Master Thesis.

Theme: “The transformation of Barcelona into a capitalist city”.
Student: Nektarios Kefalogiannis.
Tutor: Eduard Bru.
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Abstract: The objective of this thesis is to investigate the effect of the contemporary mass society and its capitalist model on the spatial and architectural construction of the city of Barcelona. Knowing that the capitalist model is a globalized model (and for that reason basic parts of its content can be found in all major cities), we have the aim to investigate and present our assumption that, in Barcelona, local conditions (created by historical, political, social quaintnesses) are generating a local, unique capitalist model. In this fact we have to add the contradictions that Barcelona is having, in order to understand the real dimensions of the evolution of the barcelonean model. According to this thesis’ argumentation, in Barcelona are existing concrete factors that determine the specific content and the form of the barcelonean capitalist model, as a unique model. On this rigid base, afterwards we can comment on the particular consequences that this barcelonean capitalist model is provoking to its urban structure, in one hand, and to its most representative buildings, in the other.

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1. Introduction.

Aim of this thesis is to explain the current situation of the city of Barcelona. The comprehension of the current situation is the key for the better design of its future evolution, exactly because we are living in a fluid period, which does not permit us easily to understand the real dimensions of the present conditions.

What the thesis is proposing, in a first step, is to investigate the singular characteristics of Barcelona that shape its unique conditions. What we will call factors. And that because all the cities have not became the same type, although we are living in a globalized capitalist environment. They do not react with the same way at the same problems. Each city, according to its condition (size, historical perspective, political tendency, economic status, social composition etc) has its own profile that permit to itself (or not) to adjust itself to the capitalist background. Especially if there are inside the model some internal contradictions, as it is in the case of Barcelona.

In a second step, the thesis will present and explain specific architectural consequences of the capitalist model in Barcelona. These consequences are not claiming to be the only existing in the barcelonean model. Because the barcelonean model is a plural one. In that chapter we will try to present the related consequences to the capitalist model. Some of them have local characteristics (for example, scale, infrastructure, spotted interventions) and some others (due to the globalized character of capitalism) have more global characteristics, which we can find also, with some differences, in other cities [for example, brand-name architecture (arquitectura de marcas), architectural buildings/icons, architecture as advertisement etc]. Of course, as a result of its internal model contradictions, there are situations that appear in Barcelona with local characteristics. Those contradictions make a plural, vivid and interesting barcelonean model.

There is a smaller shapter, in-between the 2 main ones that is playing the role of a transitional chapter. It is the one that is presenting the internal contradictions of the barcelonean model. It has a transitional role in the structure of this thesis because it will be the notional vehicle from the factors presented in the first main chapter towards the architectural and spatial consequences related to the capitalist model, in the second. Its role is decisive, although brief, because it can give us the complexity and the plurality of the barcelonean model and the fact that it has its own singularity, it is not a simple copy of other advanced capitalist models.

In order to create a more concrete theoretical base, we will start from a definition that the thesis is using as a starting point.

2. Definition.

“Capitalism generally refers to an economic system in which the means of production are mostly privately owned and operated for profit, and in which investments, distribution, income, production and pricing of goods and services are determined through the operation of a free market. It is usually considered to involve the right of individuals and groups of individuals acting as "legal persons" or corporations to trade capital goods, labor, land and money”.

We are using the notion of capitalism because we are estimating (as we will try to show later) that there is a constant shift from the public to the private, in different countenances of the barcelonean society and especially in architecture. It is important to

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2 “Private ownership is sometimes used as a synonym for individual ownership, however the term "private" may also be used to refer to collective ownership by individuals in the form of corporate ownership. Therefore, “privately owned” in the context of this definition means not owned by the state and not community owned. Source: Understanding Principles of Politics and the State by John Schrems, PageFree Publishing (2004), page 234”: Ibid.
show that the urban transformations in the city of Barcelona, through time, are following its economical changes, which are not remaining the same from the 80’s up to now. The main factor that can evaluate the qualitative part of those changes is the balance between the public and private subsidy of those transformations. From the exclusive public subsidy in the 80’s to the mix model of the Forum 2004. In this direction, it is obvious that the economic model that the city is following the last years (under a socialist government) is a capitalist one. That means that the public administration is starting to negotiate with the private sector, taking under consideration that it can not fulfill its aims (and its ambitions) without the cooperation of the above mentioned sector.

3. Factors that specify the unique character of Barcelona (and its economic model).

For this theoretical exercise it is important to underline that the capitalist model, in our contemporary society, is a globalized model. A lot of theoriticians on the contemporary economy have emphasize that this model could not have been effective if the structure of the contemporary society wouldn’t have been globalized. So, it is correct to say that there is (more or less) a common capitalist background that connects all the countries, especially the developed ones. Although this background is a reality (that permits the global flow of the capitals and the international management of corporations), the differencies with which this model is been applied in the different countries have to do with their social, historical and political quaintnesses. It is extremely important to understand, therefore, that each country (and also each city) is adjusting this model to its quaintnesses. Its final condition, so, may vary a lot from the others cities’ economical models and can be more (or less) advanced, in capitalist terms. For that reason, we are proposing to investigate in this chapter the factors which (for historical, social, political etc reasons) determine a specific catalan capitalist model3 or to be more precise a barcelonean one.

