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The Future of Museums of Cities

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KEYNOTE ARTICLE

JOAN ROCA I ALBERTBarcelona History Museum
(MUHBA), Spain**AT THE CROSSROADS OF CULTURAL AND URBAN POLICIES.
RETHINKING THE CITY AND THE CITY MUSEUM****ABSTRACT**

A century ago, when urban modernization fully affected the historical centres of the cities, the number of city museums multiplied throughout Europe. Today, after the industrial and colonial eras, the expansion of big metropolises and the diversification of their inhabitants have created a new historical framework around the world. In a context of global powers and the difficulties faced by states to regulate coexistence and identity under these circumstances, the practical life in cities as spaces of conflict, and at the same time, of negotiation, agreement and shared memories, has become increasingly important.

Therefore, cities and city museums are taking on renewed importance in the early decades of the 21st century. *Meine Stadt, meine Geschichte* – “My City, My History” – was the slogan for the transformation of the Museum of Stuttgart, a metropolis which carried a strong tradition of immigration in the 20th century. But the empowerment of the urban majorities will not come about by just recognizing their diversity; it will also require the ability to show and explain the mechanisms of social construction of the city over time. The city museum cannot just be a “local museum”; it must act as an RDI centre, where research on urban history, representative objects and heritage, as well as landscape, feeds a laboratory of citizenship in multiple formats: from talks and seminars to exhibitions and publications, from heritage spaces to urban itineraries. The tearing down of the barriers between culture and education, the drive for construction of citizenship and the contribution to reformulate tourist practices should not be separate functions.

A new generation of city museums, lying halfway between cultural policies and urban policies, is required to go beyond providing sociocultural revitalization; they need to shape a programme for building knowledge that is open to the world and rooted in the city. City museums are required to be a portal to and mirror of the metropolis and its neighbourhoods, connecting spaces and historical narratives, as well as reconnecting centres and peripheries. Thus, the museum can propitiate the exercise of the right to the city, the basis for effective participation in urban life.

Key words: City museum, right to the city, urban history, polycentrism, periphery, urban heritage, knowledge hub, school museum

Introduction

The first city museum was conceived in 1860 by Charles Buls and Alphonse Wauters, the mayor and the archivist of Brussels, respectively, opening twenty-seven years later. In Paris, Haussmann made the idea his own in 1866, proposing to the municipal council that the remnants from areas of the city being demolished ought to be conserved at the Hôtel Carnavalet, a museum that opened its doors in 1880. This very idea led to the creation of the term “city museum”, a locale featuring objects and images from the old neighbourhoods that modernization was causing to disappear. Therefore, association of the terms “city” and “museum” started to designate an institution that had a very different profile from other museum organisations.

Prior to it, quite some time had elapsed since the atmosphere of Romanticism and Positivism, when various institutions first started collecting materials from the past, originating from demolitions in the centres of European cities. First of all, this was done by archaeological societies and other similar organisations. Then the city museums came. The majority emerged through municipal initiatives between the last third of the 19th and the first third of the 20th century, based on a concept that lay halfway between the notion of museum and that of monumental compilation.

The majority of these museums remained largely unchanged for decades, until the late 20th century, a time of growing interest in cultural heritage. They became more dynamic due to growth in tourism and because of their potential as institutions of cultural cohesion, within the broad framework of public policies. Since then, many have undergone a decisive metamorphosis, as we will discuss in reference to numerous European museums, inevitably paying particular attention to the museum that, through our professional work, we know best: Barcelona History Museum.¹

A new era for city museums

The change in the mission and even in the siting of city museums, since the beginning of the 21st century, has taken place under the impact of digital technologies and globalisation. As we look at the “city museum” today, it is also worth considering “museum” as the adjective and “city” as the noun, rather than vice versa. As it was the case when most of them were founded, once more physical and social urban transformations are determining factors. Although there are no detailed studies, the tendency is noted that the interest in the potential of city museums to unite a diverse body of citizens has held as much weight, if not more so, as the aim of renewing them as venues for city and tourism promotion.

In a time in which the technological revolution has given rise to globalisation and to a deep crisis in the democratic control of the state – while new imperialisms emerge – the role of cities, as a political subject and as spaces for the regulation of everyday practical life, is growing in importance. Not only are cities a place of conflict but also of negotiation and of shared experiences. In this current state of affairs, city museums are gaining relevance as a mirror for city residents, a gateway for visitors and as ambassadors of their city.

Nowadays, the way of working among innovative city museums is much more participatory than in the recent past. *Meine Stadt, meine Geschichte*, “My City, My History”, was the slogan for launching the renovation of the *Museum für Stuttgart*, in a metropolis with a long tradition of immigration.² There is no shortage of city museums immersed in a process of reforming their structures that are striving to change the role from representing the “great past” of the elites in order to incorporate representation of the urban majorities.³

¹ The references to websites in the notes were checked in August 2018.

² According to the initial renovation project of the Museum für Stuttgart of 2013: Urban history = migration history. The city museum wants the migration history of the city as an integrated part of the city’s history. Subsequently, the project was modified. Retrieved from: http://www.stadtpalais-stuttgart.de/assets/files/newsroom/allgemein/stadtmuseum/sms-presse_stadtmuseum_museumskonzeption.pdf

³ In addition to the publications of the ICOM and the CAMOC, there is the recently published work by Postula, J.L. (2015). *Le musée de ville, histoire et actualités*. Paris: La Documentation Française.



