

# AN EXPERIMENT IN COLLECTIVE REFLECTION IN AN URBAN PERIPHERY: THE *RETHINKING BON PASTOR* IDEAS COMPETITION, A MEETING BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE AND ANTHROPOLOGY (2009-10).

By the *Repensar Bon Pastor* organisational team



*Repensar Bon Pastor* ('Rethinking Bon Pastor') was an experiment in collaborative public anthropology and architecture held in Barcelona between 2009 and 2010 which attempted to encourage visions of public space alternative to the neoliberal model which has dominated the city's urban planning policy since the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Anthropologist David Harvey (2002, 2010) has critiqued the recent transformation of the inner city of Barcelona into what he terms an 'urban growth machine', driven by financial speculation rather than the cultural and social needs of the city's residents. Similarly, anthropologist Michael Herzfeld has argued that entrepreneurial real estate speculation in Rione Monti (a residential area in central Rome which is the subject of his 2009 ethnography) 'has produced a mode of "spatial cleansing" in which the local people have been treated, as they see it, as an "Indian reservation", awaiting removal at the pleasure of the rich, in a classic pattern of the most destructive kind of gentrification' (2006, 136; cf 2009).

The case of the *cases barates* ('cheap houses') in Bon Pastor is emblematic of the same model of speculative neoliberal urban development which has recently dominated Barcelona (Delgado 2010). The demolition of this popular quarter (promoted by the Barcelona City Council, which is currently implementing this process) has inspired a series of innovative responses from architects and anthropologists who are critical of the logic behind the city's contemporary urban planning policies, and who are anxious to develop alternative models.

The 'Barcelona Model' has won the city many international awards, but during the last few years has entered a state of crisis. The '92 Olympics marked a watershed between earlier urban planning policies which had been able to solve the city's structural deficits in a few short years, and a new process of neoliberal expansion based on profit driven by foreign investment, and an urban vision focussed on architectural 'stars' at the expense of the local population and their cultural identity. As a result, Barcelona is become increasingly standardised: new hotels and residential centres are replacing the traditional quarters, while residents are being forced (often under severe constraint) to relocate to the urban periphery, where they suffer increased discrimination in their search for housing (Marshall 2004; Borja 2005; Capel 2005; Harvey 2010; Delgado 2010). The only elements of the 'Barcelona Model' which still remains in place is its economic dimension (the 'public-private collaboration' with large businesses whose task it is to implement the urban transformations), and the city's marketing strategy, launched in the eighties by Catalan PSOE (Socialist) leader Pasqual Maragall. Terms appropriated from the vocabulary of progressive liberalism such as 'citizen participation' or 'urban integration' are used to legitimate discriminatory neoliberal and public policies affecting sectors of the community which are most vulnerable to these processes of commercialisation (UTE 2004; Delgado 2005; McNeill 1999; Bourdieu & Wacquant 2008).

These urban transformations have been complemented by the 2006 'Municipal Ordinance on Civic Behaviour' sanctioning certain types of behaviour in public places defined as 'antisocial', and which focuses on street sellers, the consumption of alcohol in public places, graffiti and prostitution, with specific attention given to behaviours associated with immigrants (Silveira 2006). These sanctions are applied by the municipal authority almost exclusively in those areas of the city where the new urban planning process has already been implemented, thus creating an even more pronounced division between those parts of the city which have been restructured and cleaned up (both in urbanistic and social terms), and other areas of the city where these transformations have yet to be implemented. Within this discourse of 'urban renewal', the necessity of avoiding the formation of 'ghettoes' is highlighted (Delgado 2006); yet these urban planning policies are legitimated in a way which leads inevitably to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of such areas. Architecture is presented as the solution to the problem of 'antisocial behaviour', thus contributing to further spatial segregation and the repression of dissent (Davis 1990, Flusty 1994, Caldeira 2000, Bauman 2006).

One of the areas undergoing transformation is the *cases barates* in Bon Pastor, the last quarter of the city before the bank of the river Besós. It comprises 784 worker cottages owned by the Barcelona City Council, which built them in 1929 to house migrant workers from the rural areas of Murcia and Andalusia (Oyón & Gallardo 2004). The construction of the *cases barates*, was motivated by the necessity to provide low cost housing for these workers, but by siting them in the open countryside in the extreme urban periphery under the close control of a Guardia Civil barracks, the administration betrayed its desire to rid itself of a population which – during the explosion of social conflicts at the beginning of the last century – had strong anarcho-syndicalist tendencies (Gallardo 2000; Ealham 2005).



*Sociability in the streets of the cases barates of Bon Pastor*  
(photo: Joan Alvaro, 2007)

The structure of this *barrio* has remained substantially the same since it was built. Although the houses are owned formally by the City Council, they have been neglected for decades, and the tenants have had to take care of maintenance themselves at their own expense. This has been carried out in an autonomous and at times even less than legal manner. The leases too have been passed on informally from one generation to the next, as the city expanded to engulf Bon Pastor in

a large industrial area. Between the 80s and 90s, the City Council offered tenants the option of renovating or enlarging their houses, in exchange for a significant increase in the rent (PMH 1999). But following a policy shift at the end of the 90s, the administration began to change its plans for the future of this neighbourhood. The new urban renewal plan (*Plan de Remodelación*) entailed the progressive demolition of the entire area, thus freeing it up for the construction of over 1000 apartments, some of them set aside for the relocation of Bon Pastor's current residents.<sup>1</sup> The first 145 houses were demolished in 2007; in October of the same year, the situation was brought to public attention by the violent eviction of a number of families who opposed the *Plan de Remodelación*,<sup>2</sup> leading to public statements by both the Catalan section of Architects without Frontiers<sup>3</sup> and the International Alliance of Inhabitants,<sup>4</sup> which declared their support for requests by some residents for a solution in Bon Pastor which would not involve either evictions or demolitions.