3.1. Ambition: All the cities do not have the same level of ambition. The ambition is the motivation engine for the design and fruition of changes. The level of the ambition (with its positive connotation) of Barcelona is well-known that it is high4. Barcelona was interested (and still is) to lead in a league of the most important globally cities or, at least, to compete with them. This condition (or, in order to be more exact, this choice) is having a specific impact in its economy and the necessity for more implication, towards this aim, of the private sector/investor. In order to explain myself better, 2 cities that have, more or less the same population (as they are Barcelona and Athens) do not have the same necessity for investments, because exactly do not have the same ambitious program of growth.

3.1.1. Types of Ambition: All the ambitious cities do not have the same way to demonstrate their ambition. There are cities that invest more in their image, that means in the physical form of the city (urban form, buildings-objects etc). In this case is belonging Barcelona. There are also other cities that have the tendency to invest more in rather invisible factors, as it is the social security, education, medical care, innovation, industrial products etc), for example the case of the northern-Scandinavian countries or Germany. These different types of ambition is having an effect in the constitution of its economy (it is more or less important the role of the construction sector) and to the tendency for more or less capitalist policies…

3.1.2. The singular case of Barcelona: It is not in a question that the ambition is necessary in the contemporary high-competitive environment between cities. The competition is increasing the possibilities of city’s advertisement, something very important for the touristic sector. In that we have to add that Barcelona is not a capital of a State. That means that it has not a regime system that support Barcelona and its strategies. In order to develop itself, it has

3 The term: “catalan capitalism” is authoritative and it is explained and used broadly by catalan economist Anton Costas. See for example his texts and analysis: “Algo se mueve en el capitalismo catalán”, Anton Costas, El Pais, 06/02/2007 and “Perdida de ‘glamour’ del capitalismo catalán”, Anton Costas, El Pais, 31/10/2006.

4 See the explanation and the rhetoric of Pasqual Maragall, when he was the mayor of the city of Barcelona, in his conversations about different topics in the book: (Several autors): El tema es Barcelona: Converses de Pasqual Maragall amb Oriol Bohigas, Victoria Camps, Josep M. Espinas, Fabia Estape i Ramon Folch, Barcelona, Ed. La campana, 1995.
to depend on its own forces and its own policies. The ambition is playing an important role on that, because it is feeding the necessity for new projects, new ideas and new projections to the future. It is noticed that non-capital (of a state) cities that had abandoned their ambitious projects have fallen in a long period to strong decline (see the city of Thessloniki, after the lost of the Expo 2008 from Zaragosa, the city of Manchester, the city of Bonn after the transfer of the capital to Berlin, etc). But what is important to mention is that high ambitious projects (that have the above mentioned positive effects) have also as a result that the city is shifting progressively to capitalist models on the constitution of its economic model. That means that it is needing, in a bigger scale, the cooperation of the private corporations.

3.2. Size: One important factor for understanding the level of capitalization of one city is the relationship between its ambition and its size. In equally ambitious cities, the smaller in size should invest more money in order to be competitive. An example: Metropolitan London is almost 3 times more populated area than the Metropolitan Barcelona. Barcelona, in order to be as competitive as London should invest more times than its size may need. In order to escape from that obligation, is forced to direct its investments in more impressive ones, as they are the buildings-objects. Objects that can generate an image for diffusion (that means image consumption). These policies have direct effect to: a) the amount of money needed for investment, b) the type of cooperation with the private (construction) sector, c) the created images for being diffused globally and d) the level of social and urban cohesion.

3.2.1. Size and private subsidy: In this point it is important to mention that the smaller cities, in order to be equally competitive with the bigger cities, have to find more funds additionally to the public subsidy (that means private funds) in order to reach the necessary budget. The level of cooperation between the private and the public sector is the indication of the capitalization of the city. The contemporary (after-Forum 2004) Barcelona is characterized by its high-degree of cooperation between the public and private funds for the "construction" of its contemporary image, that means that has a high degree of capitalization. It has a high necessity of private funds to supplement its public budgets, a high-grade of dependence from the private sector. This dependency is giving to Barcelona its contemporary capitalist character.

3.2.2. Size and capacity for transformation: The size is also relevant with the city's capacity to transform itself. Barcelona has a small territory (relatively to other rival cities). Practically the last 15 years has upgraded and improved all its urban environment. But the competitive rules of the cities' competition impose a constant procedure of renovating and reconditioning the urban structure (in order to give the impression-image that the city is always updating and improving itself) that practically is forcing the city of Barcelona to renovate areas that has been renovated before 10 -15 years and there is not any practical need to do so…

3.2.3. Size and strategies for land recovery5: In order to escape from the pressure that the size is giving to its economic model, it is necessary to invent (or better to recover) new land. It is important to underline here that the transformation of Barcelona into a capitalist city is not due only to its necessity for ambitious and expressive urban projects, like Forum 2004, but also (in an important degree) to its lack of land that is pressing for the constant rise of the residence's price and the economic speculation on the habitat. The obsession that Barcelona is condemned to grow between the natural boarders of the mountain, the sea and the 2 rivers (see image 1 in the Annex, at the end of the text) is not completely true (image 2).

For example, the “Zona Franca” (image 3, image 4), now developed exclusively by the industry and having at its core the airport (area researched fully by the municipality6), have the possibility to be exempted from the industry, by the transference of that sector far away from the area of Barcelona, according to some strategical proposals. With this transformation, the recover of that crucial (for its size, which is the same as the nowadays city of Barcelona) area and its ascription to the habitat will tone down the serious problem of land in Barcelona and influence its economic problems. Presuppose for this important change is the development of the infrastructure in that extent that will guarantee the functionality of the logistic zones and the quick and efficient transport of the good and the production from the logistic-production zones towards the city, the port and the airport (and conversely). Above all,

5 See the article: “Experimenten con ratas”, Jordi Borja, El Pais, 18/06/2007. A text written recently by Jordi Borja, presenting the factor of size as one of the most important problems of the barcelonean model.

the efficiency of the transportation and the infrastructure is a basic factor of the capitalist model.

