related to the coastal ordination. The result was influenced by previous projects, such as the *Pla de la Ribera*. Caballé (2010) identifies this plan's influence in the following economical, political and social aspects:

- 1), The role of the major landowners, who were very interested on the profits, brought to them by these urban transformations;
- 2), The association between the first democratic city hall president (and leverage of Barcelona's Olympic campaign) with the office where the *Pla de la Ribera* was developed;
- 3), The abandonment of this territory for years - as a result of *Pla de la Ribera's* refusal -, would later become beneficial for gaining the much needed social approval for the implementation of the Olympic project. The Olympic Village project calls on the morphological structure of Cerdà's plan, destroying the prevailing physical structure. With the exception of Can Folch chimney, Icària's historical industrial landscape was destroyed.

The 1993 modification to the 1976 PGM continued Barcelona and Poblenou's waterfront transformation. The 1995 *Pla de Reforma Especial del Front Maritim del Poblenou* (PERI), intervenes on the Macosa and Catalana de Gas old factories, allocating 75% of its land to residential use, and the remaining to industrial uses compatible with housing, tertiary and/or commerce (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1995). It also allowed the preservation of two elements of the city's industrial heritage - Macosa chimney and Les Aigües Tower. Regarding the waterfront and PGM regulation transformations, there was also the 1993 *Pla Partial Diagonal Mar*, which introduced mixed uses (offices, shopping centre, housing, cultural facilities and a large urban park), comparable in relevance to the Olympic Village and to the set of changes implemented in Glòries (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1994); and the *Pla*



*Especial de Reforma Interior de La Catalana*. Later, in 2004, this sector of the city was consolidated through the Universal Forum of Cultures project.

By 2000, the 22@ project introduces new land uses in Poblenou, changing the previously restrictions of the 1976 Metropolitan General Plan. It updates the neighbourhood's productive use, from the classification of "classic" industrial use (22a) into intensive sectors of knowledge concentration, linked to business innovation, creativity, information and communication technologies (22@). This new regulation also includes the 7@ key, designating activities of "(...) *information and communications technologies, with investigation, design, culture and knowledge*" (Ajuntament of Barcelona, 2000a). Included in this urban policy, and in order to amplify the competitiveness of the territory, mixed uses - housing and leisure - are introduced in this territory along with the @ activities. The 22@ implements a compact city model, where the introduction of these clean new industries allows its coexistence with other uses.

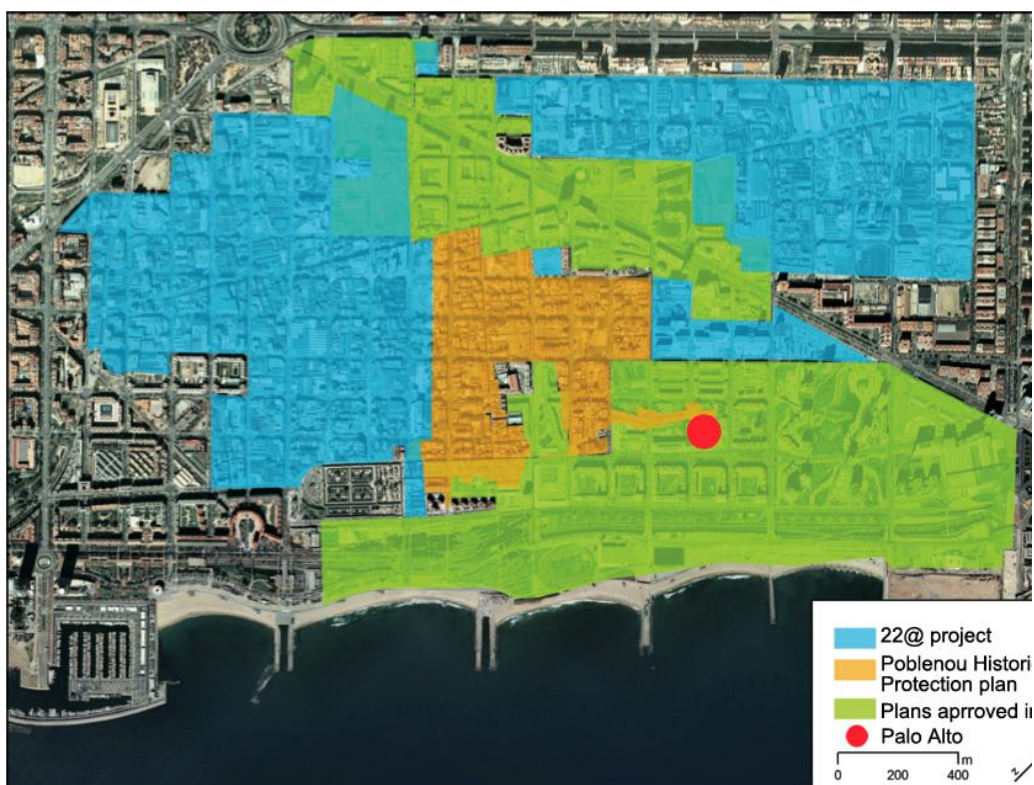


Fig.2. Most relevant urban projects in Poblenou since the nineties.

As Fig.2 shows, the 22@ project does not affect the entire Poblenou, but some specific areas of this neighbourhood. Since its approval in 2000, and through the progressive heritage valuation of several neighbourhood elements, another district area receives a Metropolitan General Plan Modification (MPGM): Poblenou's historical centre. This 2010 amendment is



included in the recent and remarkable transformations of this territory, and integrates the Palo Alto complex.

### **Palo Alto's historical perspective: from textile to cultural industry**

In 1875, a first industrial warehouse was built in this area, by the hand of the foreman Antoni Vila. Promoted by Ramon Gal and Joan Puigsech, it was a factory dedicated to wool. By 1877, the factory was expanded by another textile businessman, Agustí Coll. The factory was integrated into one of Poblenu's small industrial and residential core, along with Can Girona factory and the França Xica neighbourhood, where specialized French workers lived (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2006; 2010a).

In 1927, Augusto Ramoneda Society bought the factory. They changed the productive activity from textile into an important groats and grains factory. After the war, this industrial complex loses its productive exclusivity, being divided and rented to small companies. (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2006). Between the seventies and the eighties, it was partially abandoned. Finally, in 1987, it was rented to Pierre Roca & Associats, a cultural enterprise dedicated to production performances, which named it as it identifies the complex ever since: Palo Alto.

Most of the prevailing industrial buildings of this complex are of one ground floor, with only one building with three floors existing, on the left of the entrance. The buildings with façade to Ferrers street also accommodate a first floor. The building structure is mainly unchanged, with its large chimney dominating the space. These elements allow imagining how was Poblenu's industrial landscape by the end of the XIX century (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2006). It was precisely this industrial past that determined the new complex designation: the high chimney. Given Roca's interest in American cinema, Palo Alto ("high stick") was chosen as the complex name (*La Vanguardia*, September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1989).