Foundational headquarters of the Barcelona History Museum in Plaça del Rei. View of the archaeological route beneath the buildings and of the medieval Royal Palace. © MUHBA, Pere Vivas

The right to the city

The vindication of the “right to the city”, as formulated in 1968 by Henri Lefèbvre and inscribed in the Final Statement of the UN Habitat III conference in 2016, has become as fundamental or even more so today than it was half a century ago. However, is such appropriation of the city possible without the capacity to know it well and decipher it?

The City Museum of **Ghent**, the STAM, was renovated and reopened in 2010 with the idea of “connecting today’s people with history and looking at the city’s future”. It has on the floor of its reception area a large-format backlit aerial photo, upon which people can walk before going to see the exhibition *The History of Ghent* or, as the Museum suggests, before going out to explore the city. “For visitors who are spending one or more days in Ghent, the STAM provides the ideal cultural/tourist introduction. For those who have been to Ghent before, the STAM sheds a new light on the city. For the people of Ghent, the STAM is an open house which invites them to take part in all kinds of activities”⁴



The entrance to STAM: Walk all over Ghent! The physical appropriation of the urban space is considered a requisite for its social appropriation.
© Stadsmuseum Ghent

City museums can play a key role in inclusive public policies, incorporating the time and space of the city’s trajectory into a cultural package that is shareable among all citizens, from the oldest residents to recent migrants and refugees. They can, at the same time, influence the modalities of urban visits, in favour of more sustainable touristic practices. The tourism business urgently requires regulatory measures, but the right to the city also includes visitors, and the museum should be able to cater for them with more hospitality rather than mercantilism.

It is useful to differentiate the numerous implications of the right to the city. It is the “right to the neighbourhood”, the world of local life, and the “right to the centre”, the symbolic space that represents the city. It is, at the same time, “the right to the memory” – all the pasts that still speak directly to us – and “the right to history”, the explanation of the city over the course of the centuries and of the heritage or its evidence that are preserved.

In favour of urban history

The trajectory of cities, especially of large cities, is not just a copy of their country’s history on a smaller scale. Cities also show a series of vicissitudes and periodisation of their own, which are sometimes counter-cyclical with respect to broader geopolitical spheres. Many economic, social, cultural and political changes of general scope have originated in a particular city: cities have their own substance as a historical subject. Hence the relevance of urban history as an organising paradigm of stories, braiding the elites and the majorities together in a plural way. However, granting their place to the subordinate classes does not mean renouncing history, but, quite to the contrary, it requires renewed historical knowledge.

To fight the fight for history is especially important at a time in which revisionism is making great efforts to blur political and social responsibilities. One gets the impression, however, that a great number of city museums have ultimately become trapped within a vague and general deconstructivism that rejects history as knowledge of the powers. Yet, they do not apply the same critical criteria to other social disciplines, such as anthropology and ethnography.

It is not even uncommon to hear curators and museologists talk in disparaging terms about a supposed *official history*, described as false and boring, and contrasting it with a supposed *popular memory*, which would be the veracious and thought-provoking expression of the collective past. It is to be feared that along this path both “history” and “memory” will become blurred, even if the intention is much to the contrary. Instead of proceeding to the systematic criticism of poorly

⁴ Retrieved from: <http://stamgent.be/en/events/een-permanente-tentoonstelling> and also from: <http://stamgent.be/en/about-stam/wat-is-het-stam>.

constructed or distorted historical narratives, they opt for generic disqualification of historiography. It is always difficult to know how things have happened, but a rigorous historiography must help to know, at least, how they have *not* happened. And this historical knowledge, however limited perhaps, turns out to be essential at a time when falsehoods receive the name of *post-truth*, and while fake news camouflages the relations of power.⁵

There is no shortage of cases where the term “history” has even been eliminated from a museum’s name. The Amsterdams Historisch Museum changed its name to **Amsterdam Museum** a few months before the 2011 opening of the programmatic exhibition *Amsterdam DNA*, and in Rotterdam they even championed the elimination of the concept: “The contemporary transnational city, and not the past city, has become central to the policies of the Museum. In 2010, it dropped the “Historical” in its name to continue as **Museum Rotterdam**”. In other cases, the name has been maintained, but somewhat uneasily. The website of the **Historisches Museum Frankfurt** underlines the fact that, with its renovation, completed in 2017, “it has transformed itself from a museum specialising in history to a metropolitan city museum”... as if historical knowledge were not of any use in engaging citizens.

The alternative to opting exclusively for the paradigm of an ethnography of everyday life can entail the risk of reducing the capacity to construct an interrogative, explanatory and comparative knowledge of the city. Without a backbone structuring the narrative of urban history, it would be difficult to lay the foundations of a city museum capable of engaging the citizens, with a meaningful retrospective view that can broaden the thinking about the present and the future.⁶ A museology that focuses solely on the link between a community and a specific territory, based on a restrictive interpretation of the Declaration of Quebec - Basic Principles of a New Museology 1984,⁷ may end up as a self-referencing representation of the community. Ecomuseums have been able to satisfactorily tackle communities attached to a well-defined natural, social and cultural community, but the complexity of relations that intersect at the metropolis requires complementary treatments. The neighbourhood or the community cannot be explained without referring them to the city overall, which is the scale whereupon urban microprocesses converge with the impacts of national and global events.⁸

Reconquering the historical centre

The recent wave of reforms of city museums has been justified in many cases by the purpose of turning them into a symbol of the municipality and a space for citizenship at the heart of the city, and this has been carried out as importantly, if not more so, as in terms of tourism promotion, which is so decisive in the case of other museums.⁹ Studies are needed in order to analyse whether these actions have had an effective impact in the reconquering of the centre by citizens, but there are indications that seem to corroborate it.