3.3. Barcelona as a city-state: Using a form of organization from the ancient Greece, Barcelona is maybe one of the few cities [in our times (with Hong-Kong), because in the past we had the model of the Italian cities-states] that is been organized as such. Barcelona is not a capital of a state (like London or Paris), neither has other significant and competitive city inside Catalunya.

3.3.1. Barcelona and its relations with Catalunya: Barcelona is a city that has to represent an autonomous region and to identify itself as Catalunya. Barcelona in reality is absorbing Catalunya, for that reason the metropolitan structure of the broader Barcelona (the metropolitan Barcelona) is so important. In this direction of thinking, the relationship of the city with its agricultural and semi-agricultural environment is very important and decisive. This unique condition of Barcelona, the formation of a “contemporary city-state” and the need of representing a whole culture, is having a specific effect in its economic condition, in its trajectory towards an advanced capitalist city. The necessity for being the only city (and the only entity) that has to represent globally a specific cultural environment is forcing Barcelona to increase its extroversion (necessity for being constantly extroverted) and its degree of ambition, with obvious influence in its economic strategy.

3.3.2. City-state, region-state and the role of infrastructure: Catalunya, in order to help Barcelona to avoid this pressure, is shifting its model from the city-state to the region-state. In order to achieve that is trying to (and additionally has to) reinforce its infrastructural system in order to be more efficient, bigger and more functional. The rapid transportation of people and goods permit the development of other areas or cities, outside Barcelona and the construction of an important regional network (image 5, image 6, image 7). In this direction, important example can be the Nederlands, where the extremely efficient transportation system (in additional to its important airports and ports) are permitting the quick and easy transportation. This is giving a different perspective of the country. The cities are more connected, are losing one part of their autonomy and they are reinforcing a broader metropolitan concept. The whole Nederlands (with some small exceptions) have been transformed in a big metropolitan network (image 8). Have constructed a new Megalopolis. Towards this direction, the improvement of the infrastructure and the strengthening of the metropolitan concept in Catalunya can create a region-state and on this base there can be interventions not-only monothematic, as now.

3.4. Historical background: Barcelona is one of the european cities that have strong bourgeois tradition. The bourgeois society in the past is the one that formed the existing urban tissue and gives the specific character of Barcelona. Cerda’s planning is actually an urban and spatial translation of the bourgeois society and the Eixample is a physical, formal and functional product of the Bourgeois (image 9, image 10). Intervening in a city formatted with bourgeois principles is not the same as intervening in a city without this social-historic background (as it is Athens, for example). Maybe this historical background is one reason why we see different sub-models, inside the barcelonean model, to create internal contradictions.

The bourgeois past has also to do with the mentality of the citizens (even those that do not have a bourgeois reference in their family). More, has to do with the mentality of the governors and their attitudes towards the role of the city in a regional, national and international environment. It has to do, finally, with the ambition and the competitiveness.

3.4.1. The past bourgeois society and the private initiatives: A brief historical reference can explain the way with which the barcelonean contemporary society is...
functioning and the reason for its capitalist tendencies. Barcelona’s Medieval development, its decadence after that successful economic starting point and its afterwards industrial explosion as a textile industry (well-known as the Spanish Manchester) in the 19th century, is connected basically with private initiatives from the local Catalan bourgeoisie and barely with a state initiative or project. That has to do with the contemporary capitalist profile of the city, exactly because its historic development is connected with its local bourgeoisie initiatives. Comparing with other Mediterranean urban models (as for example Athens, where its lack of bourgeoisie history and the connection of its development always with state urban projects, make obvious its disbelief to private urban initiatives), in the case of Barcelona, its historical relationship with the liberal local capitals make more easy a cooperation between the private and the public funds. In this way, we should not be surprised if we ascertain that there are occasions where it is more easy the cooperation between the city’s government and its public funds (or the local Catalan government’s funds) with the local private corporations [exactly because of their common aim towards the city development] than the cooperation of the city’s government with the state public government (based in Madrid) and its plans, cause their different strategic decisions.

3.5. The Mediterranean profile (the touristic phenomenon): The city of Barcelona is a Mediterranean city with all the characteristics that this situation may give. It is one of the most touristic cities of our region [Barcelona is the most visited place of Catalunya. Catalunya (as an autonomic region) is the number 1 touristic destination of Spain. Spain is the second country (after USA), in the ranking of the tourist income]. The city of Barcelona is receiving almost the same number of tourists, as the whole country of Greece. This can show its great potential. The mass concentration of human beings that are arriving in a specific place for their diversion (the definition of the touristic activity) is giving a special character to that place (image 11). Barcelona, as a consequence, is having the necessity to invest to its image (its urban image, the images of its buildings-objects), cause the image-making and image-management is crucial to the touristic sector. In order to maintain its leadership in the touristic industry, continues an economic model that will permit the full operative capacity of the third sector, the services. Regarding to the urban policies, the city favours the creation of images-icons, that can be attractive to the foreigners (potential tourists) and improves and promotes the existing ones. These specific decisions have to do with the shaping of the local economic model and the preference of those policies related to physical (visible) production (urban transformations, buildings-objects) against those policies with less direct and visible results (education, social polities, etc).