The large space of the industrial area allowed Pierre Roca & Associats to create three shooting scenarios, with a total of 1900m<sup>2</sup>. This space availability was highly attractive to Roca in determining moving his company from another studio, also located in Poblenu's neighbourhood. Besides this large production areas, the availability of space offered by Gal i Puigsech – with a useful area of 11,000m<sup>2</sup> –, allowed the creation of another project, which he highly desired: a cultural activities' production centre (*La Vanguardia*, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1988). By then, there were other cultural facilities in Poblenu; Roca himself stated, to this same newspaper, the belief that the cultural sector could be a possibility for Poblenu's future development, as a replacement to its past industrial activities.



Fig.3. Palo Alto in 1988, with Pierre Roca in the forefront. Fig.4. Palo Alto, 2012

The other spaces of Palo Alto were rented to six artist and designer studios, as well as to studios from the Winchester School of Arts. Two of the artists who rented spaces were returning from New York; one of them, sculptor Xavier Medina Campeny, stated in 2011 that Palo Alto and its cultural reconversion recalled him of this American city (*El País*, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011). One of the main actors in Palo Alto development was Valencian designer Javier Mariscal. Among the first to rent a studio in this complex, his role was determining: Roca himself affirmed Mariscal was Palo Alto's "engine", with his name attracting other creators to the complex. Mariscal was, by then, a rising star. In the beginning of 1988, his Cobi became the emblematic mascot for Barcelona's 1992 Olympics – allowing him a great national and international acknowledgment. This factor conducted him to need a larger working space from where he had it before, in Born neighbourhood (*El País*, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012). In declarations to *La Vanguardia* (September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1989), Mariscal describes as highly positive the transformation of the old Poble Nou's industrial district into a creative area, and the Palo Alto complex as contributing to it. He also parallels the neighbourhood's development with New York's, while highly romanticizing Poble Nou's working class environment and activities.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mariscal later opposed this vision. In statements from 2012, he then recalls the eighties Poble Nou's environment as: "Plants would cover your head and some buildings were about to fall down. In the surrounding spaces there were junkies, rats, stolen motorbikes hidden... that was the surroundings, but the space was spectacular" (*El País*, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012).



In the beginning of the nineties, the importance of Palo Alto's cultural hub enterprise already reflected the cultural sector's characteristics and dilemmas, such as: the enlargement of the sector, encompassing more areas; its entrepreneurial tendency; its relationship to the heritage buildings' reconversion, with the resulting land valorisation by-product. In Palo Alto, artistic cultural activities coexisted with business-oriented companies in an entrepreneurial initiative, which recovered the old buildings complex and kept its productive activity, actualizing it.

The economic and symbolic success of the complex was eminent. As early as 1990, in an article about the difficulties of the Catalan industry in adapting to the new globalized economy competitive context, a local newspaper highlights it with a Palo Alto picture, under the subtitle "*Palo Alto, an old Poblenou's industrial complex, remodelled to modern companies*" (*La Vanguardia*, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1990). Between 1988 and 1991, Palo Alto's real state value raised substantially. The initial renting contract, of one million pesetas, tripled. The contract also changed to Mariscal's company, who proposed to buy the complex, with a calculated value of 500 million pesetas, according to Roca's declarations to *La Vanguardia* (July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1991).

By then, Roca accuses Mariscal of speculating and misrepresenting Palo Alto original intentions: "*Palo Alto's philosophy was to offer the artists a quiet and accessible place to joyfully work, and nothing will remain of it*". In the same newspaper, Mariscal's studio manager, Eusebio Nomen, defends of the accusations. He affirms that during Roca's management, he didn't pay the rent – although the tenants had paid him their share. Nomen states that the building owners proposed Roca several possibilities to arrange the debt, to which Roca had not replied; therefore, Palo Alto's tenants had an eviction sentence court pending. Such eviction did not happen: the landlords were sensitive to the artist's circumstances, and offered them a global contract. Mariscal SA signed it, in representation of the artists. Besides this renting changes, this newspaper testifies Mariscal's intention in improving the renting conditions: one of the main goals of Palo Alto's tenants was to form themselves as a property community, with the aim of buying and restoring the property.

Palo Alto growth was also evident in the number of creative tenants, reaching around twenty studios. The complex acknowledgement had risen beyond the city limits, thanks to the prestige of some of its elements, whose work was internationally known. Among the relationships established between Palo Alto creators and other innovators, there is to highlight the stay of the internationally known chef Ferran Adrià, between 1991 and 1992. On that winter, his friend Campeny invited him for a creative period in his Palo Alto workshop. Such time allowed him to observe Campeny's creative working process, which the chef decided to apply to his gastronomic sphere. This stay also gave Adrià the chance of experimenting cooking without the commercial



pressure, which the chef considered to allow him a very profitable, innovative management model in his restaurant elBulli (Adrià, 2014).

### **Palo Alto's acknowledgement and preservation in the nineties**

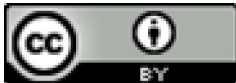
In 1992, a new plan for Poblenou's waterfront was approved by the City Hall. This plan affected the area compromised between the Olympic Village and Sant Adrià del Besòs. It initially proposed the construction of a new district, dedicated to housing and tertiary, in the land occupied by Catalana de Gas and Macosa factories, destroying part of Taulat neighbourhood, and allowing an increase in the neighbourhood's edificability. This possibility of land use change was already prospective in 1976 General Metropolitan Plan, which qualified these coastal fringe soils with the 14b key. Such meant the replacement of its industrial uses - average and large industries -, by industries with another implementation, or even changing to residential and tertiary uses (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1995). The 1992 amendment organized this sector's urbanization, mainly promoting residential use. Thanks to the railway line underground and to the coastline consolidation, this plan provided the territorial integration into Barcelona's urban environment.

However, this project faced a strong popular opposition. Led by various entities and Poblenou's neighbourhood's associations, they eventually achieved a partial modification of it. Mariscal was part of the initial citizen petitions. He managed to have his claim accepted: the safeguard of Palo Alto, which was under the threat of destruction. The complex was acknowledged by its building's heritage value, allowing its preservation. Moreover, the redrawing of the prior bases of the coastline plan approved the maintenance of Palo Alto cultural uses, referring the passage of this cultural facility to the public domain. The equipment urban qualification (7b)<sup>5</sup> limited its uses – by example, by forbidding housing. The modification also planned the crossing of the property, in line with Fluvià Street. It is as such that it remained in Poblenou's waterfront MPGM (*Modificació del Pla General Metropolità al Front Marítim del Poble Nou, des del Cementiri fins la Rambla d'el Prim*), approved on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1993 (Fig.5). Anticipating the new creative and innovative uses of the 22@ project, and thanks to its new valuable heritage acknowledgment, Palo Alto skirted the territory's industrial uses, which still obeyed to the 1976 Metropolitan General Plan rules. This marked another step in its heritage acknowledgement, following the agreement signed between the Barcelona City Hall and the Fundació Palo Alto in 1997, with the latter being responsible of the buildings rehabilitation.

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Metropolitan Urban Normative, defined by Barcelona's 1996 Metropolitan Plan (Article 211).





In October 1993, the City Hall was formalized as the owner of this industrial complex, expropriating it to Walter, SA Company. According to *El Periódico* from October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1993, this acquisition didn't imply any change in the tenants. That is, the City Hall protects Palo Alto's cultural facility use, leaving the possibility of the Municipal Heritage Service to change the business model – something that would not happen.