Our first approach as an independent group in the Bon Pastor issue began after a request for assistance from a local residents' association called *Avis del Barri en defensa dels inquilins de Bon Pastor* ('Grandparents of the Quarter in Defence of the Residents of Bon Pastor'). The use of the Catalan word *avis* ('grandparents') evokes the family ties which residents of Bon Pastor feel to the area, given that many are descended from migrants who arrived in Bon Pastor in the 20s or 30s, all of whom were born and have lived up until now in the *cases barates*. *Avis del Barri* was formed in 2003 as a response to the almost unconditional acceptance of the demolition project by the area's long-established residents' association (*Asociación de Vecinos y Vecinas de Bon Pastor*). Like many local committees which emerged at the end of Francoist era with a view to channelling popular protest, the

<sup>1</sup> 'El Ayuntamiento construirá mil pisos para sustituir las 800 Casos Barates del barrio' ('The City Council will build 1000 apartments to replace the 800 *cases barates* in the *barrio*'). *La Vanguardia*, 26/10/1998. The official name for the "Plan de Remodelación" is *Modificació del Pla General Metropolità al Polígon de les Cases Barates de Bon Pastor*, 20/3/2001, while the City Council department in charge of the houses is the *Patronato Municipal de la Vivienda*.

<sup>2</sup> 'Tenso desalojo policial en las Casos Barates de Bon Pastor' ('Tense police eviction in the *cases barates* of Bon Pastor'). *El País*, 20/10/2007.

<sup>3</sup> 'Letter of Support from Architects without Frontiers'. *La Directa*, 23/5/2007. See ASFE 2007.

<sup>4</sup> 'Bon Pastor, Barcelona: bloquear los desalojos y los derribos, negociar otro plan de remodelación' ['Bon Pastor, Barcelona: stop the evictions and demolitions, negotiate a different urban renewal plan']. *International Alliance of Inhabitants*, 10/1/2010: [http://www.habitants.org/news/residents\\_of\\_europe/bon\\_pastor\\_barcelona\\_bloquear\\_los\\_desalojos\\_y\\_las\\_demoliciones\\_negociar\\_otro\\_plan\\_de\\_remodelacion](http://www.habitants.org/news/residents_of_europe/bon_pastor_barcelona_bloquear_los_desalojos_y_las_demoliciones_negociar_otro_plan_de_remodelacion)

*Asociación de Vecinos* has undergone a process of institutionalisation and compromise with the City Council agenda, thus undermining its capacity to operate in a truly activist mode. In the words of Bonet and Martí (2008), the *Asociaciones de Vecinos* [residents associations] 'have become a key actor in the municipal programme' because they are able to confer apparent legitimacy on projects to which they give their approval (see also Castells 1986, Bacqué 2006).

The restructuring of the *cases barates* has been represented by the City Council and by the media as a participatory and consensual project with strong popular support. Although Bon Pastor was described until the 90s as a passive and disorganized area – 'the *Asociación de Vecinos* hardly does anything. There are no functioning associations in the area. Associational activity is practically non-existent' (Juste i Moreno 1989:68), from the moment the demolitions were approved, the dominant discourse shifted to the idea that 'Bon Pastor is alive' and is 'a suburb with a future', or in the words of one City Council pamphlet of 26/1/2007: 'a suburb with a dynamic, lively and involved community which wants to face the new and important challenges of the future with passion and enthusiasm. New services and infrastructure will convert Bon Pastor into a model of the suburb in transformation, a protagonist in both the present and future of the city' (Ajuntament 2007).

The 'modernisation' rhetoric of the administration has systematically obscured the fact that there is strong internal opposition to the demolition project – in 2004, *Avis del Barri* collected signatures from 200 out of 784 nuclear families in the *cases barates* who didn't agree with the proposed Urban Renewal Plan – and also the conflict between those who are in favour and those who are opposed to the City Council's plan. The collaboration with the City Council by *Asociación de Vecinos* and other associations which had previously taken strongly activist positions<sup>5</sup> has been a critical factor in the silencing of dissent and the promotion of an idea of the area which is favourable to the demolition of the *cases barates*.

As a response to the demands of *Avis del Barri*, some members of our group<sup>6</sup> began to see the possibility of formulating an alternative discourse which could challenge the official 'discourse of power' (Barthes 1977), in which the *cases barates* are associated with the past and with degradation, while the demolitions are associated with the future and modernity. The central element in this dominant discourse is the alleged low quality of construction of the houses, which are constantly represented as obsolete or uninhabitable,<sup>7</sup> at times playing on the assonance between the words '*barates*' ('cheap') and '*barraques*' ('shanty houses'): the demolition of solid brick houses built 80 years ago is legitimated using the same discourse which was used to justify the clearing of shacks along the Spanish shoreline in the 80s<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> A case in point is the *Federació d'Associacions de Veïns de Barcelona*, which had historically been very close to working class activist positions, but whose magazine *La Veu del Carrer* ran an article in its February-March 2004 edition entitled 'From the *cases barates* to quality of life'. Thus, the Bon Pastor area under demolition is represented as being synonymous with poor housing standards.