4. Internal contradictions in the barcelonean model.

Aim of this transitional chapter is to present the internal contradictions of the barcelonean model. Aim is to show that there is not one way of the city’s evolution, it is not a standardization of the procedure. On the other hand, the barcelonean model is containing internally different and opposing sub-models (in other way to say: strategies) that have different and contradictional effects. This reality is not caused by a lack of coordination, or a lack of basic central decision-making, but it is a production of the different forces that co-exist in the city and have the tendency to move the city towards different directions. This reality is making the city more rich and interesting, adding plus-value to its city model. We need this transitional chapter in order to describe the complexity of the city of Barcelona and to move forward presenting in the next chapter (chapter 5) some of the spatial and architectural consequences related with the capitalist model. Those consequences are not the only one (for that reason exists the present chapter) but are characterized by the thesis as more related with the capitalist model.

In this chapter we can not extensively present the contradictions that appear in the different design strategies applied in the city of Barcelona, exactly because it is a big theme that needs a whole thesis. We will try to present it in brief, mainly because we have the necessity to draw the broader picture, to frame the existing situation, in order, inside it, each particular comment of chapter 5 to find its place. As we will see explicitly bellow, the barcelonean model is consisted by different, dynamic and contradictory sub-models.

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10 See information from the World Tourism Organization: http://www.world-tourism.org/
11 By a lot of critics, the period of the city’s goverment from mayor Clos was characterized as period of special interest in favor of the tourists phenomenon.
(strategies in other words) that have different effects and tendencies. The image of the barcelonean model that we are perceiving finally is the composition of the contradictory sub-models that are existing independently. In order to simplify a bit, in this chapter every time that I will refer to models or strategies, I will refer actually to the above mentioned independent sub-models.

It is crucial to reveal that, in the current barcelonean model, there is not any type of standardization. There are existing different contradictory processes and strategies. This reality is defining the particularity of Barcelona and its model. For example, the districts are continuing a strategy in the line of the 80’s, creating real public spaces with objective the necessities of its citizens. On the other hand, the central administration (the municipality of Barcelona) is following a 90’s strategy based in the attention and the furtherance of tourism and consumption. The last one is a more capitalist strategy, according to an imposed international model.

Below we will gather and present briefly the contradictions of the different strategies in 3 levels: in the city-center, in the periphery and in the different forms of public spaces.

4.1. Contradictions in the city-center: Different contradictions are appearing in the city-center, leading to different effects. One strategy is trying to affect the types of populations/citizens of the city-center and its progressive depression. It is the one that push the residents (due to the rise of the habitat’s value) to move to the periphery and tends to favour two types of population in the city center, the young people and the immigrants (both co-living in numerous groups). An other strategy is leading to a “museumification”, to a monofunctionality of the district. I am referring to the most touristic part of the city that tend to dedicate its content to the services. Some other strategies are favouring the gentrification of some city’s parts and in other models we recognize a mixture of the above characteristics.

4.2. Contradictions in the periphery: Some models intent to make independent (from the city) parts of the peripheral urban structure. I am referring basically to more rich parts of the barcelonean periphery (as it is Sant Cugat) that tends to be independent functionally, socially and physically, in order to maintain its different status. Contradictory to the above mention models, some others intent the opposite effect, to integrate their urban structure (or part of it) to the city, taking advantage of its infrastructure. In this category can be incorporated the more impoverished parts of the barcelonean periphery. A third model is choosing to maintain a specific degree of functional dependency on the city infrastructure (taking advantage of it) and keeping a certain degree of physical separation. This model is applied basically in peripheral areas that the geography and the existance of the infrastructure is permitting this simultaneous dependency and independency.

4.3. Contradictions in the public spaces: Certain public spaces are made by the design strategy to be dependent on the city plot. It is in the design line of the interventions in the 80’s (during the pre-olympic preparation) and can be identified in the city-center and especially in areas with hign degree of predominance of the city plot. Other design strategies (or models) of public spaces are creating a dependency on a building. The basic relation of the public building, in this case, is not to the city plot but it is functioning more as an annex of the building and is depending on it. This situation we can find near or around of emblematic buildings, as for example the Gas Natural headquarters. The third model is the construction of a fluid public space without character and relationship to its surroundings. The example of the Forum area is more characteristic. A fourth model of public spaces is a big open (and normally undefined in its limits) space in the periphery. Despite its size, it holds a smaller, less significant role for the city, cause of its location and its lack of connections with the infrastructure. A contradictory model is the one for small public spaces (in the city-center), which have important role in the city, cause their critical position, their relationship with the city plot (a matter of design) and the character of the relaxation space that they have for the most dense parts of the city.

5. Some principal (spatial and architectural) consequences in Barcelona, related with the capitalist model.

In this fifth chapter we will try to investigate and present the spatial and architectural consequences related to the contemporary barcelonean capitalist model. As we had
mentioned in the third chapter the capitalist model is a globalized one. So, it is an expected result, some of the consequences to be present also in other cities. Or, in order to put it in other way, the globalization of the capitalist model is having as an effect some of its spatial consequences to be the same in all the major cities. For example, it is obvious that the rise of the architectural star-system is bringing a ‘brand-name architecture’ which is repeating its form and strategies (as a stamp) in the different countries. The contemporary necessity for the cities’ competition (two main reasons, besides others, are tourism and the attraction of the global capital funds) is having as a consequence the architecture to react, in all the major cities, as city’s advertisement, as city’s image-maker, in a greater extent than we were used in the past.