The new **Museum of Liverpool** is perhaps the most obvious case. It opened its doors in July 2011 and is located in the most symbolic and representative area of



Field work in the Bon Pastor neighbourhood in 2018. Research on urban history has made it possible to situate the works of the museum in this 1929 working-class housing estate in a broader context. © MUHBA, Marta Delclòs

⁵ See Klemperer, V. (2015). *LTI: Notizbuch eines Philologen*. Stuttgart: Reclam. English translation: Klemperer (2013). *LTI. Language of the Third Reich*, London: Bloomsbury.

⁶ This was the main theme at the founding meeting in Barcelona of the City History Museums and Research Network of Europe, in the year 2010. Urban history was adopted as the explanatory model, without renouncing contributions from other disciplines. It was attended by city museums and research centres from Amsterdam, Antwerp, Barcelona, Berlin, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Helsinki (by delegation), Kraków, Lisbon, Liverpool, Ljubljana, Luxembourg, Madrid, Riga, Rome, Stockholm, Turin and Vienna.

⁷ See Davies, P. (2011). *Ecomuseums. A Sense of Place*, London: Continuum.

⁸ A reflection in this respect, written between 1989 and 1994 from a secondary school on the periphery of Barcelona: Roca i Albert, J. (1994). *Recomposició capitalista i perifèrització social*. In: Roca, J. and Meseguer, M. (Eds.) *El futur de les perifèries urbanes. Canvi econòmic i crisi social a les metròpolis contemporànies*. Barcelona: Institut Barri Besòs. 509-788.

⁹ The development of museums to add value to their surrounding environment has followed various models: singular buildings (Bilbao), cultural zones (Museumsinsel in Berlin, Museumsviertel in Vienna), urban parks (Copenhagen, Budapest) and museum quarters (Amsterdam, Munich). There have also been more integratory formulas, such as the Museumsufer (“Museum embankment”) in Frankfurt. See: Kochergina, E. (2017). *Urban Planning Aspects of Museum Quarters as an Architectural Medium for Creative Cities*, *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, 245.



The new Museum of Liverpool, inaugurated in 2011. © Jonathan Hutchins

the city, on the waterfront of the Mersey between Pier Head and the Docks. It is reminiscent of the Guggenheim in Bilbao but, in contrast, it is oriented first and foremost towards the inhabitants of Liverpool.¹⁰ The new museum was primarily designed with the aim of reinforcing the self-esteem of a metropolis depressed by industrial decline and the impact of Thatcherism, but without renouncing these conditions, in fact, turning them into a focus of touristic attraction.

The **Museum Rotterdam** also chose a maximum urban centrality, after experimenting for a time with nomadic museum work.¹¹ In 2016, it presented the opening of new premises near the City Council as a strategic option: “Here, the history of Rotterdam, the city with a young heart and an old soul, is told in new ways.”¹² Some months later, in Helsinki’s iconic Senate Square, the doors opened of the new main site of the **Helsingin Kaupunginmuseo**, more central than its predecessor. It was conceived as an open-access facility: “The museum offers a platform for you to think, explore and get to know this city and its history, and then relate to that and to have a personal relationship with – and maybe even fall in love with Helsinki”¹³

The **Historisches Museum Frankfurt**, for its part, reopened its main building in 2017, in a facility that had been renewed and expanded within the framework of the historicistic reconstruction of the old centre, destroyed in the Second World War. The Museum forms part of the “museums embankment” (*Museumsufer*) next to the river Main, and defines itself as “a space for information, reflection and discussion on Frankfurt, offering the multi-faceted explanations and backgrounds of the city’s past as a frame of reference. As a forum for the important topics concerning the municipal society, it will contribute to the process by which that society comes to an understanding about its present and future”¹⁴

Meanwhile, in Copenhagen, the **Københavns Museum** is in the process of moving, having left the neighbourhood of Vesterbro to reopen behind the City Hall. Also opting for the heart of the city is the **Wien Museum**, which has an extensive network of diverse thematic centres; in 2017, construction work began at its main site in Karlsplatz, which it has managed to maintain following a long controversy over its possible move that echoed all over Vienna.¹⁵

More recently, renovation has reached the global metropolises of Paris, Berlin and London. The **Musée Carnavalet** and the **Stadtmuseum Berlin** are already having construction works under way. In the case of Berlin, the Museum is also responsible for preparing, at the Humboldt Forum, an exhibition on Berlin society and the world, which will “explore (urban) society and the people living within it, its living and working conditions, and the nature surrounding it. The focus will be on current issues related to the transfer of ideas, people, and things to and from Berlin”¹⁶ Finally, at the **Museum of London**, the main building will move to the old West Smithfield wholesale market in the year 2021: “Integrating the New Museum into the wider public realm, working to establish the area as a cultural destination, and building on the opportunities of Culture Mile and the arrival of Crossrail, which will be key factors”¹⁷

In general terms, all of these decisions on city museums have depended as much on cultural policies as on urban policies. Their activation on a European scale in recent decades is not extraneous to the perception that these museums can play a relevant role as facilities for sociocultural inclusion, in increasingly diverse

¹⁰ See: <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/about/corporate/strategic-plan/index.aspx>.

¹¹ On the travelling museum, see Van Renselaar, I. and Van Dijk, N. (2012). The Urban Realm as Museum Laboratory. The Participation Programmes of Museum Rotterdam, *CAMOC News*, 4, 1-2.