<sup>6</sup> At that time, the group was composed mainly of independent architects and urban planners, and had been critiquing the contradictions of so-called "participatory urban planning" in different districts of Barcelona: see AAVV 2006.

<sup>7</sup> '*En marzo empezarán las obras para sustituir las obsoletas Casas Baratas por unas mil viviendas de protección oficial*' ('In March, work will start on the replacement of the obsolete *cases barates* with a thousand public apartments'), *El Punt*, 2/1/2004. See also anthropologist Manuel Delgado's article 'Vidas baratas' ('Cheap Lives'), in *El País*, 13/2/2007.

<sup>8</sup> Another article by Manuel Delgado highlights the contradictions between this discourse and contemporary urban planning policies. "Segundo elogio de la barraca" ('In praise of the shanty town part II'), *El País*



Position and aerial photo of the neighborhood of cases barates, 2007.

In June 2007, immediately after the first series of demolitions, the Association *ESFÀ (Espai de Formació d'Arquitectura: Architectural Training Space)* of the Barcelona Advanced Architectural Technical College (*ETSAV*) organised a seminar which involved a practical workshop in the Bon Pastor neighbourhood. This involved mapping defects in the *cases barates* so that alternative solutions to demolition could be found. The results of this seminar (Pawlowsky et al. 2007) support the views of *Avis del Barri* and those residents who oppose demolition: the problems that were found were principally due to the state of abandonment in which many of the houses have been left by the City Council, but these defects are not structural, and could also be fixed without recourse to demolition. Our interviews with residents revealed that many older people could remember seeing the foundations of the *cases barates* – the existence of which has been put in doubt in order to legitimate the demolition – after they were exposed by Fascist bombing during the final phase of the Spanish Civil War in 1938. Since that time, the only houses which have collapsed have been those which were demolished in 2007 under the *Plan de Remodelación*. According to the *ESFÀ* architects, the condition of the houses is ‘completely different from the terrible state described by some sources’. In a letter written to the City Council in February 2007, Architects Without Frontiers refers to the ‘unquestionable value which the *cases barates* represent for the city’s historical and architectural heritage and for its population’ (ASFE 2007)

Anthropological research began in the suburb some years previously in 2004, with a survey of the opinions of the residents of the first 145 houses to be demolished (PVCE 2005), while a proper ethnographic study of the suburb began in 2007.<sup>9</sup> A total of more than 250 interviews were compiled, and by analyzing residents’ responses to the ‘urban renewal’ process, it has been possible to get an idea of the situation in the suburb which challenges the more ‘mainstream’ and superficially common sense claims promoted by the media, City Council and the *Asociación de Vecinos*.

The first thing which emerges from this data is the strong and widespread attachment to the houses and the neighbourhood amongst both young and old people, and a strong sense of discomfort in relation to the proposed relocation to the new apartments. In a 2004 interview, a 34 year old man interpreted the transformation of the suburb as follows: ‘what

30/1/2009.

<sup>9</sup> This study was later consolidated into two research projects financed by the Generalitat de Catalunya: ‘*Represàlies i resistències a les Cases Barates de Bon Pastor*’ (‘Reprisals and resistances in the *cases barates* of Bon Pastor’), *Memorial Democràtic*, 2009; ‘*Lluita social i memòria col·lectiva a les Cases Barates de Barcelona*’ (‘Social conflict and collective memory in the *cases barates* of Barcelona’), *Inventari del Patrimoni Etnològic de Catalunya (IPEC)*, 2009-2011.

will be lost is the friendliness we have now in the *barrio*. These little streets where you can put a chair outside and sit down to read, [...] the old people playing cards...[...] When this is all turned into apartment blocks, where there is now 200 houses they'll build 800 tiny apartments.[...] It'll be good for the market, [...] for globalisation...but what people really want is peace and quiet, because even though they call this an underprivileged suburb, that's the most wonderful thing you can have: it's priceless. It will lose this charm'. 'It took us years to renovate these houses, and now we've fixed them up, do they want to take them away from us?', 'I'm happy in my house. They'll build flats which we won't be able to afford, where we'll no longer be able to see our neighbours...It'll be like a gilded cage', say three residents in the 50-70 age group.

Secondly, it is clear from the data that it is not the actual acceptance of the City Council project, but the interiorisation of the 'discourse of power' and social marginalisation which have prevented residents from expressing their opposition to the demolitions. 'Even if I disagree with it, they'll do it anyway', 'even though we don't want it to rain, it rains anyway. At the end, we'll just have to accept it'; 'if they let me choose, I wouldn't [leave my house]; but I can see that it's better, that we'll be better off...and then again, I think I've got to the stage where I've finally realized that there's no alternative, and so I'm gradually getting used to the idea' (interviews from PVCE 2005: 10-11).