Besides the above mention reality, it is real also that the local situation (which we had tried to present in the third chapter) is influencing a lot the construction of the contemporary cities and their changes (in a bigger or a smaller degree). For example, the extent in which each city is using the architectural star-system, the role of the infrastructure, the scale of the interventions, the relationship between the buildings-icons (if there is any) and its environment etc. For that reason, based in the results of the first chapter, we will try to extract the basic consequences and to interrelate them with the procedure of the architectural projects. We will try to show, how these spatial punctualities are influencing Barcelona.

We have always in mind (for that reason the chapter 4 with the contradictions is preceding) that in Barcelona co-exist different sub-models (some on contrary to some other) that make the final product complex and rich. This situation does not permit us to have a clear idea how the barcelonean model will evolve, because, due to this complex model, we can not project in the barcelonean future the situations that they are having other contemporary capitalist models. In this way, the bellow mentioned consequences can be seen as related to the capitalist model tendencies but not as the only options. This sub-models have mainstream characteristics but not a sovereign character.

5.1. Scale of the interventions: With the evolution of the city’s development, we have a change in the scale of the intervention. In the period of the pre-olympic-games preparation and some years afterwards, the interventions were done basically in the whole surface of the municipality and, in some cases, in a metropolitan level. In the current situation we observe that the intensification of the interventions is focused in specific places (small scale, as for example the area of the Forum), with a tendency to explode economically the area, using the well-known american capitalist model. From the bigger scale we are moving progressively to the smaller scale.

According to this thesis’ point of view, the city of Barcelona seams to need a total intervention in all its territory, whenever decides to make an urban change, and not some concentrated operations. The city should be upgraded all together slowly and should not design a concetrated, forced and fast urban ejection/explosion. What this thesis is proposing (as a corrective strategy to the current capitali st situation, taking in account the economic reality), is some planned, simultaneous interventions in different parts of the cities, having as common base a qualitative urban design for upgrading the urban equipment. Using in each case different programmatic strategy, according to each needs. In the same direction with what the thesis is proposing, this period, there are some current tendencies (positive according to the thesis) that aim to reactivate the barcelonean metropolitan model and a bigger scale projectionation (image 15, image 16, image 17).

In order to explain more the ‘scale of intervention’ we will present here, firstly the evolution of the problem (showing the tendency to the smaller scale as a consequence of the economic evolution of the city) and secondly, a reference to the historic background of the city, that according to our point of view is qualifying and strengthening the bigger scale’s design. In this way, the second comment is coming to support the, quite generalised in the community of architects, opinion that the current tensity towards the smaller scale, without an overview in the bigger scale, is in the wrong direction.

5.1.1. Pre-olympic-games preparation vs Forum 2004. From the bigger scale to the smaller: The difference between these two models do not have to do only with the origin of the funds (in the first case, only public, in the second, from the cooperation of the public and the private sector). It has to do basically with the scale of the intervention. (In the first case the whole city, in the second a specific place). The upgrade of Barcelona in that pre-olympic-games preparation has positioned it from a middle, indifferent city, to one of the best models/references of reinvigorated cities. The whole upgrade of the city had made a homogeneous qualitative base of public spaces (what was called the barcelonean urban design) onto which each different, urban character of the neighbourhoods could bloom. (In the
level of the strategy, it has to do with the idea of Cerdá’s planning to create an urban tissue, into which each difference can be incorporated) (image 18). On the other hand, the Forum 2004 (with the same scale of ambition with the Olympic Games of 1992) has been concentrated on a specific (relevantly small in size) area of Barcelona, onto which has imposed buildings/objects, without reinforcing it, in advanced, with the aforementioned (or similar) homogeneous qualitative base of public spaces that had constructed in the pre-olympic-games period.

5.1.2. The historic background. Intervening in a city with a strong bourgeois past:
The analysis of the modern and post-modern condition (in this case we are using the analysis of the greek political philosopher and social ontologist Panagiotis Kondylis12) is helping us to understand that the bourgeois past is not only a historic reference but also had specific effects to the urban structure and, as a consequence, the way that now it is behaving and reacting during our interventions. For that reason, we can not intervene in a city with a strong bourgeois past (like Barcelona) as we can intervene in a city without bourgeois past (like Athens), where the facility for concentrated, focused interventions in a non-harmonic, chaotic and fluid urban environment is bigger. In cities like Barcelona, caused to its harmonic composition of “substance and consolidated”13 parts, in which the relationship between “parts” and “Whole” can be obvious (I am refering basically to its broader historic center with the Eixample), we can not use exclusively concentrated and focused strategies (small scales), but we have to operate simultaneous to all the parts of the city-body...

5.2. Spotted interventions: In relationship with the above chapter 5.1. (scale of interventions) is the subject of the spotted interventions. With this phrase we mean the tendency in Barcelona to construct buildings-points, spots, instead of general urban upgradings integrated in the city, that tend to change the image of the whole area, as for example, a neighbourhood. If we except the case of 22@ in Poble Nou (which is coming actually from the past, from the previous strategic design), the majority of the other planned interventions (private or public) are aiming basically in the construction of single buildings, most of them buildings-icons.