¹² <https://museumrotterdam.nl/en/>

¹³ <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/helsinki-city-museum-opening/index.html>

¹⁴ <https://historisches-museum-frankfurt.de/en/ueberuns?language=en>

¹⁵ Retrieved from: <https://www.wien.gv.at/video/245762/Die-Zukunft-des-Wien-Museum>

¹⁶ See: <https://www.en.stadtmuseum.de/humboldt-forum>

¹⁷ https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/application/files/4215/2646/1105/Museum_of_London_Strategic_Plan_2018-2023.pdf.

cities. As Paul Spies stated in 2016, shortly after his appointment as director of the Stadtmuseum Berlin: “City museums can become the analysts and catalysts of urban identity. We have the capacity to speak with diverse actors and communities in the city and convince them to participate actively in its life and its culture”.¹⁸

The new director of the Stadtmuseum Berlin presented the conquest of a new central position for the museum together with the plans to better structure the “Museum houses” around the city: Märkisches Museum, Ephraim-Palais, Nikolaikirche, Knoblauchhaus and Museumsdorf Düppel. Conquering the centre is thus part of a broader and polycentric proposal. “Each site”, Paul Spies continued, “would have to have a distinctive identity, be well known and be positively anchored in the public”.

The extension of polycentrism

On the subject of the intensification of social interest in heritage in the late 20th century,¹⁹ many city museums started to incorporate new sites, often at the request of the municipal administration. The reasons for this expansion of polycentrism were numerous, ranging from compacting facilities to save up on resources (given that by using new technologies one single team can properly serve a set of distant and diverse spaces), to the aspiration of profiling the city museum as a consistent network of heritage sites.

The degree of integration between the different sites varies greatly. At some museums, the minor sites have few links with the urban narrative of the main site, and only form part of the “museum family” which is how, for example, they are presented in **Frankfurt** or in **Stuttgart**. These are not much different from the case of **Paris**, where in the year 2000 the Musée Carnavalet incorporated the Archaeological Crypt of the Île de la Cité and in 2002 the Catacombs, and where the website simply informs of “three places devoted to the history and memory of Paris”.

In other cases, at the very least, programmatic links between various museum spaces are made explicit. For example, at the Wien Museum, which operates as a municipal organisation with twenty-two sites: on the one hand, there are those that cover the heritage and history of **Vienna**; on the other, those dedicated to culture and the arts. In **Hamburg**, the Historische Museen Hamburg Foundation brings together nine sites: a central urban history museum, the Museum der Arbeit (Labour Museum), the museums on the port and trade, the local museum of Altona and some bourgeois houses.

The articulation between venues and narratives is somewhat more intense at the Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Krakowa, with nineteen sites that trace the history and heritage of **Kraków** from mediaeval times to the present day, including two major references relating to the Jews in times of Nazism: the Old Synagogue of Kazimierz and the Schindler factory. In **Helsinki**, the conceptual link between the main Museum site and the others lies in the modernization of the city, with a bourgeois house dating from 1860, a municipal housing block from 1909, the tram depot and the Villa Hakasalmi, devoted to showing the cultural effervescence of the city in the 1900s.

In **Berlin**, as it has been said, the Museum’s renovation programme defines a unitary framework for the set of its sites, and at the **Museu de Lisboa** the municipal proposal of 2015 for renovating it establishes polycentrism as a foundational option: “Museu de Lisboa is the new name of the Museu da Cidade (City Museum). It is a name that introduces a new concept: a multi-branched museum, in which



Houses in the Työväenasuntomuseo / Arbetarbostadsmuseet, the section of the Helsinki City Museum dedicated to popular housing. Photograph by Bengt Oberger, Wikimedia Commons, 2016

¹⁸ Declarations by Paul Spies, 18 July 2016: Paul Spies stellt Zukunftsstrategie für das Stadtmuseum Berlin vor. Retrieved from: <https://www.stadtmuseum.de/aktuelles/paul-spies-stellt-zukunftsstrategie-fuer-das-stadtmuseum-berlin-vor>. See also the Museum’s Strategic Plan: Spies, P. (2016). *Zukunftsstrategie für das Stadtmuseum Berlin*. Berlin: Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin. Retrieved from: https://www.stadtmuseum.de/sites/default/files/zukunftststadt_museum_berlin.pdf.

¹⁹ Choay, F. (1999). *L’Allégorie du patrimoine*. Paris: Seuil.



Call for the seminar “Reinventing the museum of the city”, on the relationship between heritage spaces and historical narratives in the Barcelona History Museum, 2018. © MUHBA

Lisbon and its stories reveal themselves under different perspectives”.²⁰ Both Berlin and Lisbon have their founding sites – Märkisches Museum and Palácio Pimenta – far from the most frequented streets but thanks to their polycentric organisation they have other sites that are more accessible for their temporary exhibitions.