For many residents of the *cases barates*, modernisation is not seen as an opportunity to escape from 'poverty', but rather, as a forced eviction from a style of housing which they consider a privilege and a constituent element of their identity. The contempt shown towards this lifestyle by institutions is interiorised (Fassin 1999, 184), thus preventing opposition, and creating an appearance of consensus which reinforces the institutional discourse. By highlighting the contradiction that underlies the modernisation of the *barrio*, the Bon Pastor ethnographic project exemplifies a theme which, as Herzfeld has noted, is central to anthropological practice: 'the systematic critique of common sense' (2006: 12).

Bon Pastor residents understand clearly that their voices and opinions are continually obscured by artificially-contrived discourse which is designed to promote the political and economic objectives of the property owners. 'They promote the false idea that people in the *barrio* have always wanted the houses to be demolished'.<sup>10</sup> In the Republican (1931-39) and Francoist (1939-1975) eras, the *cases barates* were stigmatised on the basis of residents' economic status and political allegiances: this stigma was based on the working class and Southern origins of the families, and their mass affiliation to the anarcho-syndicalism of the CNT-FAI<sup>11</sup>. In the democratic period after 1975, this stigma was transformed into a construction of cultural difference based on social and cultural elements: the politically activist identity which the *barrio* had maintained until the 1970s has been substituted by a literary and cinematic imaginary produced in the 80s, in which the 'degradation' of certain working class areas of Barcelona was highlighted, and in which the *cases barates* were strongly associated with drug trafficking, crime and an image of degradation symbolised by the presence of gypsies (Juste i Moreno 1989, Portelli 2009).<sup>12</sup> The construction of this image

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Aurora Pujalte Sánchez, 15/4/2010.

<sup>11</sup> 'A series of families, most of them undesirables [...] poor and dedicated to vice', as they were described in 1932 by the mayor of the nearby town of Santa Coloma, three years after their arrival in the *barrio* (Gallardo 2000).

<sup>12</sup> One example is the TV report '*Visc a les Cases Barates*' ('I live in the *cases barates*') by Esther Llauro and Lourdes Guiteras, broadcast on TV3 18/3/2009, which even provoked protests by residents of the area who were in favour of the demolitions.

has had the effect of preventing residents from expressing their true wishes, thus making the demolition of one of the Barcelona's historic proletarian suburbs more acceptable in the eyes of the city's inhabitants.



Above: the model for the City Council's Urban Renewal Plan (photo: Martha Pelayo, 2010).  
Below: demolitions in the cases barates (photo: Stefano Portelli, 2007)

In addition, the majority of Bon Pastor residents have been supporting for several generations the very same political parties (the Communist and Socialist parties, including illegally under the Franco regime) which are now promoting and carrying out the demolitions. This transforms the entire scenario into a paralyzing historical trauma, especially for the elderly. The 60-year old left-wing president of *Avis del Barri*, who has been working full-time to defend the neighborhood and denounce the City Council policies, has frequently confessed to us how problematic it is for him, both on a personal and political level, that the current head of the public housing department responsible for the Bon Pastor demolitions, is his former party comrade Eugeni Forradellas. Many of those opposed to the demolitions have ended up supporting right-wing parties such as the Catalan nationalist *Convergència i Unió* (although all of them are Spanish-speaking descendants of non-Catalan immigrants from southern Spain) or even Aznar's *Partido Popular* (despite the fact that all of them are victims or descendants of victims of the Francoist repression).

Even a superficial visit to the *cases barates* quarter gives an idea of why this residential lifestyle which is considered 'underprivileged' by the city authorities is instead viewed as a privilege by many of its residents. The structure of this barrio – a network of regular tree lined blocks divided up by small piazzas – favours a form of communal life which is unusual in a modern European metropolis: most of the families have known each other for many years, and ties of kinship, friendship, work and neighbourly proximity make the barrio a kind of 'big family' which its residents are proud of. The small size of the houses, the architectural structure which recalls that of a village, and the isolation from the rest of the city have facilitated the maintenance of a strong sociality within public spaces, and the development of strategies for living together which belong to an earlier age. Children play on the street and old people greet each other in the doorways. The networks of common acquaintance, and the constant interaction with neighbours on the streets act as an element of social integration, allowing the resolution of conflicts which in other areas might perhaps have required the intervention of the authorities. There are also other elements conducive to collective harmony which are still in operation, like for example the annual San Juan fireworks festival, which still functions today as a cathartic communal ritual in the *cases barates*. It is also worth noting the relatively peaceful relations which exist between the various

Spanish gypsy families in the area and the rest of the residents. Although there is still a certain separation between these two communities which is not without tensions, there is also a series of mixed families (*mestizos*, or *mercheros*) and a large group of non-gypsy youths who have adopted some gypsy cultural elements (the so called *garrulos*<sup>13</sup>), thus facilitating the natural mediation of inter-ethnic conflicts (Portelli 2010). These processes are not widely recognised outside the *barrio*, and the *garrulos* are largely associated by the wider public with their at times aggressive attitude and links to the criminal milieu.