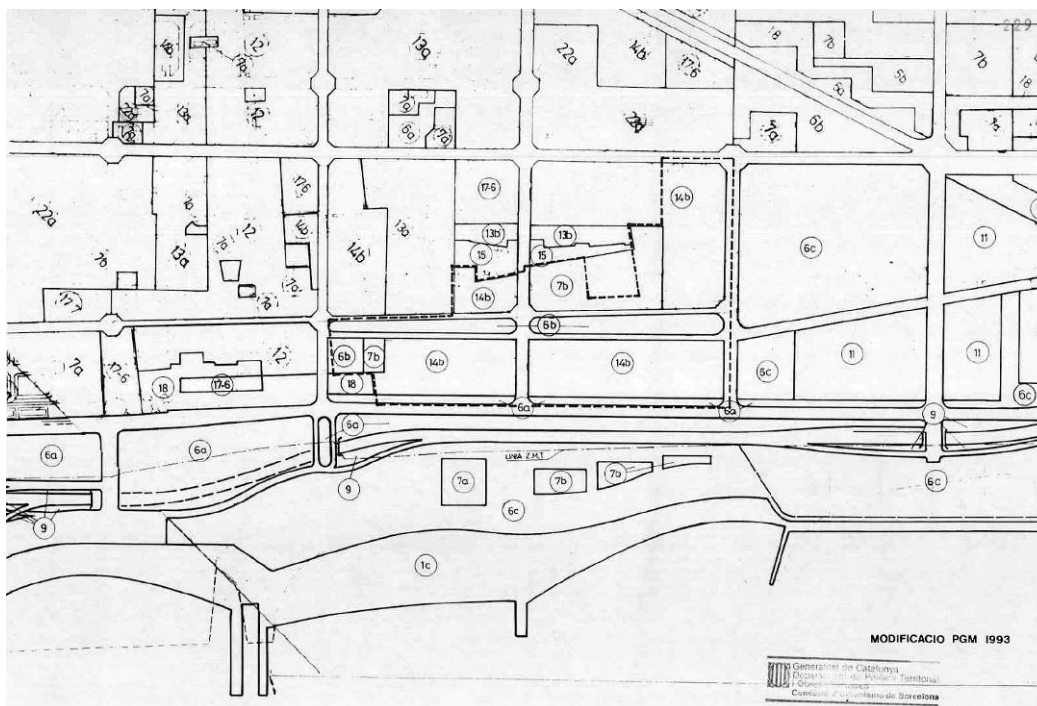


Fig.5. *Modificació del Pla general metropolità al Front Marítim del Poble Nou, des del Cementiri fins la Rambla d'en Prim (1993). Palo Alto exclusion is clearly observable.*

The good relations between Mariscal and Maragall might have contributed to Palo Alto's maintenance. The press from those times shows that, although Mariscal often maintained a difficult relationship with other government relevant personalities (such as Generalitat de Catalunya's President, Jordi Pujol), the public statements of the designer about the City Hall president transmit a relationship of closeness and empathy. In particular, Maragall chose Palo Alto for the public presentation of his Culture Program, in the 1995 local elections.

For the opposition party, CiU, Palo Alto deserved a prominent place in the city's future: their candidate Miquel Roca expressed their willingness to change the Diagonal Mar project, in order to concentrate designers and creative agencies in Palo Alto's area, converting it into a design district (*La Vanguardia*, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1995). This indicates that in the mid-nineties, the main local political forces recognized Palo Alto's relevance, with its power reaching the surrounding projects of its territory.



On July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1995, the Special Interior Reform Plan of Poblenou's Waterfront (*Pla especial de reforma interior del front marítim de Poblenou - PERI*) is approved. This PERI is part of 1993 MPMG waterfront urbanization plan, which organizes the territory on a local level (Fig.6). In infrastructural terms, it retrieves and updates Cerdà's road network proposal. It also protects industrial elements in Can Girona complex: the chimney and the water tower, proposing their inclusion in the Municipal Catalogue Protection (p.31). It organizes the public space with a central promenade, Passeig de Taulat; the interiors of the projected five blocks; and designs two squares, one of which houses the old tower of les Aigües. This PERI keeps Palo Alto grounds untouched, except for the 1993 crossing, designed to connect Fluvià Street with Passeig de Taulat.

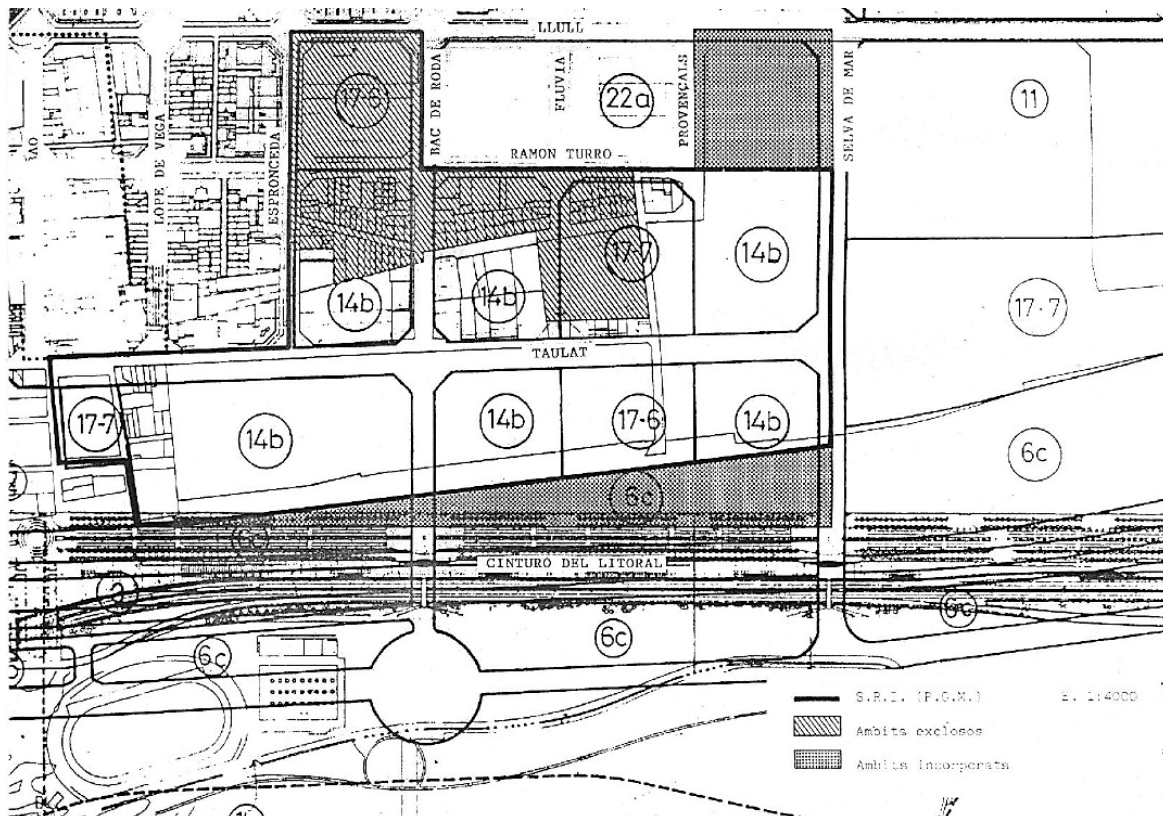


Fig.6. *Pla Especial de Concreció dels tipus d'equipament i ordenació als Carrers Provençals, Pellaires, Taulat i Ferrers. Unitat d'actuació 1 – PERI Front Marítim*, from 1995. Palo Alto is excluded from this urban intervention.