For example, from the El Consorci Barcelona and its exhibition that took place recently14 in CCCB it can be revealed clearly this argument. Projects already realized by El Consorci (as Edificios Nexus I and II, Edificio de Oficinas Forum etc) or projects planned to be realized soon (as Edificio Mediatico, Edificio CAC, Edificio Banc de sang, Torre Diagonal 00, Torre Espiral, Edificio Sagrera etc) show explicitly the mainstream tendency of the city to promote buildings and spotted interventions (image 19), although there are some intentions to integrate some of the new interventions in the barcelonean tissue, maintaining in a way the “barcelonean” character of the city inherited by the far and nearest past (compare Agbar headquarters and Gas Natural headquarters). This reality (of spotted interventions) has to do

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12 This comment on the scale of the intervention has do to with the historical background that we had mentioned before (chapter 3.4.). Using the way of thinking of Panagiotis Kondylis, a greek political philosopher and social ontologist and his books “Power and Decision” and “The decadence of the Bourgeois Culture, from the Modern to the Postmodern Society and from the Liberalism to the Mass Democracy”, we can take advantage of a quite thorough description of the way that the bourgeois society had been composed and the equivalent constitution of the contemporary society. Through his way of reading the bourgeois society, we can understand it as a harmonic composition of “substance and consolidated” parts [see: Panagiotis Kondylis, The decadence of the Bourgeois Culture, from the Modern to the Postmodern Society and from the Liberalism to the Mass Democracy, pg. 64, edition Themelio, Athens, 2000] that is “based at more-or-less stable relations between the parts and the Whole”. On the other hand, the contemporary, post-modern (as Kondylis calls it) society is consisted by “only ultimate constituent elements, that can be detected with the consistent analysis, points or atoms, whose texture and existence is being constituted simply and only by its function, that means by its capability to form endlessly new combinations together with other points or atoms” [The above mentioned book, page 64]. In order to simplify a bit, the composition of the bourgeois society is like a “body” and the constitution of the contemporary society is like a “network”. But according to the urban physical reality, the change of the periods doesn’t mean direct and immediate change of the urban tissue. In the cities with bourgeois past (like Barcelona) we have a kind of superposition of the two systems. (We can imagine a “body” dressed with a “net”).

13 For an explanation on the words in italics, please see note number 10.

strongly with the capitalist model, because in it the private funds are interested more in constructing projects that can be promoted and sold as an image.

5.3. Brand-name architecture: The capitalist model in the free market (consumption) has imposed already the necessity for the brand-names. The way that the advertisement and the market works is leading to the predominance of specific brands. This has to do also with the way that the mass society is functioning and the necessity for a connection between an image, a product and a behaviour. This tendency for brand-names in the consumption field has been transferred primarily at the cities’ competition. Maybe because the cities are also nowadays brands (for the reason to attract the tourism and the global capitalist funds, as we have mentioned also previously). The cities’ strategies in this competitive field is to connect themselves with events that are capable to attract the global public attention. In these strategies it is incorporated also architecture. The most important (emblematic) architecture in the capitalist model should be made by architectural firms – brand names, that can guarantee as all the brand names (in the consumption field and the mass society) the “quality” of the final built result, its efficiency and at the same time its utmost diffusion (as an image and as an economic investment). Just in order to mention some example, I will continue in the line of the previous chapter (5.2.). The El Consorci, in the same logic that we have presented above, is planning to construct the Edificio Sagrera, of Frank Gehry, and the Torre Espiral, of Zaha Hadid, besides others.

Against this reality (that has been imposed by the international cities’ competition, asking for recognisable names and media-diffusion capacities) the catalan architectural system is resisting, succeeding big part of the built projects to be designed and executed by catalan architects. It has succeeded to do so, cause its influential position inside the catalan society (comparing with other architectural communities in other countries), the acknowledgeable quality of its work and its already international character (a lot of catalan architects are well-known internationally). The question is up to which point the catalan architecture is capable to resist to that international pressure.

5.4. The infrastructure: One of the bases of the contemporary capitalist model is the network of infrastructures. We are referring to all the construction (engineering structures) that are facilitating the quick, efficient and economic transportation, in a first level, of people and goods and, in a second level, of the information. In this category belong the ports, airports, roads and the informational networks. The capitalist model is based on their efficiency exactly because that model is mostly interested in the flow of people and goods, which will provoke its economic profit. Besides the practical necessity of the infrastructures (the more important), those are playing additionally a second role, in the communicational level. The capacity of a community to create and maintain an efficient network of infrastructures is a proof of the high level of its mass society and an important factor in its competitiveness with the other rival communities. A consequence of the rise of the capitalist model is the rise of the importance of the infrastructure in the present mass societies. For those, the development of the infrastructural network is of a primer necessity.

In this point we have to mention the importance that the infrastructure network is having for the Catalanian development. The pretty poor record of the present catalonian infrastructure’s condition, due to historical and political reasons, is one of its basic handicap. The improvement of its condition is obvious that will support and push its economic and social development.

5.5. The architectural buildings/icons: Always the capitalist mass society was working with symbols and icons. But, the present advanced mass-democratic society has maximilized their importance. The buildings/icons in the contemporary major cities are playing a dual role. On the one hand, are expressing the economical (and as a consequence, the political) power of the corporations (public and primarily private) that are financing them. On the other hand, they are converting themselves into an (advertising) representative of the city. The buildings/icons of the contemporary cities are not representing only the corporation that are hosting (a private function) but also the city itself (a public function). In this way, a private image is converted also into a public image. This is the
quintessence of what is happening now in our contemporary capitalist model. The private is substituting the public by representing the city. In the subconsciousness of the citizens by this way is earning status, it is becoming part of their public life. (Something relevant is happening also with the sponsorships). In more advanced capitalist models than the european one, as it is the japanese, the corporations (in which the citizens are working) are becomings their family. The building/icon of the firm is becoming equal with the image of their homes...