However, these factors should not allow us to forget the precarious situation endured by many of the families in the *casas barates*, particularly from the point of view of employment. The 2009 global financial crisis has had particularly dramatic effects in Spain,<sup>14</sup> thus further exacerbating the situation by increasing the already high rate of unemployment in the *barrio* (Juste i Moreno 1989). The *Remodelación* has worsened the precarious economical situation which already existed, making the continued residence of poorer families in Bon Pastor even more uncertain. The cost of new apartments, even though reduced, is much higher than the rent of the *casas barates*, and residents' fear of being evicted and losing their right to alternative accommodation is very widespread amongst those with less financial means. It is true that many residents do need to find alternative housing solutions – families are large, the houses are small and in bad condition – and access to the new apartments represents the recognition of a right which up until now had long been denied. Yet for many others, the obligation to leave the houses in which their families have lived since migrating to Barcelona at the beginning of the twentieth century, and relocation to anonymous and standardised flats, represents a trauma whose consequences are difficult to evaluate (PVCE 2005).

The idea of convening a 'competition' came out of the need to build a new device for addressing the complex situation provoked by the Urban Renewal Plan in Bon Pastor. Because of their capacity for exploring urban and social reality, both architecture and anthropology can contribute to foregrounding those elements which mainstream discourse tends to obscure. The fact that residents have internalised a double stigma – towards both their houses and themselves – meant it was necessary to deploy a broader range of techniques than those which we had been able to mobilise as a group up until then. Competitions are a familiar process within the discipline of architecture, but this competition took on a different objective from the normal one, by presenting itself as a complex and open process of intervention within the city through multidisciplinary analysis, and through the creation of new links and grassroots collaboration between specialists – anthropologists and architects – and the residents of the *barrio*. The objective of this process was not to develop a single alternative 'project', but to open up a space for dialogue and reflection on the current situation between the different actors involved: residents of Bon Pastor, professionals, activists and students. Rather than focusing on results, as the term 'competition' might suggest, we concentrated on the process which might emerge from the results, and on the potential for creating new resources for intervening within the contemporary reality of the city.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Identified as *cholos* by Nofre 2007: 'young people between 13 and 25 who live in the Barcelona urban periphery and who appropriate elements of gypsy ethics and aesthetics to construct a discourse and modes of contestation of the conservative Catalan politico-cultural hegemony reproduced by the centralised city, thus emphasising a certain alternative suburban identity'.

<sup>14</sup> 'El Gobierno admite el riesgo que se llegue este año a los cuatro millones de parados' ('The Government admits the risk of unemployment rising to four million this year') *El Periódico*, 3/2/2009.

<sup>15</sup> See *Repensar Bonpastor* Competition web page: <http://repensarbonpastor.wordpress.com>.

The two disciplines which were most closely involved - architecture and anthropology - were forced by virtue of collaborating with each other to transcend their own intrinsic limitations: the architects had to involve themselves in the social, and to accept the time frames and apparent incoherence of the human reality in which they were intervening, while the anthropologists had to come to terms with the urgent need for direct face to face collaboration and practical engagement with the residents and the architects. From an anthropological perspective, the activist stance opens some doors while closing others (Hale 2008, ed., Borofsky 2007); at the same time, this collaborative mode (Rappaport 2008) represents a rupture with ethnographic solipsism, and the possibility of opening up the cognitive horizon of anthropology to integrate a new public and multidisciplinary perspective.

Over 150 groups from all over the world responded to the competition announcement. We convened a Jury of local and international experts from both disciplines to judge the 45 proposals finally presented.<sup>16</sup> After three days of deliberation and some unusual encounters with the residents of the *barrio*, the Jury selected twenty projects which had complied with the criteria of the competition: respect for cultural heritage, rejection of the eviction process, and resident participation in decisions about the neighbourhood. Prizes were awarded to four of the projects, with a further project being singled out for special mention. At the end of the competition, we thus found ourselves with an enormous range of proposals: in general, the projects presented were of an extremely high level, and demonstrated a willingness by many students and professionals from various parts of the world to contribute to a research process designed to find a new way of 'making the city'. The projects featured three elements in particular: the rehabilitation of the houses, the possibility for residents to express their own wishes and aspirations, and the use of public space in the *barrio*. We will now see how each of these elements was expressed in the words and images of the participants who converged from different countries and disciplines in Bon Pastor, in an attempt to create a new collaborative discourse which may help the residents to imagine a different future for their *barrio*.



*Another Bonpastor is Possible': enlarged and renovated houses with walkways. An image from proposal **FMS2** by Maria Kopanari, Stauros Sofianopoulos, Stauros Stavrides and Fereniki Vatavali.*

<sup>16</sup> The Jury included anthropologists Michael Herzfeld (Harvard University), Manuel Delgado (Universitat de Barcelona) and Teresa Tapada (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona); the urban designer Yves Cabannes (Development Planning Unit, London University College, member of the United Nation Habitat *Advisory Group on Forced Evictions*); the activist Raquel Fosalba (Cooperativas de Vivienda de Montevideo, Uruguay); and the architect José Luís Oyón (Escola Técnica Superior d'Arquitectura del Vallés).