In 1996, the Detailed Study of Palo Alto's Urbanization (*Estudi de Detall d'Ordenació del Centre de "Palo Alto"*), defined by the City Hall, was approved. It determined the facility's uses as supporting the cultural context. In 1997, Mariscal creates the Palo Alto Private Foundation Centre for Artistic



and Cultural Production, which manages the complex since then. Their objectives are: to promote and manage artistic and cultural activities, among which is the complex's promotion; the creation of a cultural found; the rehabilitation of its buildings, and the renting of exhibition spaces (Fundació Palo Alto, 2013).

That same year, the City Hall approves a convention, providing the renting of these factory buildings for a period of twenty years. The factory rehabilitation is of the Foundation's responsibility, which becomes responsible to devote 416 pesetas per m<sup>2</sup> monthly for this purpose, and 250 pesetas for conservation (*La Vanguardia*, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1997).

By the end of the nineties, along with the studies on Barcelona's economic reorientation of its industrial model into the knowledge economy, another phenomenon happened in Poblenou: the revitalization of the city's old industrial buildings, through its reuse for new cultural uses and housing. The local newspapers note the resemblance with other cities in the world, such as New York. Pointing to the renewal of industrial buildings located in Poblenou, in 1998, *La Vanguardia* (June, 21<sup>st</sup>) analyses the occurring transformations of old industrial buildings converted into residential lofts. Although illegal, such real state operations were highly profitable: in Poblenou, the housing soil price was 213,000 pesetas/m<sup>2</sup>, while to the industrial soil corresponded 160,000 pesetas/m<sup>2</sup>. One of these reconversions was specially controversial: the illegal transformation into housing of the Vapor Lull factory was awarded, in February 1998, the City of Barcelona Award, evaluated by an external jury but granted by the City Hall. The newspaper states that such operations were a symptom, felt among promoters and architects, of a real state and city need: the requalification of Poblenou's obsolete industrial soil into housing.

By then, the City Hall was indeed heading towards this territory's requalification, allowing the introduction of new uses besides the set defined since 1976. The Poblenou renewal criteria – allowing the transformation into a mixed use zone (housing, leisure, commercial, industry) -, was two days earlier announced for public discussion in the same Catalan daily newspaper; and published in the *Butlletí Oficial de la Província de Barcelona* (BOP) nº152, June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1998. By then, 63% of this territory was still dedicated to industrial uses. Nonetheless, the document *Criteris, objectius i solucions generals de planejament de la renovació de les àrees industrials del Poble Nou* opened then the door for the 22@ urban regeneration.

### **Palo Alto's creative cluster and its inclusion in Poblenou's creative territory**

In addition to the real estate pressures, to the municipal plans for Poblenou's physical and economic regeneration, and to the cultural activities settled in this territory – such as Palo Alto -, by the end of the nineties Poblenou was



part of industrial building's reconversion into cultural equipment Barcelona's dynamics. These were strengthened by the city's policies orientation of inserting culture within the economic strategy of the city. In this context, the author highlights the inclusion of culture in the 1990's *Plan Estratégico Económico y Social Barcelona 2000*; and in the consideration of the heritage buildings, at the 1999 *Pla Estratègic del Sector Cultural de Barcelona*.

The approval of the *Modificació del PGM per a la renovació les zones industrials del Poblenou - Districte d'Activitats 22@BCN*, the 2000 plan which dictated the major economic shift and urban regeneration processes in Poblenou, did not include Palo Alto's territory. It is in its fringes that Palo Alto remains. Although the 22@ project defines the design sector as one of the productive activities to be undertaken in Poblenou; and that there are references including Palo Alto as part of this cluster (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2012), the author is unable to determine with precision when was Palo Alto's business activity included in the design cluster of 22@ new industrial district. Thus, in the early twenty-first century, Palo Alto is characterized as cultural facility, located in a valuable real state property, rented by the City Hall. Its new use, as a creative facility; the business management model; and the building regeneration were the result of Palo Alto Foundation's work.

On July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2003, the approval of the *Pla de Millora Urbana per l'ordenació de l'àmbit de la unitat d'actuació n.4 del PERI del Front Marítim del Poblenou*, keeps the Fluvià Street crossing through the Palo Alto complex, with the key 5 of the Metropolitan Urban Normative. The 1993 MPGM paradox remained: the building's heritage level did not include the protection of the entire complex, which would be threatened by the street crossing. The land located on both sides of the extension of this route had the facility qualification (7b), with one of the buildings being particularly affected.

This problem was overcome by including the complex on the *Modificació del Pla del Special Patrimoni Arquitectònic Historicoartístic de la Ciutat de Barcelona. Districte de Sant Martí. Patrimoni Industrial del Poblenou*, 2006, marked as element 113. The High Protection Level (B) awarded to most of the buildings of the old Gal i Puigsech factory, as well as its chimney, elevated Palo Alto to become one of the eight elements with the highest level of protection in this district, considered as Local Interest Cultural Heritage<sup>6</sup>. These heritage elements, together with Palo Alto's creative business, are decisive to its public space configuration: both rendering forms of cultural relevance to this industrial complex.

Such heritage value categorization limited the interventions on these catalogued elements. It determined the original volume and chimney to be

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<sup>6</sup> The other seven factories are: Productos Frigo, S.A.; La Escocesa; Can Gili Nou; Industrias Waldes; Vicent Illa, S.A., Ca l'Illa; and Can Ricart.



kept; it also specified the façades restoration, by eliminating elements later added (as air conditioners). It also promotes the recovery of the original architectural elements, textures and colours; highlights the respect for the spatial structure defined by the enclosure, to facilitate the reading of the original spaces; and points to the restoration and valorisation of the most relevant original structures, visible from the inside. This protection level defines that any intervention on the complex must value all its historical processes (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2006). To the D protection level element, the plan accepts its destruction – as long as it is preceded by an historical memory survey, with a comprehensive photographic and planimetric collection.

In 2010, the *Modificació del Pla Especial de protecció del Patrimoni Arquitectònic Històricartístic de la Ciutat de Barcelona. Districte de Sant Martí*, introduced new elements on Sant Martí's heritage catalogue. A housing front, located in Pellaires Street, on the opposite side of Palo Alto, (Fig.7) must be highlighted. In 2010, it acquired the C Protection Level, after previously being merely mentioned in the 2006 edition. This level of protection resulted on the rehabilitation of its buildings, and positively contributed to the valorisation of Palo Alto's surroundings.



Fig.7. Listed residential front in Pellaires Street. Fig.8. Palo Alto outside view.