It is possible, however, to go even further in the articulation of spaces and narratives. At least, this is the objective of the work underway at the **Museu d’Història de Barcelona (MUHBA)**, conceived as a “museum with its rooms across the city”. The proposal is to weave criss-crossing views between some fifteen heritage sites, with great variations in size, all interwoven with each other and with a core in the foundational headquarters of the museum.²¹ There are places of power and the elites (Temple d’August, Palau Reial, Park Güell), testimonies of ancient and mediaeval life, the city of minorities with the Jewish *Call*, urban areas strained to the limits by the Spanish Civil War and the post-war period (air-raid shelter, anti-aircraft battery, the archaeology of shanty towns) and the contemporary metropolis viewed from the periphery, with the counterpoint of the literary narratives at Vil·la Joana. Casa Padellàs, the organisational hub, is designed as a “shared home for urban history”: Agora museum, school museum, centre for research and debate, and the exploratory exhibition *Barcelona Flashback*.²²

Incorporating the periphery

The accelerated urban growth of the second half of the 20th century preceded, in many European cities, the creation of the public spaces and facilities necessary to cater for the new neighbourhoods and link them to the city. Adding to these initial shortages, there was the impact of the subsequent economic crises, to the point that the integration of the peripheries became one of the key questions for the future of European democracy. Furthermore, it is often overlooked that the social incorporation of urban majorities is a determining factor in achieving respect for the minorities.²³

In the case of Barcelona, on which this section will focus, the chaotic city generated by decades of growth without democracy under the Franco dictatorship led to a socially broad environment for critical reflection on the city.²⁴ Between 1976 and 1995, in the early days of the recovered democracy, Barcelona underwent a major urban renovation, driven by citizen demands.²⁵ The city achieved great prestige through its actions in the public space and in the cultural facilities of its neighbourhoods, while the Olympic Games of 1992 enabled the building of infrastructures that had been pending for decades.²⁶ It is worth saying, however, that museums were only considered at that time as part of the cultural network aspiring to capital status.²⁷

Towards the end of the century, two museum institutions from the field of art, the Fundació Antoni Tàpies and the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (Macba), were among the first to break the ice and get closer to the social and cultural networks of the periphery. They started to frequent the Fòrum Ribera del Besòs. The Fòrum was defined as “a market for ideas, and a meeting point and a

²⁰ Retrieved from: <http://www.museudelisboa.pt/en.html>.

²¹ Roca i Albert, J. (2017). Reinventing the Museum of Barcelona. *Urban History and Cultural Democracy, Camoc Museums of Cities Review*, 3, 4-9.

²² Recent experiences of overview exhibitions that can be visited in one hour include *Amsterdam DNA* and *Berlin Zeit-Geschichte Kompact*.

²³ Roca i Albert, J. (2012). Los riesgos de la nueva dimensión urbana. In: Montaner, J.M. and Subirats, J. (Eds.) *Repensar las políticas urbanas*. Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona. 38-57.

²⁴ See Ferrer, A. and Calavita, N. (2000). Behind Barcelona’s Success Story: Citizen Movements and Planners’ Power, *Journal of Urban History*, 26-6, 793-807. Retrieved from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/009614420002600604>.

²⁵ In *Reconstrucció de Barcelona* (Barcelona: Edicions 62), Oriol Bohigas formulated in 1986 the principles of “recovering the centre and ‘monumentalizing’ the periphery” to rebuild the city after the Franco dictatorship.

²⁶ Marshall, T. (Ed.) (2004). *Transforming Barcelona: The Renewal of a European Metropolis*. London: Routledge.

²⁷ Subirós, P. (1999). *Estratègies culturals i renovació urbana*. Barcelona: Aula Barcelona.

space for dialogue”. It had been created in 1993 by the Institut Barri Besòs, a high-school whose slogan was “a school rooted in the neighbourhood and open to the world”. There were regular meetings held there between very diverse organisations, from neighbourhood associations, schools, health centres and other local services to universities and other cultural institutions. Most of the issues addressed were urban redistributive policies, in the fields of housing, public facilities, education and culture.²⁸

The reflection on the heritage and landscapes of the old industrial quarters and of the housing estates caught on within this framework as a driving force for incorporating the social majorities and contemporary peripheries into the narratives and representations of Barcelona.²⁹ At the beginning of the 21st century, there were signs of exhaustion of the urban transformation model that had triumphed in Barcelona in the previous decades, which had been presented to the world with the creation of new public space and facilities all around the city and with the 1992 Olympic Games. Criticism of the municipal urban policy was spreading in the field of heritage, too.³⁰ It was in the midst of the citizens’ defence of the factory legacy of the Poblenou neighbourhood that the city museum arrived at the scene, with the initial proposal of devoting a new site to the industrial culture, at the Can Saladrigas factory, which subsequently underwent a change in both conceptual profile and location, with the final site being the Oliva Artés factory.

The Barcelona museum has been multi-site museum since the time of its founder, Agustí Duran i Sanpere, but the leap outside of the old city centre occurred more recently. The proposal of linking together a set of heritage sites to weave an articulated view of the metropolis was intensified with the Strategic Plan of 2008,³¹ which advocated a museum “with its rooms distributed across the city” as we already illustrated in the previous section. This model for a museum as a network of interconnected polarities circulates between two decisive fronts: a choral narrative with multiple interlinked hubs and a core connecting hub at Casa Padellàs, at the edge of Plaça del Rei. From the inner city to the outer city and vice versa, with the right to the city understood as the right “to the centre” and the right “to the neighbourhood” at the same time.

Within a scheme of public-community partnership projects – along with city districts and neighbourhood associations, local studies groups, university research teams and other organisations – the MUHBA is profiling four strategic approaches to the contemporary metropolis. All these proposals are related to heritage sites in the outlying suburbs of the municipality, alongside the river Besòs: *provide* (Casa de l’Aigua de la Trinitat: environment, water and resources), *work* (Fabra i Coats Factory: the city of the working world), *inhabit* (Bon Pastor Houses: popular living accommodation) and *urbanise* (Nau Oliva Artés: the expansion of the metropolis). Placing them along a single axis, as the *Besòs Museums Embankment*, helps to highlight their conceptual complementarity and the invitation to tour them and combine perspectives: there are other points of interest in the area.