## The competition entries

The authors of the **‘Bon Pastor Open Source Neighbourhood’** proposal (*Bon Pastor Barrio de código abierto*: Simon Marián, Nerea Morán, Cristina Fernandez, Gorka Ascasibar and Quim Vilar), awarded a prize by the Jury, describe the current Urban Renewal Plan in the following terms:

*The transformation of Bon Pastor followed a logic based on economic profit, in which the administration of housing and public spaces is considered solely from the point of view of their exchange value as commodities, without taking into account the impact on the lives of the people who have been living in this urban area for nearly a century. If we add to this situation the historic neglect of the properties to date (with tenants obliged to carry out repairs and improvements by themselves), and the fact that the land values of the area have been increasing, it is correct to talk of actual real estate speculation.*

The main reason for the demolition of the *casas baratas* – at times even admitted expressively – is the low residential density of the neighborhood: it is possible to build more houses on the same area of land, thus ensuring access to housing by more families. This justification, based on the optimal exploitation of the land for construction, is symptomatic of a neoliberal logic in which only short-term benefits are considered, without taking into account the value of traditional buildings or the potential economic benefits which could be realised if they were properly preserved and adapted.<sup>17</sup> According to the authors of **‘In the Face of Division, Participation’** (*Antes la división, la participación*: Naomi Ferguson and Afrodití Karagiorgi), also awarded a prize by the Jury, the dominance of this economic paradigm has produced a conflict between local people who are ‘for’ or ‘against’ the Urban

Renewal Plan, thus reducing the potential for a common front between neighbours, in which everyone could be ‘for’ a truly participatory plan for the *barrio*.



Panel 1 from "Antes la división, la participación": proposal for a workshop among the residents.

*Most of the factors that have generated this conflict are based on one hand on local socio-economic factors, [...] but on the other hand, are linked to people's feeling of belonging and profound identification with their own homes. The architectural structure of the neighbourhood, in particular its single level housing, facilitates interaction between people, creating a distinctive identity that is rarely found in the modern city.*

Within the contemporary context of urban standardization and depersonalization (Delgado 2010), ‘alternative’

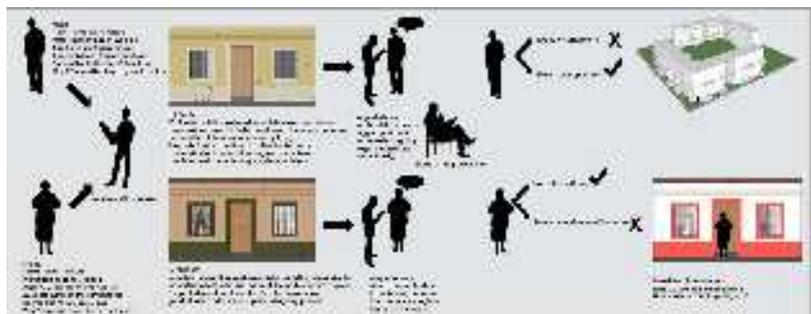
<sup>17</sup> Chapter Seven of Stewart Brand's classic *How Buildings Learn* (1994) (*‘Preservation: a Quiet, Popularist, Conservative, Victorious Revolution’*) describes the shift which occurred in the 60s and 70s towards a conservationist paradigm in relation to old buildings.

neighbourhoods such as Bon Pastor become essential. Not surprisingly, professionals and students from other parts of the world have recognized the significance of the area's uniqueness, thus confirming the urgent need for a change in urban planning policy. The necessity for 'modernization' must also take into consideration the need to maintain lifestyles and unique urban structures. **'Change in Order to Maintain'** is the title chosen by the authors of one of the 20 proposals selected by the Jury<sup>18</sup>:

*The area has many elements which need to be improved, but the most important consideration is the comfort of those who live there. We cannot allow people to be cold or to not have enough room for another child. [...] However, this neighborhood has strengths and characteristics which are unique in Barcelona. [...] We are the first to support the idea of a modern city, but nothing is more modern than this 'Slow City' which has been functioning for 70 years in this corner of Barcelona. Our proposal is to change yet maintain the neighbourhood: physically, whatever part of the physical structure is damaged should go, but the lifestyle offered by this compact low-rise area should be retained.*

The very same factors which are now considered the root causes of segregation and social stigma can also assume another connotation: the way of life 'of the ground floor' becomes an alternative to the dominant 'vertical urbanism', instead of being considered, as now, characteristic of a socially-marginalised population. The authors of the winning proposal **'Refining Bonpastor'** (Karin Fernanda Schwambach, Susan Field Eipper and Fernando Medina), describe this situation as follows:

*[Bon Pastor can change] from being a segregated and uniform community to becoming a potentially integrated and heterogeneous one. The challenge is to keep or even reinforce the existing social relations, but also to allow their regeneration. [...] In this context, this proposal arises as an alternative,*



*Image from "Refining Bon Pastor" proposal. Every type of neighbours should have the chance of choosing the preferred housing style.*

*because it aims to keep the community relationships which result, among other factors, from the unique urban morphology, as well as trying to maintain the strong identity of low rise buildings and integrated neighbourhood. The main proposal consists in improving the existent urban fabric of the neighbourhood, focussing on the quality of life of the residents and achieving this through a participative process.*

The plan for the demolition of the neighbourhood and its replacement with apartment blocks does not take into account the value – both tangible and intangible - of the *cases barates*, nor the social impact of transformation, or the individual needs and desires of the residents. The only two options considered have been to 'leave the houses as they are' or to 'go and live in the apartments': it is this externally imposed dichotomy which has prevented the

<sup>18</sup> Jordi Garet i Cuartero, Marc Vilella Guijarro, Adrià Pujol i Cruells, Marc Ballester i Torrents, Oriol Martí i Colom.