The 2010 *Modificació del Pla Especial protecció del Patrimoni Arquitectònic Històricartístic de la Ciutat de Barcelona. Districte de Sant Martí* was accompanied by another plan: the *Modificació puntual del PGM en l'Ambit del Casc Antic del Poblenou* (MPPGM), adopted on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, concerning the protection and urban regeneration of the old Poblenou centre. This plan emphasised the importance of the area where Palo Alto is located, and regards its buildings with special interest, by considering their contribution to Poblenou's urban landscape with identity and value, conveying essential features of its historical development process.



This MPPGM resulted from a popular petition, asking for a protection plan for this Poblenou's historical area. Until 2010, this area's regulation was the 1976 PGM; it remained excluded from the 22@ project. However, the strong real estate pressure driven by the 22@ impacted this territory, especially in the axis of Maria Aguiló and Taulat Streets. In 2004, the neighbour's association achieved that the district's Councilman, Francesc Narváez, organized a studying committee for this issue. This committee was composed by the neighbour's associations, by the Grup Patrimoni del Fòrum Ribera del Besòs and by 22@ representatives. As a starting point, they based themselves on a previously study done in this area by architect Sebastià Jornet, from the architecture faculty ETSAB (AA.VV., 2004).

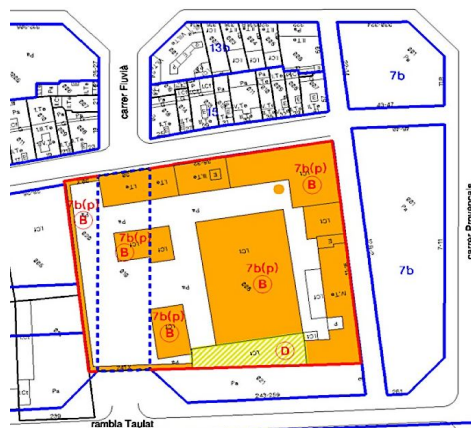


Fig.9. Palo Alto heritage protection levels, according to the *Modificació del Pla Especial del Patrimoni Arquitectònic Historicoartístic de la Ciutat de Barcelona*. Districte de Sant Martí, 2010..

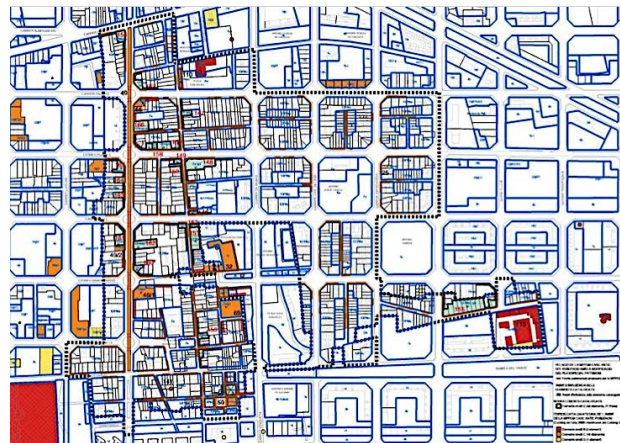


Fig.10. *Modificació puntual del PGM en l'Ambit del Casc Antic del Poblenou*, with highlights to Palo Alto and to the buildings front from Pellaies Street, connecting the area to Poblenou's historical centre

Palo Alto's aggregation resulted from the valorisation of different heritage elements: the factory building and the facades located in front of its entrance; the morphology of Pellaies Street and its continuity, the Carrer de Tortellà, which maintains an old agricultural route. The relevance of these elements, key testimony moments in Poblenou's history, were considered as contributing to the richness and diversity of the urban landscape of this neighbourhood, marking their identity. Despite this integration of Palo Alto in the 22@, in normative terms, the productive activities of this enclosure remained classified with the 7(b) key. Thus, corresponding to the Article 211 of the 1976 PGM rules, of new creation and equipment of municipal interest, and not the 7@ key, which corresponds to innovative productive activities, under the rules of the 22@ MPPGM, approved in 2000.



Currently, Palo Alto hosts the following activities:

Seventeen companies, studios and creative scope enclosures	Architecture and Interiors: Fernando Salas Studio, Alex Gasca, ADD + Architecture
	Audiovisual, communication design and events: Moreradesign, Sans Visual Studio, Puresang, Playoffvision, Pasarela, Estudio Mariscal
	Jewelry Design: Duch Claramunt
	Photography: Jordi Bernadó
	Artists: Víctor Pérez-Porro, Medina Campeny
Education and Training	Brother Escuela Creativos
Two multipurpose spaces	Room XYZ, Escoleta
A restaurant	La Cantina

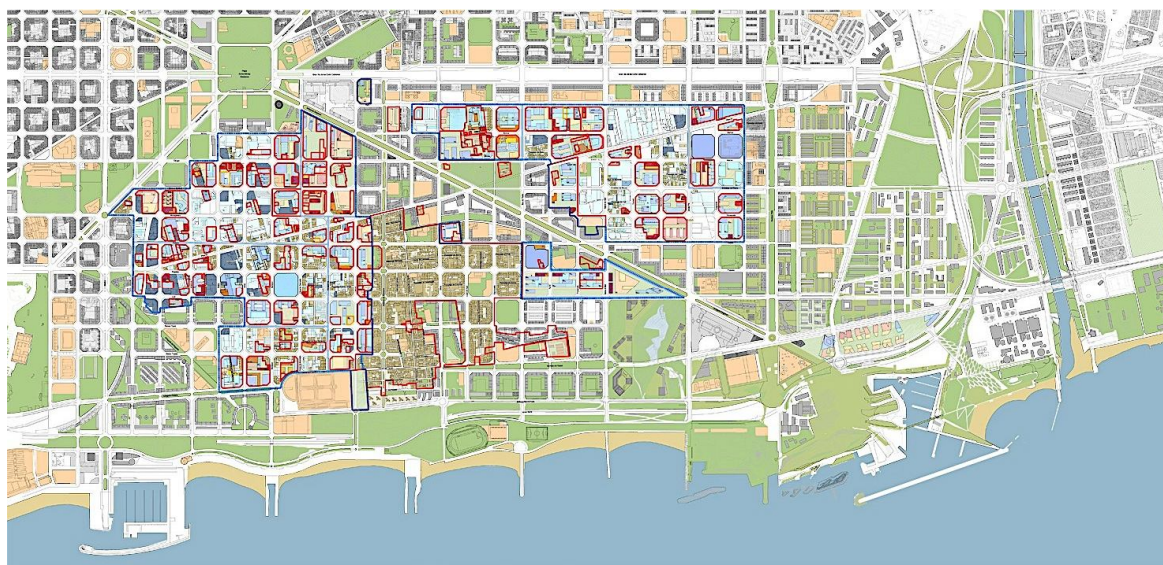


Fig.11. 22@ ordination, July 2012. Palo Alto enclosure is noted in the plan, connected by the 2010 *Modificació puntual del PGM en l'Ambit del Casc Antic del Poblenou.*

Maintaining the business typology of small and medium enterprises, as well as the cultural activity sector, Palo Alto adapted itself to the global competitive market, by becoming a centre of innovation and creativity. For these reasons, it has become a reference in the city, especially for:

- The quality of its business environment, directed to the creative sector,



integrating relevant companies in the arts and design;

- Being considered a success for the conversion of an old factory in an area of new productive uses, linked to innovation and culture (Tatjer et al, 2005; Ajuntament of Barcelona, 2010a).