These heritage sites, together with the museum’s other sites, need to function in a joint, flexible and sustainable way, as well as in harmony with the organisations and the districts: not as static heritage venues that merely open their doors to visitors, but as hubs that incentivise research, collections and the invention of activities,



Strategic vision of the links between different spaces associated with the museum, 2018. © MUHBA

²⁸ Roca i Albert, J. (2010). Urban Inclusion and Public Space: Challenges in Transforming Barcelona. In: *Kihato, C.W. et al. (Eds.) Urban Diversity: Space, Culture and Inclusive Pluralism in Cities Worldwide*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

²⁹ *Per un pla alternatiu entre la Ciutadella i el Besòs*, manifesto published in March 2001. See Faigenbaum, P. and Roca, J. (2018). *Barcelona vista del Besòs*. Edited by Jean-François Chevrier and Jorge Ribalta. Barcelona: Museu d’Història de Barcelona and La Virreina Centre de la Imatge. A review of the project at: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/lavirreina/en/exhibitions/barcelona-besos-view/175>.

³⁰ Roca i Albert, J. (2004). Ha estat mai Barcelona una gran ciutat industrial?, *L’Avenç*, 288. Clarós i Ferret, S. (2016). *Can Ricart i el patrimoni industrial de Barcelona*, Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona.

³¹ MUHBA. *Pla estratègic del Museu d’Història de Barcelona*, Barcelona, 2008. Summary in English: <http://www.bcn.cat/museuhistoriaciutat/docs/muhbasstrategicplan.pdf>.

with positive effect in the heritage system, the knowledge of the museum, and, above all, the attention to schools.

The museum and the creation of urban heritage

Since the 19th century, city museums, mostly under municipal ownership, have nourished their collections with institutional documents and artefacts, archaeological materials and private donations. The collections are often uneven and hold few contemporary materials. So, how can we aim towards a collection that includes more recent historical times?³² How can we ensure selection criteria in a task shared with citizens and other social and cultural organisations? The question of how to collect is crucial for city museums and, because of its specificity, it would require another paper. The debate has been proposed on numerous occasions by the ICOM and also by the City History Museums and Research Network of Europe, with a first workshop organised in 2011 at the Museum of Copenhagen by its then-director, Jette Sandahl.

At the sites of the Barcelona museum in development on the eastern periphery of the municipality, the collection on city and work at Fabra i Coats is being created with the participation of Amics de la Fabra i Coats (Friends of the Fabra&Coats) and other organisations with labour-related origins. Meanwhile, the collection on popular housing at Cases Barates del Bon Pastor has been built at breakneck speed – due to the risk that everything might disappear – with the support of residents, neighbourhood organisations and the District of Sant Andreu.³³ The creation of collections takes place in parallel with the museum's action on plans for the conservation and restoration of constructions assigned to museums and their surroundings, to the point that it would not have been easy to think about the objects without thinking about the buildings and the public space.



Creation of the collection for the project *City and Work* at MUHBA Fabra i Coats, with the participation of Amics de Fabra i Coats (Friends of Fabra i Coats), an organization made up of former employees of the factory. © MUHBA, Jordi Mota, 2014

This model of intervention had already been tested by the museum in the Turó de la Rovira, when it was decided to create, in a public park, a musealized archaeological space on the urban impact of the Spanish Civil War and post-war periods, with the remnants of an anti-aircraft battery and the shanties. The intervention was awarded the 2012 European Prize for Urban Public Space, and the restoration initiative generated a series of innovative proposals that were fully integrated into the project. This was, probably, the first time that a shanty town wall was transformed into cultural heritage.³⁴ But, deep down, this operation is not so different to when, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Barcelona Museum became involved in the restoration of the Roman wall of *Barcino* and incorporated the new artefacts obtained through archaeological digs. Besides the need of caring for the collection, city museums add their involvement, in one way or another, in the conservation and restoration of archaeological sites, buildings and urban landscapes – they participate both in the spirit of the ICOM and that of the ICOMOS.

There are city museums that, in the field of urban heritage, exercise a broad range of competences, from objects to buildings, such as in Copenhagen and Helsinki, where in addition to taking care of the archaeology service, “the city museum acts as the building conservation authority for protected buildings”.³⁵ One finds, in other cities, the opposite tendency: to segregate these competencies from city museums, through initiatives from municipal governments and sometimes from the museum itself. However, it does not seem to be a good idea to weaken the

³² See Kistemaker, R.E. and Tietmeyer, E. (2010). Collecting the present. Historical and ethnographical approaches: the case of entrepreneurs. In: *Entrepreneurial cultures in Europe. Stories and museum projects from seven cities*. Berlin: Publications by the Friends of the Museum of European Cultures. Retrieved from: <http://nmuseum.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Entrepreneurial-Cultures-in-Europe-2010.pdf>.

³³ See the text by Elena Pérez Rubiales on the actions in the Barcelona neighbourhood of Bon Pastor in this volume.

³⁴ See Roca i Albert, J. (2018). The Informal City in the City Museum. In: Savić, J. (Ed.) *Museums of Cities and Contested Urban Histories*. 26-37. Retrieved from: http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/camoc/MEXICO_Conf_Pro_BOOKLET_Final4r.pdf. Also see: Roca i Albert, J. (2018). The Informal City in the Museum of Barcelona. *Museum International*, 70: 3-4 (*Museum & Contested Histories*). 48-59.