exploration of alternatives. As explained by Barbara Dovarch, Stefano Grigoletto, Sara Incerti, Gynna Myllan, Marta Pietroboni, Luca and Pietro Serra Pusceddu, authors of **'Within Walls'** proposal, awarded a prize by the Jury:



*Bon Pastor is a place in transition. It is no longer what it was in the past, and it is not yet what it will be in the future. The sense of belonging appears to be disrupted by this condition of temporariness, where strong nostalgic memories and hopeful glances looking ahead cohabit in the same environment. [...] Most of the inhabitants believe that the transformative solution proposed is the only one possible, and this lack of options has generated a condition of stalemate in which people's minds are stuck in the reigning 'casa/piso' (house/flat) dichotomy that means new flat blocks replacing old cheap houses.*

*"Within walls" proposal, panel 3. Different elements converge into an alternative plannina for the neiahbourhood.*

The starting point for developing a solution must be the needs and desires of the residents. All their family situations must be taken into account, consistent with the possibilities permitted by the *barrío*. Recognizing that many families need to leave their houses and gain access to alternative

housing solutions should not entail the forced eviction of others who instead wish to continue living in the *casas barates*.

*Situated on the bank of the Besós River, charming houses with personalized façades, people know each other and live in peace together, a neighbourhood with a strong identity: the Casas Barates of Bon Pastor are a typology of social housing which is worth keeping. Since its construction in 1929, a lot of things have changed, but with some small adaptations and the involvement of the inhabitants, it is possible to take this form of living into the 21st century. The idea of this proposal is to think about points of interest, create a system which gives people the chance to realise their personal needs and add some space at the same time. Somebody might be fine with the present situation of their house - fine: let them keep it! Others might need more space: they should be able to have it too!<sup>19</sup>*

In order to integrate these different options into local urban planning policy, a more complex system of analysis must be established. The City Council did not carry out any form of neighbourhood consultation before the demolitions apart from a controversial 'referendum' organized by the *Asociación de Vecinos*, which - due to lack of information provided and the polarized nature of the possible responses - managed to secure a 55% 'yes' vote in favour of the proposed changes (PVCE 2005).

*The participatory process proposed by the administration was based on a public consultation, a referendum [...]. This method of consultation could only elicit polarized*

<sup>19</sup> Proposal '159357' by Josef Ernst and Johannes Ilsinger.

*responses (yes or no). Alternative solutions such as the potential rehabilitation of old houses, or other less traumatic solutions than simply destroying the existing urban fabric were not considered. Since no compromise proposal was considered, many people voted 'yes' because they considered not viable any other possibility of maintaining the cases barates lifestyle.*<sup>20</sup>

There are a number of widely-used social science techniques which allow different and more reliable forms of consultation: for example, the sociological/ethnographic survey conducted by the *Plataforma Vecinal contra la Especulación* (Neighbourhood Platform Against Speculation) in 2004 (PVCE 2005), or the 'resident wish maps' suggested in the '**Refining Bonpastor**' proposal, or the *European Awareness Scenario Network* workshops presented in the '**In the Face of Division, Participation**' proposal. Other proposals emphasize how the retrieval and preservation of neighbourhood collective memory may promote social cohesion by favouring the emergence of a new collective process. There is a close link between historical memory, community self-esteem, and collective decision-making. By contrast, the stigmatisation of Bon Pastor's residents has instead had the effect of promoting social stagnation and division amongst residents.

*Long term social isolation, institutional abuse, the lack of recognition of the lives and value of Bon Pastor, the subsequent destruction of the neighbourhood, have generated, among other things, a situation in which many people hold their neighbourhood and their own lives in a very low esteem. They feel that their opinions have no weight, and that 'they cannot do anything' against the huge administrative machinery. There are various steps which must be carried out to recover the individual and collective self-esteem of the people of Bon Pastor, so that the new process could be truly participatory, consensus-based and critical. The recovery of the individual and collective memory of the neighbourhood; the recognition of the positive contribution of migration and cultural diversity, in the face of the institutional desire for standardisation; the recognition of the positive contributions which the Bon Pastor urban model has made to the city as a whole.*<sup>21</sup>

One idea for a neighbourhood organizational structure that deserves special mention here was highlighted in '**Bonpastor Open Source Neighbourhood**' and in some other proposals: the formation of 'housing cooperatives' has enabled the inhabitants of certain districts 'in transformation' (for example in Rome and Buenos Aires: Maury 2009, ed.) to continue living in areas where they had been threatened with eviction, and also to contribute to the rehabilitation of their homes through 'autonomous renovation cooperatives'. In the specific case of the *cases barates* in Bon Pastor, an initiative of this kind could provide a solution somewhere between the self-help model practised in the district up until now, and the radical top-down public intervention proposed by the Urban Renewal Plan: a partnership structure could be created between the residents and the City Council, which would retain ownership of the land and of the houses. This housing cooperative form is also linked historically to the *cases barates* since its foundation: the first cooperative in Bon Pastor was founded in the same year the neighbourhood was constructed in 1929, and the last one survived up until the 80s (Arias 2003, Fabre and Huertas, 1976).