Therefore, the approval of the plan *Modificació puntual del PGM en l'Ambit del Casc Antic del Poblenou* meant the inclusion of Palo Alto within the recent changes of Poblenou's territory alongside the 22@ project, through its heritage perceived value. Palo Alto becomes integrated in a wider territorial and economic transformation: in terms of the inclusion of their productive activity in the new Barcelona's strategic, economic and industrial orientation - in the context of a globalized economy and of competitiveness between cities.

### **Palo Alto's heritage and public space**

Palo Alto's integration in Poblenou's territorial scope through the 2010 MPPGM also acknowledges part of the complex as a public space, acknowledging its use for the enjoyment of the neighbours. This category enhances Palo Alto's inclusion in the new urban design processes implemented in Poblenou's territory, such as the 22@ project: articulating mixed uses in this industrial enclosure, and giving coherence to its physical territory through the use of flexible typologies, harmonizing its background - agricultural, manufacturing, and the Cerdà plot - with the current needs.

This old factory complex is currently regulated on two levels: the *Modificació del Pla Special Protecció del Patrimoni Arquitectònic Històric artístic de la Ciutat de Barcelona. Districte de Sant Martí* (2010), which limits the intervention of its heritage; and the *Pla de Millora Urbana dels sols d'equipament i zona verda del recinte industrial de "Palo Alto" i entorn, i definició dels parametres edificatoris de l'equipament d'escola bressol municipal situat al carrer Pellaires nº28*, from 2010. This Pla de Millora Urbana (PMU) does not define any kind of intervention on the buildings. Its scope in Palo Alto is restricted to the reorganization of its open space, making a clear separation between areas of public use (6b) and private areas (7b). The intervention on the built heritage focused on the recovery of the two walls and the chimney; and forecasts the reconfiguration of one of the enclosed areas, opening the passage that would allow permeability between Pellaires Street and Passeig Taulat, as promoting the morphological continuity of Carrer Fluvià.

This territorial intervention of the urban improvement plan approved in September 2010, had a scope limited by the heritage protection level of Palo Alto: the regeneration project had to be assessed by the Comissió de





Patrimoni Industrial. After its approval, the project established two main objectives:

- Specify the location of the uses in Palo Alto venue: facility 7b (p) and the green zone 6b (p). It extends the public use to the complex interior area (which hitherto enjoyed an exclusive private use), while maintaining its unique character bestowed by the complex heritage scope and its cultural and creative uses. It solves the prolongation of Fluvià Street, projecting a new pedestrian passage between Pellaies and Passeig Taulat. Other relevant items of this plan are the structure of the public areas, by arranging and organizing them (green areas and accesses).
- Set the parameters for the creation of a neighbourhood nursery school, located on Pellaies Street, 28.

The land areas affected by the plan – located between Pellaies, Ferrers, Taulat and Bac de Roda Streets were public property and available for intervention.

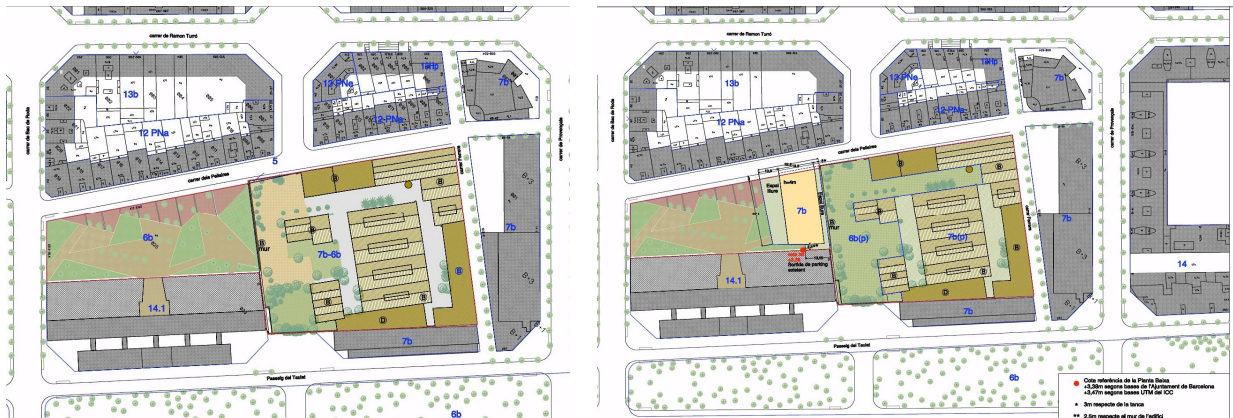
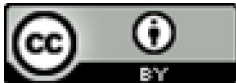


Fig.12 and 13. Palo Alto before and after the 2010 *Pla de Millora Urbana*

Of the previous Palo Alto's 1.600.000m<sup>2</sup> open access 6b/7b areas, this plan increases it to 2.887.30m<sup>2</sup> (p.10). This green area gain results from the adjustment of its limitation, due to the incorporation of areas previously classified as vials (the continuity of Fluvià Street). Since dealing with a protected building, the proposed urbanization of this public space was detailed and focused on the following aspects:

- Retrieve the area located inside the complex walls to public use. This transformation would be performed with the vegetation and trees maintenance, and the significant reduction of parking space;
- Rehabilitation of the surrounding wall and of the chimney;



- Restoration of the wall area, near the new built school, allowing the visual permeability with the interior of Palo Alto enclosure. It also aimed to aesthetically improve the ground floor of the buildings, increasing the vegetation.

In defining the facilities areas, this plan includes the buildings of Palo Alto's industrial warehouses - 7b (p), as well as the two access zones to some of its buildings.

Public space is a distinctive characteristic of Palo Alto's enclosure, albeit its public access is restricted to the opening hours of its corporations, during the weekdays, and to private acts. The enclosure's space consists of four areas, which are divided into two zones as one enters the complex. On the left, there is a street layout, visually marked by a set of palm trees and the chimney, which dominates the space. This street layout belongs to the public realm. It also allows the direct access to two buildings, and distributes two "corridors" that allow access to three other blocks.