In the case of Barcelona, we have a more light model (comparing to cities in Japan and in USA), but the role of architecture as an icon is starting also to appear in some big barcelonean buildings (as it is Agbar). Although the smaller buildings are keeping a more social profile, succeeding to integrate themselves in the physical and social barcelonean tissue. In this point we can see the contradiction and the conflict of the different models co-existing in Barcelona.

5.5.1. The role of the icon and its consequences: The image of private corporations (that means their buildings-headquarters) is an expression of their political and primarily economical power. The buildings, converted in icons, have basically economical dimension. The economical power is being expressed by the architectural icons. This condition is not something new. What is new is the use of that model in its limits. The consequence of this strategic decision is that, in some cases, there is not any relationship between the design strategies of those building with the urban design of their (near or broader) environments (image 29). They are a lot of times spots in the middle of nothing. In parallel, they are creating a pressure in the residential areas around them. They are forcing the residents to leave (towards the suburbia) or at least the owners to increase the prices of the residences. This phenomenon has appeared in Barcelona recently with the Agbar skyscraper. It is not a generalized phenomenon, but it is starting to become notable.

This evolution is an auto-supplied procedure. The city in needing more and more (advertising) interventions in order to compete with its rivals. The city can not finance them and need the cooperation of the private sector. The necessity for propaganda and advertisement of the private corporations is leading to buildings-icons. These types of icons have been considered as (advertising) interventions in the city of Barcelona too. In this point, we have to mention that it is not a generalized phenomenon in Barcelona (as in other capitalist cities), but it is existing and has some initial impacts. See, for example, the celebration for the new year (image 30) and the commemoration for the 50 years from the european convention of Rome, organized by the city’s authorities, both around the Agbar skyscraper. Result of that is the fact that the city continues to support this model and to incorporate in its image-making strategies (image 31) the private initiatives as basic factors of its policy. The contemporary capitalist model, consequently, is not affecting only the city that we are producing, but also the form and the aim of the buildings that we are designing\footnote{It is worthing in this point to underline that the design of those buildings-icons are following different strategies and vary a lot (according to its capacity to generate form and its presence in the surrounding urban environment). So, and in the design level, we can find out different models and design strategies with different impacts. It is not fare (especially because we are architects) to put all the buildings designed to be buildings-icons in the same category. In order to explain better this argument we can refer to two very characteristic buildings-icons of Barcelona: the Agbar headquarters and the Gas Natural headquarters. Both buildings are creating a specific icon and can be characterized as buildings-icons. Both of them form a physical expression of economic power that is been projected through their size, basically their height (image 32, image 33). But they are sharing differences. The Agbar skyscraper has no relationship with its urban environment. The Gas Natural skyscraper intent to communicate with its surroundings, bridging the scale-difference between the local neighbourhood behind it and the high-speed road, in front of it. The Agbar skyscraper has based its design in a concept strategy, it is a building-object, in contrary to the Gas Natural skyscraper, which is shaping a special micro-environment. Gas Natural headquarters is not a building-object, with its strict meaning. The Agbar headquarters’ design is creating a mega-approach, it is using the same construction details, without an intention to differentiate its parts. The Gas Natural headquarters’ design is having a micro-approach, with small differences and imperfections that intent to give a smaller scale to the whole work.}

From this comparison we can see that different design strategies can be applies with the same objective: To strengthen the image of the economic corporations, to highlight physically their power. If we were sociologists, we may had the luxury to reject both models of design, as equally capitalist. But we are not, we are architects and we should try to find out how two strategies with apparently small differences in the approach of the image-making of
5.5.2. **Buildings/icons vs Infrastructure:** The comparison of infrastructure with the buildings-icons [that are representing the new image (the diffusion image) of Barcelona] is crucial for the understanding of the present economical condition of the city. Both of them are connected directly with the new capitalist approach of the city or, in other words, with its political necessity for growth and expansion. Big infrastructures, as the port and the airport, are not expanding only with functional criteria, but with geopolitical and strategical criteria too. On the other hand, the new buildings that are representing the private corporations (and have been converted into the city’s images and icons) have also been related with the economical model.

What is interesting in this comparison between infrastructure and buildings/icons, is that although they are belonging in the same (capitalist) model, they have different grade of support from the part of the citizens. The expansion of big infrastructures, like the port and primarily the airport, is conceived as a positive effect for the geopolitical role of Barcelona and, therefore, is almost unanimously supported. On the contrary, the interventions (basically by the private sector) in the city with a tendency to create buildings-icons (see Forum 2004 and skyscraper Agbar) have been strongly criticised by the citizens and the public opinion. Is this situation a twist of change in the consideration of the urban space and the architectural design?

6. Conclusions.

The objective of this thesis was to investigate the effect of the contemporary mass society and its capitalist model on the spatial and architectural construction of the city of Barcelona. Knowing that the capitalist model is a globalized model (and for that reason basic parts of its content can be found in all major cities), we had the need to investigate and present our assumption that in Barcelona local conditions (created by historical, political, social quaintnesses) are generating a local, unique capitalist model. According to this thesis’ argumentation, in Barcelona are existing concrete factors that determine the specific content and the form of the barcelonean capitalist model. On this rigid base, afterwards we can comment on the particular consequences that this barcelonean capitalist model is provoking to its urban structure, in one hand, and to some of its representative buildings, in the other.