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<sup>20</sup> '*The Syncretic City*' (*La ciudad sincrética*) proposal by Mireia Pinedo López, Gustavo Pires De Andrade Neto, Sonia Camalonga González, Debora Da Rocha Gaspar and Ana Paula Ferreira Da Luz.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*



An "Open source neighbourhood" means a community capable of auto-organizing its own urban renewal.

imminent (the next 192 *cases barates* have to be demolished before the end of 2010), makes extremely difficult to imagine possible alternatives to the demolitions. Even though more than 400 *cases barates* will not be pulled down until the successive wave of demolitions in five or six years' time, the intention of the administration seems to be to keep the residents in a situation of need, in order to force them to accept the Urban Renewal Plan. In June 2010, over twenty families in the neighbourhood took part in a symbolic occupation of houses which had been closed down by the City Council, with a view to highlighting their urgent need for housing. The institutional response was to evict all the families, and destroy the roofs of twenty-six *cases barates*, in order to preclude them being used until their complete demolition.<sup>23</sup> The City Council's resistance to altering the proposed urban planning model is strong, especially because of the real estate interests which are at stake. At the same time, the current deep economic crisis within the Spanish State may paradoxically work in favour of a shift in the current model. The City administration may find itself at some point without the material resources needed to carry out the proposed project,<sup>24</sup> and a new paradigm for transformation may prove attractive even to those political forces which are now implementing the demolitions.

The emergence of a 'new sensitivity' to the preservation of popular housing styles in cities has been a feature of the debate for over a decade (Oyón 1998) but has not yet received any real recognition within the dominant urban model. From an anthropological point of view, the impact of urban transformation on Barcelona's population has stimulated debate on the need to understand and respect cultural diversity in the use of public space among communities living in the city: for example, in relation to the gypsy communities (Tapada 2002). *Rethinking Bonpastor* is an attempt to introduce these and other elements into the

The City Council gives the cooperative the right to manage the neighbourhood area. This arrangement allows the administration to provide housing to citizens, without losing the public ownership of the land. The cooperative is responsible for the costs of constructing and maintaining housing, and the management of public spaces. The City Council obtains public housing for its citizens without having to spend any money.<sup>22</sup>

Since these proposals were submitted and the Jury was convoked, Bon Pastor residents have begun to familiarize themselves with these ideas and the various proposals presented, assisted by the constant work of translation and mediation that we developed, as the organizers of the Competition. But the current emergency situation, with a new wave of demolitions

<sup>22</sup> 'The Important Thing is to Participate' (*Lo importante es participar*) by Ernest Garriga, Mauro de Carlo, Jordi Miró, Carles Baiges, Laura Lluch, Santiago Facet, Eliseu Arrufat, Lali Daví, Arnau Andrés, Ricard Campeny.

<sup>23</sup> 'Revolta per l'habitatge al Bon Pastor' ('Housing Revolt in Bon Pastor'), *La Directa*, 23 giugno 2010.

<sup>24</sup> 'Zapatero Aprueba el Más Grande Recorte al Gasto Público de la Democracia' ('Zapatero approves the largest cuts in public funding of the democratic period'), *El Confidencial*, 2/5/2010.

debate over urban planning, through the creation of a practical device that emerged directly from the demand of the residents of a neighbourhood which has already been affected by a process of urban transformation.

However, the aim of this device is not limited to an attempt to 'save' the *cases barates* of Bon Pastor. It seeks instead to develop a collective discourse, both theoretical and practical, to challenge a contemporary urban planning ideology dominated by the neoliberal paradigm. In contemporary Barcelona, this model appears to be undergoing a crisis of legitimacy which is not only intellectual (as witnessed by the defection of a number of former City Council supporters who began to openly criticize current urban management trends: see Borja 2005) - but also economic. The homogenization of urban areas has resulted in a homogenization of the communities that inhabit them, which are forced to adapt to a new lifestyle or else to abandon the spaces which have historically belonged to them. For anthropology, this process involves the progressive loss of its object of study, i.e. the cultural and social diversity of communities that inhabit the city. The city is the basis of our daily lives: if we allow neoliberal urban planners to modify and regulate it at their whim, the result will be an ever more reduced sociability, restricted mobility, and an ever-reduced possibility of promoting reflection and creative action among citizens.<sup>25</sup>

The Bon Pastor neighbourhood has taught us the vital importance of a residential model which involves daily contact between its residents in public spaces, as an antidote to the endemic lack of communication and increased social tensions associated with the growth of contemporary cities (Fernández Durán 1993, Atkinson and Bridge, ed. 2005, Davis 2004, Delgado 2010). The *Repensar Bon Pastor* proposals reveal that some architects feel a pressing need to establish a deeper personal and political engagement with these kind of different social realities that make up the city. For anthropologists, acting as catalysts in these new forms of engagement also means becoming involved on a political level, by defending the historical identity of unique urban spaces, and highlighting the process by which their inhabitants appropriate them as cultural spaces. This in turn may contribute to halting the process in which the contemporary city is increasingly being transformed into a hyper-controlled, hyper-normative sprawl of standardised buildings.



Image from the '(De)generated City' proposal, by Azpiroz Sergio Martín, Alain Montejo González, Mireia Cortina and Pedro García Grau Fiquera, which received a special mention from the Juru.

<sup>25</sup> Candan and Kolluoğlu (2008) observe in relation to Istanbul, that as a city expands, the "smaller cities" which are part of it contract and close in on themselves, as in Bon Pastor, where the spaces of autonomy and relationship between neighbours are being eroded, as the neighbourhood is absorbed into Greater Barcelona.

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