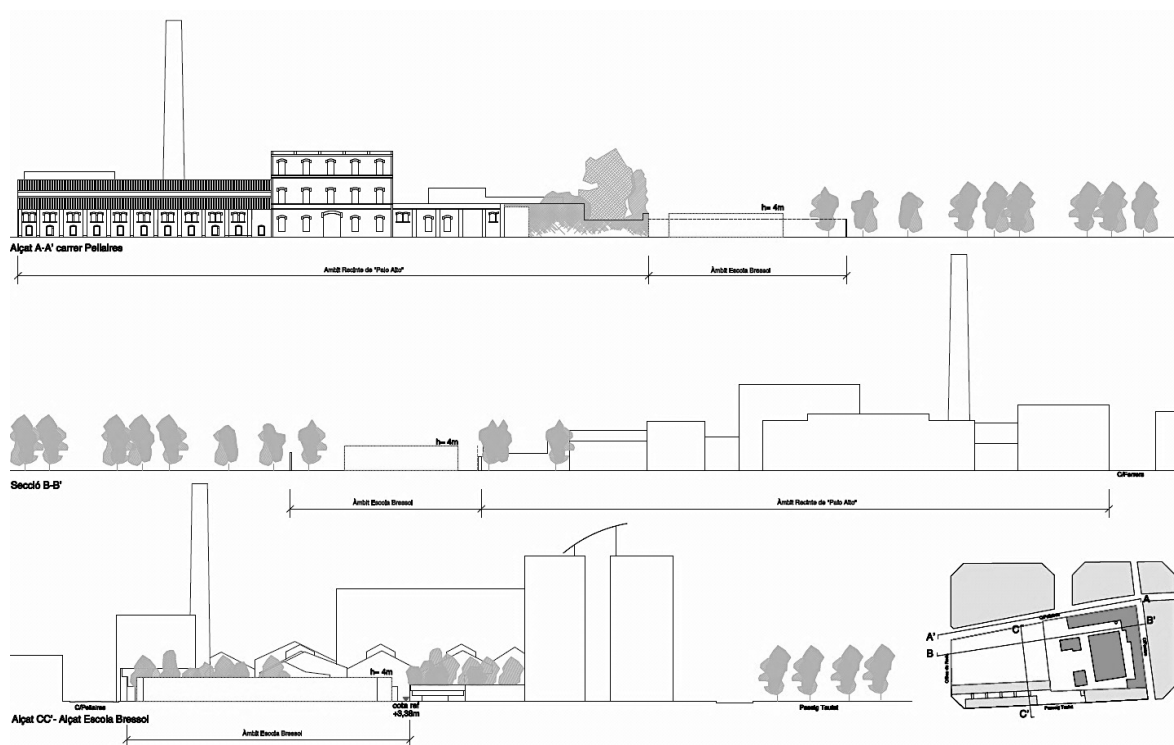


Fig.14. Building regulation limited by Palo Alto elements, at the 2010 PMU

In Carrer Fluvià continuity area, there is car parking, followed by a green area. This is characterized by a small vegetable garden; by a living area, home to an informal terrace; and a green area, where there should be an open access to the Passeig Taulat, according to the 2010 Pla de Millora Urbana, allowing enclosure crossing. By not implementing this, this space exists as a kind of



residual "pocket". In addition to the inconsistency of these different areas of public space, there is also a spatial disorganization, mixing street furniture elements (such as the case of banks used by the municipality, the Escofet) with furniture elements of the private sector (chairs and tables garden, vases, etc.).

This "pocket" area is regularly used by Palo Alto Market. This weekend event started in December 2014, proposing with a street market-sophisticated style, the prolongation of the privatization of its public space, by limiting the access with an admission price. Other activities led by Palo Alto's enterprises also use the outer area of the enclosure.

Palo Alto's heritage valorisation impacts its surroundings as an aesthetic, historic and identity mark of Poblenou's industrial past; and it also determined the new buildings. The pre-primary school project preserves Palo Alto's wall, and limits new constructions to four meters high.

This plan incorporates objectives from Agenda 21, regarding sustainable development, such as: the reduction of residues, due to reusing the buildings; the green area increase and the positive impact on the neighbour's life, due to the availability of this public space. The plan also states the mobility and permeability improvement, by the connection between the complex and its surroundings. These last two points are contradicted by direct observation, led in this investigation between 2012 and 2015. Palo Alto's green area is mostly used by its tenants and workers, restaurant consumers, and occasional outside visitors (for events and as tourists). The neighbours green area needs seem to be mostly fulfilled by the Remedios Varo gardens built in the surrounding area. This lack of usability is aligned with the connection deficiency between Palo Alto complex and its exterior: there is only one entrance to the complex. Until today, the pedestrian passage to Passeig Taulat is yet to be opened.

Regarding the citizen participation in this project, this plan states two sessions were held with representatives from a neighbour's association (Associació de Veïns de Front Marítim). Their participation seems to have been limited to the City Hall's adoption of a few of the citizens' inputs regarding the proposal



Fig.15. Urbanization criteria from the 2010 *Pla de Millora Urbana*, with highlights to the new access and conceded permeability proposed with Passeig Taulat

In the scope of this paper, of the seven urbanization aspects defined by this 2010 *Pla de Millora Urbana* for this public space design, the highlights are:

- Maintenance of the two main distinguishing aspects of Palo Alto: its heritage and its vegetation. On the industrial heritage front, the factory chimney and the wall recovery are especially relevant. Regarding the urban green, the initial preservation of the arborisation developed over the years by José Farriol (Universitat de Barcelona, 2013), and the expansion of the green area, in the continuity of Fluvià Street. The combination of these two elements seemed essential to characterize this complex, as a quiet, almost rural environment. The vegetation is diverse, covering a large part of the facades of buildings in this old factory. On the other hand, the vegetation is an essential element for establishing distinguished environments in the precinct: on the 6b area (Fluvià Street prolongation), the environment, green and with a fishpond, - is distinguished from the access to the warehouses area, which culminates in the chimney dominant element;
- Creation of two pedestrian private circulation spaces, on the warehouses access (Fig.13). These circulation areas are within the zones



previously designated as public spaces, now qualified as facilities;

-Opening of a new Palo Alto access, on the wall located on Passeig Taulat. Functionally, this would permit a new pedestrian access and route through the enclosure, in the public use area designated as 6b(p). Morphologically, this crossing allowed a subtle continuity of Fluvià Street.



Figs.16, 17. Palo Alto's wall to Passeig Taulat view, from the street and from the enclosure.

However, the observation on the territory performed between 2012 and 2015, reveals another reality:

- The walls recovery was accompanied by the preservation of some of the vegetation. Some carelessness should be highlighted in handling the green area located at the zone 6b (p) centre. Following the main access to Palo Alto, and after the car parking area, some confusion is observed in the elements that make up this public use space. There is a lack of ordination and coherence in the overall design. Vegetation is disordered, and street furniture coexists with private garden benches. It goes beyond the "bohemian artist" spirit, being converted into a spatial disorder lacking qualities of a good public space. It also should be noted the existence of a private, fenced vegetable garden in this public space. The vegetable elements that work best were those relating to the facades overlay, giving a sense of coherence, pleasant, care, and rural-industrial paradox with positively resulted in a distinctive image of this *laisser-faire* area. It is patent a sense of growing abandonment in the public space.
- The creation of private circulation spaces, for the access to the warehouses, has not been established by built barriers, as planned. For the uninformed citizen, this means mingle of private and public spaces, albeit defined by the plan as 7b.



- The lack of the opening access to Passeig Taulat on Palo Alto's enclosure. On this sector, the wall was intervened, with a metallic reconstruction (Fig.16); but no gate is to be seen. Not opening this access means that the space inside the enclosure was not transformed into crossing and access, as originally planned. The use of this space seems to be private, with an undefined character. Morphologically, there isn't the expected continuity of Fluvià Street. The quality of this public space states disorganization, making it uninviting for public use and enjoyment.

