

Press Release

Local residents' involvement in the reconstruction of neighbourhoods at risk of social exclusion reduces segregation

This is the main conclusion drawn from a study by the UIC Barcelona School of Architecture on the process of urban reconstruction in the Barcelona neighbourhood of San Cosme since the 1970s.

Failing to allow local residents to get involved in the reconstruction process increases their isolation and generates greater dependence on public administrations.

The study, headed by professor Raquel Colacios, has just been published in the *Italian Journal of Planning Practice*.

Barcelona, 3 December 2019. The involvement of local residents in the reconstruction of big-city neighbourhoods is crucial to combat the social segregation and risk of social exclusion that affects these districts, and hence guarantee greater cohesion among their inhabitants. These were the conclusions of the study entitled *"Neighbourhood reconstruction, community identity and place attachment: mixed experiences from the mass social housing complex of Sant Cosme, Barcelona"*, headed by Raquel Colacios, a professor at the UIC Barcelona School of Architecture, with the collaboration of researchers Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo and Isabelle Anguelovski.

The research project, which ended up being published in the specialist *Italian Journal of Planning Practice*, analysed the process of urban reconstruction undertaken in the social housing complex of San Cosme, an archetypal model of the housing estates built in the 1960s on the outskirts of big Spanish cities to house the migrant population from the countryside who were in great demand as labour for industry. "We chose the neighbourhood of San Cosme firstly because this district underwent a complete reconstruction process between 1979 and 2003, including both housing and the design of public urban spaces; and secondly because it represents a socially vulnerable urban landscape subject to powerful spatial segregation," explains Raquel Colacios.

The research method was based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques that included 20 in-depth interviews with local residents, association members and public administration officials, 120 questionnaires developed in an academic workshop with Master's degree students, and an urban analysis of the neighbourhood that examined the morphology of the public space and the housing.

Two-speed reconstruction

Building started on the neighbourhood of San Cosme in 1964 to relocate migrant families, mainly from southern Spain, who up until then had been living in a shanty town on the hillsides of Montjuïc. The homes were built with low quality materials that led to their rapid deterioration. Poor transport connections with the centre of El Prat and the lack of basic services generated a social ghetto stereotype that became associated with San Cosme from its creation.

Press Release

In 1970, a group of local residents, mainly made up of migrant families, started a neighbourhood movement to fight for improvements to the conditions of their homes and their neighbourhood. This social pressure, channelled through the San Cosme Neighbourhood Association, meant that in 1978 the El Prat municipal council approved a reconstruction plan for their apartments. This process went on for 14 years and the local residents themselves played an active role by coming up with specific design suggestions for their homes at open assemblies and meetings.

However, as the study reflects, the families who joined the neighbourhood in the second wave of migration, in the early 1970s, were left out of this reconstruction process until 1993, when the town council decided to embark on the renovation of their homes and public spaces. "This accentuated tensions between local residents because in spatial terms they were divided into two groups," explains Raquel Colacios.

As the study shows, the same physical reconstruction process can have very different results at a social level, depending on the degree of citizen involvement. In San Cosme, the phases during which community participation was much more pronounced engendered a strong sense of community identity and pride which still remains today among a large group of residents. On the other hand, the reconstruction of the most socially vulnerable sector and the design of their public spaces, in which the involvement of the community was either negligible or non-existent, failed to generate any positive feeling among local residents and merely exacerbated the division through spatial segregation and local residents' increased dependence on the public authorities.

The article concluded that the management of the reconstruction failed in its attempt to integrate local residents due to the different levels of their involvement, which resulted in greater dependence, intensified stereotypes, and, in the final instance, led to a community that became more and more divided.

About the UIC Barcelona School of Architecture

UIC Barcelona School of Architecture is committed to the intellectual, professional and personal growth of all those who form part of it. The School of Architecture has strongly invested in a teaching model based on individual attention, practical learning based on embracing every field of knowledge, cutting-edge technology, and teaching staff with international experience in order to train architects to be able to tackle the challenges posed by society.

Further information:

Marcos Doespiritusanto

Press Officer at UIC Barcelona School of Architecture

T. +34 932 541 800 / mdoespiritusanto@uic.es / www.uic.es / [@UICbarcelona](https://twitter.com/UICbarcelona)