³⁵ The functions of the Museum of Copenhagen in terms of archaeology, built heritage and collections at <https://cphmuseum.kk.dk/en/artikel/heritage>. On Helsinki, see: <http://www.helsinginkaupunginmuseo.fi/en/pictures-objects-helsinki/buildings-and-environment/>.

tandem between cultural policies and urban policies, which is at the very origin of city museums. Especially at a time when they are trying out new outreach programmes for museum interaction with communities in the neighbourhoods and just as urban planners are proposing more integratory procedures for rehabilitation, especially in the historical centre and the ageing peripheries.

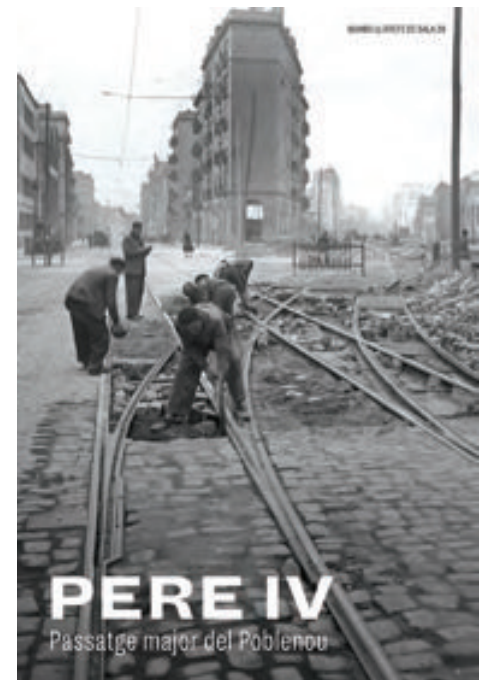
Transformations in the historical centre nearly always end up involving the city museum, whether actively or passively. On the Liverpool Waterfront, the museum and its new building are the keystone of urban regeneration, while at the Neue Frankfurter Altstadt (literally, the “new old city of Frankfurt”) the museum’s architects have opted to mark distances with the medievalist remodelling of its surroundings.³⁶ In Barcelona, the museum contributed in the mid-20th century to the historicist idealisation of the Gothic Quarter and today contributes towards adding value to a much broader range of heritage layers, including the remains, in the historical centre, of what was the main manufacturing centre of the western Mediterranean.

As we have previously stated, another heritage match is being played out on the periphery: industrial districts and housing estates have been the home of urban majorities in contemporary metropolises. However, the testimonies from factory environments and the urban peripheries, in general, require specific evaluation criteria,³⁷ due to their nature of being more “ordinary” than “singular”, and to the fact that the memory – the “present past” – now counts for as much as the historical, formal and functional evaluation. The interest of citizens in the issue is an added incentive, as in the case of the conceptualisation and subsequent signage in Barcelona of Carrer de Pere IV - the historical axis of the Poblenou industrial quarter - entrusted to the museum by the District of Sant Martí.³⁸

All in all, the city museum can play a key role in the creation of urban heritage, with functions such as historical and heritage research, advice on intervention in archaeological sites, buildings and landscapes, as well as the creation of new collections of artefacts, representations and non-tangible culture.

City museums as centres of knowledge

As an institution devoted to presenting and representing the city and its inhabitants, the city museum must profile both the key issues of urban history and their heritage remains. However, unlike museums of art, science, technology or national history, city museums do not have the academic support of university departments specifically devoted to the history and heritage of the locality: they hardly exist anywhere. Research work and studies on the city have been promoted by the museums themselves, usually in partnership with the municipal archives. The promotion of research is what may facilitate the city museum to go a little beyond the role of a cultural hub in order to also become a knowledge hub. A hub, which, based on the Kantian motto for the Enlightenment of daring to know, *sapere aude*, facilitates knowledge and appropriation of the city for the maximum number of people. This way of working, which has a positive contagion effect from exhibitions to activities, multiplies its impact if, by merging innovation and dissemination, the research is integrated into public programming (in this area, science museums have taken the lead).



Landscape guide to the street Pere IV, the booklet of a multiple-format project, 2018.
© MUHBA, Andrea Manenti

³⁶ Alexander, M. (Ed.) (2018). *Die neue Altstadt*, Frankfurt a.M: Societätsverlag. On the Museum: Historisches Museum Frankfurt a.M., DBZ, 10/2017. Retrieved from: https://www.dbz.de/artikel/dbz_Historisches_Museum_Frankfurt_a._M._2904528.html.

³⁷ Muñoz, F. (2014). Cultural sustainability: ordinary heritage and ordinary landscapes 'at work', *Eco Web Town. Magazine of Sustainable Design (SCUT, Università Chieti-Pescara)*, 10-11. Retrieved from: http://www.ecowebtown.it/n_10-11/pdf/10-11_12_munoz.pdf. And also Muñoz, F. (2017). Urbanization, *Mark Magazine*, 68.

³⁸ See Poblenou/Bcn. Leix Pere IV i la Diagonal, *Guia d'història urbana*, 11(2013), and also Manenti, A. and Sales, L. (2018). *Pere IV. Passatge major del Poblenou*, Barcelona: MUHBA and Bit Habitat. Retrieved from: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/museuistoria/ca/publicacions/pere-iv-passatge-major-del-poblenou>. The project featured the Master's degree in Intervention in Heritage and Landscape, shared between the Museum and the Autonomous University of Barcelona, and the studies of Cardiff University's EMUVE programme. In both cases the results were exhibited at MUHBA Oliva Artés, the laboratory site of the Museum for the contemporary city.