Palo Alto's is a special case within the set of public spaces resulting from industrial transformation processes of urban regeneration. Despite being property of Barcelona's City Hall, the successive postponement of planning regarding this enclosure, together with the extended rental of the building to Palo Alto companies led to a gradual appropriation of this public space for their business environment. Thus, one of the most characteristic elements of this space - the vegetation - was due to a progressive landscaping, by José Farriol ("Pepichek Farriol"), possibly dating from the beginning of the Fundació Palo Alto in 1997. The fact that in 2010 there was a Pla de Millora Urbana approved did not interfere yet with the configuration and distribution of this territory; therefore, it sadly keeps most of the above characteristics of a private enterprise.



Fig.18. One of Palo Alto's characteristic buildings, covered with vegetation  
Fig. 19. Palo Alto's public space, in the garden area. The distinctive chimneys of Palo Alto (on the left) and Torre de les Aigues, from Can Girona factory (on the right).



## CONCLUSIONS

Barcelona's economic shift into an innovative, global competitive city of the last decades has a parallel in Palo Alto's recent transformations. In this complex, its symbolic features - heritage and creative cluster - are exhaled and promoted as highly positive. These qualities are linked to Poblenou's wider urban regeneration processes, where its industrial past is cleaned up and turned into a refurbished, smart city image of sustainable economical production. Creativity and technology are now the liberating, problem-solving driving force of the city's economy, and, finally, the re-interpretation and reconversion of its past into new valuable symbolic attributes, which add differentiation to the city's landscape and allow the multiplication of the real state value.

Nevertheless, along with the economic and strictly physical territorial transformations, the social impact of these changes is not fully engaged. As this paper explores, the economic, symbolic and physical transformations led in Palo Alto's complex do not conform with the patterns designed by the City Hall's plan of making its public space more accessible to the public. Although the limited access to the enclosure, due to its working hours, seems to be inevitable (and, due to its characteristics, even positive), the fact is that the non completion of the 2010 PMU plan design – with the walking passage of the precinct from Pellaires Street to Passeig Taulat - deeply constricts this territory, both socially and morphologically.

Other ignored aspects of this plan, such as the parking lot organization, and even aspects not defined on this plan, such as the design of the public green area of the enclosure, add to the allowance of privatization of this valuable public space. The Palo Alto's enterprises' desired "oasis in the city" metaphor remains. It marks a public space of exclusion, allowed for the chosen ones. Such exclusive tone is underlined by the recent entrance-fee activities related to art and design related commerce and to the exaltation of a bohemian, selective lifestyle.

The public life of the historical, symbolic heritage values of Palo Alto's enclosure – its buildings, the public art element of its chimney, the enclosure green area itself – would add a positive and enriching experience to the citizens. The limiting enjoyment opportunities currently offered do not conform to the City Hall's purposes of diversity and social representation - namely, stated at Agenda 21. The lack of design of this public space, with a balanced distribution of its elements and their integration in the city and neighbourhood's landscape patterns is a much-needed work. Such project would highly contribute to the attraction and vividly citizen's life of this public space.

There is room for a proper civic re-accommodation of Palo Alto's industrial past. The buildings reconversion into new creative industries would be



enriched if the representation of the new global, sustainable, innovative knowledge economy would integrate positive social values, such as diversity, inclusion, participation, dialogue, compromise. If it is a public space, there is a need of neighbourhood and of citizenship in Palo Alto, for its public space to be truly considered as public. The current state of this closed enclosure is segregation, upper-hype class exclusiveness and social homogenization. Social identity processes allowed by its heritage vocation and by its public art should be further encouraged as part of Barcelona's public space.

This fragmentation between intentional project and real implementation leads to the limitation of Palo Alto's relevance in the city. Its consideration as a heritage and business-reconversion hallmark could be further extended to encouraging and including in its public space the citizens. This social input would align and enrich the city's landscape most valuable goods: its people. There are infinite possibilities of encouraging and enlisting the citizens not as mere spectators or users into the city's new innovative, cultural-led public spaces. Stabilized, operative structures, such as Palo Alto, could reframe the possibilities for this to happen, and be a constructive guide to future projects of industrial reconversion, related to heritage, new innovative uses, and the creation of new public spaces, such as the case of Can Ricart.

If public space is seen as a structural element for the city, both as functional, symbolic and economic terms, then it should encompass the concretization of the 2010 Pla de Millora Urbana. It should also go further, into a proper design of the space, with the physical, symbolic and social integration into its surroundings. This current lack raises relevant questions about social and cultural policies and how they represent the city's current purposes. Independently from which label Barcelona uses to project itself into the future, a clear definition of its core social values and the method for their appliance is essential to the city's successful changes. This constitutes a constant challenge - permanently negotiated, adapted, and reconsidered. Thus, invoking the need of the firmly stated, non-negotiated structural values. That needs to be the basis of city policies and, therefore, of urban regeneration processes.

The historical, morphological and heritage anchors defining Palo Alto's intervention are insufficient to constitute an added value in its full sense: social, symbolic, economic. The economic priority, together with the aesthetic quality of its renewal generates a distinguished, incoherent space, insufficient in its substance. Both in the history of Barcelona's cultural and territorial policies more fulfilling examples of articulation possibilities between culture-territory-economy can be found, which engage deeply in its social dimensions.

Palo Alto's contribution to the city has, nonetheless, positive traits. It is a good example of how a non-organized group of people can rescue, reform and adapt to new functions old industrial buildings, and transform an old





factory into a beautiful heritage site. The successful recovery from such a degraded site also positively impacted its surrounding area, and serves as a model on how private, corporate initiative can ignite territorial valorisation (both as real state profit and as physical improvement). Thus, values developed by Remesar (2005a) in his methodology of public space analysis, such as:

- 1, Identity, by the distinction and valorisation of its heritage,
- 2, Adaptability, by its flexibility in receiving new economic functions,
- 3, and sustainability, by the public space's ability to promote new economic, symbolic and social values,

Are stated as positive.

The cultural value of Palo Alto's enterprise contributed to the development of urban regeneration processes, and its adaptation to the cultural field evolving changes had positive economic results.

Finally, in Barcelona and in the 22@ project itself, there seems to be a shift in the marketing label. If Barcelona was previously marketed as a "creative city", recently it seems to be more related to the "smart city" brand. The evolving interest in information technologies applied to the urban territory and its citizens conducted the iCapital, European Capital of Innovation Award, in 2014 (European Commission, 2014). Perhaps such scenario is also possible in Palo Alto, where some of its companies (such as Mariscal's studio) faced financial problems in recent years. No matter the challenges the future holds nor the re-branding used, the city's urban policies should be perceived as a whole: economy and social policies should not be separated, nor disregard the deeply rooted and acknowledged public space needs.

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Fig.5. *Modificació del Pla general metropolità al Front Marítim del Poble Nou, des del Cementiri fins la Rambla d'en Prim*, de 1993. Fonte: Ajuntament de Barcelona (1995). *PERI del front marítim del Poblenou. Annex: criteris, objectius i solucions generals*. Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona

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Fig. 19. Source: author's archive, 2012



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