Important role in our argumentation is having the notion of buildings-icons (and the way that they have been constructed), the necessity for understanding the new character of the infrastructures (and how that can develop the local society) and also the different scales of the city’s interventions, with their different implications. This thesis, far away from any intention to make any moral judgement, had tried to present the current reality as precise as possible. The thesis has tried also to reveal the situation of uncertainty that the present Barcelona is facing. After a successful pre-olympic preparation and an optimistic post-olympic era, it gives the impression that it hasn’t any clear idea on what can be its next objective. It is broadly characterized by the notion of ambivalence for its future. Maybe, for this present condition, responsible are the internal contradictions that make any prediction for its future evolution risky. Maybe this ambivalence is a positive characteristic, showing that Barcelona is not following blindly (by copying) one or some examples of the advanced capitalist cities, but it is maintaining some creative internal contradictions, an internal collision of sub-models. This ambiguity maybe is containing a positive message and a hope for future surprises.

Barcelona, conscious that, for different reasons, should compete and try to lead in an international cities’ competition, has framed its battle field, having as expansion vehicle its model and the tools that it is offering. The question is towards which directions and with which objectives? What new initiatives (events?) has to envisage and on which base has to re-invent itself from a new, as it did in the pre-olympic era? Which of its internal sub-models have more to reinforce?

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the contemporary economical actors, can have big (in some cases chaotic) differences in the spatial and urban situations that they are proposing.
7. Sources.
(Information has been taken from the followings:)

Web-sites:
1) http://www.idescat.net/ (Instituto de Estadistica de Catalunya).

Articles in the spanish newspapers:

Bibliography:
Annex

image 1: The natural borders of Barcelona: The mountain, the sea and the 2 rivers. In this framework, Barcelona should construct its expansion strategy.

image 2 (below): The present condition and the different land-uses in the metropolitan region.

image 3 (left, below): The Zona Franca and its broader urban environment.

image 4 (right, below): The complex of the Zona Franca, its industries and its logistic centers.
image 5 (left): the daily network of movements in the catalanian area.

image 6 (below): the mayor infrastructures in the metropolitan Barcelona.

image 7 (right): the network of Catalunya.

image 8: the transportation network of the Netherlands. It is one of the main references worldwide for its efficiency and its capacity to cover the whole country. This network is capable to create a new urban reality: the Megalopolis.
image 9 (above): The Cerda planning and its relationship with the Bourgeois past. This image shows the progress of the initial plan and how it was filled up.

image 10 (left): The Cerda urban plan and its consequence in the 3D reality. This system has proved, through time, that can incorporate various different situations and spatial models.

image 11 (bottom): the city and its relationship with the tourism and leisure. The urban beaches and their role in the creation of a new image for Barcelona.
image 12 (above): Gracia, the squares and their relationship with the city-plot.

image 13 (left): The city fabric and the public spaces that it creates (in the city-center).

image 14 (right): The Forum intervention and the new public spaces that it creates. A public space disconnected from the building. A flowing open space.

image 15 (below, left), image 16 (below, right): Some new initiatives trying to promote new metropolitan concepts. The metropolitan strategic planning was abandoned the last 2 decades with a consequence the intervention to be fragmentary and contradictory. The significance of the Metropolitan planning the last years have rised.
image 17 (above): the metropolitan structure. The relationship of the different parts and the infrastructural system that connects them.

image 18 (left): the Cerda tissue into which each difference can be incorporated.

image 19 (left): spotted interventions. The El Consorci Barcelona’s projects and their distribution in the city’s map.
image 20: Architectural firms and architectural brand-names. The role of the architectural star-system.

image 21: *El Consorci* and the promotion of buildings-icons. This image is from a recent advertisement, including images from projects that will be built in the future.

image 22: One of the bases of the contemporary capitalist model is the network of infrastructures. In this image the infrastructural system of Catalunya.
image 23: The infrastructural system in a smaller scale. “The node of the Trinitat”. Complexity and efficiency are its basic characteristics.

image 24: the expansion of the port. Big infrastructures, as the port and the airport, are not expanding only with functional criteria, but with geopolitical and strategical criteria too.

image 25 (below): the expansion of the airport.
image 26 (left): The architecture as an icon. The image is from the recent exhibition in MoMA (New York).

image 27 (right): The building as an image for diffusion. In the cities’ competition it seems critical the emblematic to have photogenic characteristics.

image 28: The Gas Natural headquarters.

image 30 (below): The New Year 2007 celebrations around Agbar headquarters, organized by the municipality of Barcelona.

image 29 (above): The Agbar headquarters and its relationship with the surroundings.
image 31 (left): the private initiatives and the city’s image-making.

image 32 (below): the position in a city map of the high-rised buildings.

image 33 (above): the skyline of the city of Barcelona and the role of the high-rised buildings.

Sources of the images:
From the book: Busquets Grau, Joan: Barcelona: evolución urbanística de una capital compacta, Barcelona, edición Mapfre, 1992, are the images: 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 32, 33.
From the booklet de El Consorci: Barcelona - El Consorci: Construint el futur, are the images: 19, 21.
From the author of this thesis are the images: 15, 16.
The rest of the images have been taken from the internet.