At the Barcelona Museum, a significant part of the activity is channelled through the Centre for Research and Debate (CRED), with a good reception by the citizens. This is not a differentiated department within the museum, it is only composed by a technical office to organise the talks, seminars, workshops and other open formats. Research is becoming participatory. The museum thus heightens the visibility of the social relevance of the research task, and, in a transdisciplinary environment and one of shared interests, it is not difficult to fuel the programme with contributions originating from the universities and other centres for studies, in line with the museum's goals.³⁹ The museum is also capable of contributing to the city's economy and its export base with its know-how in some specialised areas of heritage, from archaeology and architecture to the treatment of culinary and musical legacies.



*The museum as a school,
at the MUHBA
Summer Camp 2018.
© MUHBA*

The city museum is thus configured as a centre for RDI in urban history, heritage and citizenship, organised into lines of research. From studies on the environment and the supply of water and food, to studies on work, housing and schooling, to lines of research on sexuality and gender, minorities, heritage and government in the city, and to research projects on technologies for representation and new educational formats, etc. The Centre for Research and Debate has thus become the silent driving force behind the MUHBA, nourishing the entire system and infiltrating it with an "investigative spirit": the educational programme is now titled *Questioning Barcelona*. The result is not an academic museum of minorities, but rather to the contrary: well-grounded concepts and narratives are essential for a reflective museum, which leads to the formulation of questions and the appreciation of works with vibrant museographies for all.

The conception of the city museum as an open city knowledge centre favours the convergence of genres, interlinking all manner of formats: digital and virtual (basis of the system), object-based (collections, urban heritage), exhibitive (permanent and temporary displays), spoken (talks, seminars, workshops), written (books, magazines), visual and audiovisual (images, documentaries), and urban (cartographies, itineraries). Finally, it is worth highlighting for a moment the specific potential of the itinerary format for city museums. The art of walking the city involves recombining formats and knowledge of all kinds, and innovations in this field could be among the most productive. We spend many hours moving around the city during our lives. The increase of the cognitive and emotional creativity of urban walks represents a small revolution, which democratizes the figure of Walter Benjamin's *flâneur* and generates alternative modalities for visits by residents and tourists alike.⁴⁰

Mirror of and gateway to the city. Epilogue

When economic, social and cultural flows all jump over frontiers, the relevance of cities as agents for social and cultural cohesion grows. The city museums of the 21st century must be the mirror of and gateway to the city,⁴¹ within everyone's reach: this was the inspiration behind *The Barcelona Declaration on European City Museums* of 2013.⁴²

The position of city museums at the crossroads of cultural and urban policies confers upon them a key role in the creation of knowledge and heritage, in the social and cultural cohesion of metropolises and in the renovation of tourism practices. The city museum of the 21st century should be able to be profiled as:

³⁹ See <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/museuhistoria/en/research-and-debate-centre-cred>.

⁴⁰ Roca i Albert, J. (2004). Itinerary as Art Form, Cities and Citizenship. In: *Tour-isms. The Defeat of Dissent. Critical Itineraries*. Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies. 100-113. The MUHBA offers the programme "Urban narratives. Theory and practice of the historical itinerary" to rethink touristic practices and design alternative visit modalities.

⁴¹ See Roca i Albert, J. (2009). El Museu d'Història de Barcelona, portal de la ciutat, *Her&Mus. Heritage & Museography*, 2. 98-105. Retrieved from: <https://www.raco.cat/index.php/Hermus/article/view/314618>

⁴² City History Museums and Research Network of Europe. (2013). *Barcelona Declaration on European City Museums*. Retrieved from: <https://cityhistorymuseums.wordpress.com/>

- 1) **Centre of knowledge**, as a hub for research and the socialisation of knowledge about the city and its trajectory and for appreciation of its cultural heritage in multiple formats: from exhibitions and installations to seminars, publications, documentaries, visits and itineraries or urban walks.
- 2) **Centre of heritagization**, which creates, systematises and studies collections of tangible and intangible heritage, in connection with the archaeological legacy, the built heritage and the urban landscape.
- 3) **Centre for development**, as an RDI agent that innovates, together with other institutions, and exports know-how in numerous heritage specialities and as an institutional agent that contributes towards formulating sustainable touristic practices.
- 4) **Agora museum**, as a participatory laboratory on the city and its trajectory for everyone – young and old, inhabitants, newcomer immigrants, refugees, visitors – within an environment of respect for the right of citizenship, social justice and cultural democracy.
- 5) **School museum**, with the application of museum methods in schools and vice-versa. Overcoming the barriers between culture and education and between museums and schools must be a fundamental goal.
- 6) **Network museum**, weaving a plural and choral narrative between the set of its heritage sites, with a connecting hub that acts as a departure – or arrival – point for questioning the city and its trajectory from diverse perspectives.
- 7) **Dual-scale facility**, on a city scale and a local scale at the same time, as an organiser of spaces and narratives and as a connector of neighbourhoods with the city. With an appropriate institutional fit within the municipality, the museum can be an agent of sociocultural cohesion, an arrival point for visitors and a cultural ambassador for the city.

These can be the starting points for a *new urban museology* that could feed the city museum of the 21st century as mirror of and gateway to the city and its neighbourhoods, connecting spaces and historical narratives, enhancing participation in urban life, promoting a more sustainable tourism and, all in all, focusing on the cultural field in a singular way.

BIOGRAPHY

Joan Roca i Albert was trained as an urban geographer at the University of Barcelona and is a researcher into urban history, heritage and education. He taught at Institut Barri Besòs (a secondary school in the suburbs of Barcelona), at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and the Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst in Zurich. A former director of Aula Barcelona and the Urban Majorities Project at Fundació Tàpies, he was appointed as director of Barcelona History Museum (MUHBA) in 2007.

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