

Figure 1. Map of Usme without scale: village, part of the urbanised area and urban expansion area "Nueva Usme". Source: Author, 2020.

APPROACH FOR THE ANALYSIS OF SELF-CULTIVATION AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE RESILIENT CAPACITIES OF MIGRANTS IN BARCELONA DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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This paper offers an approach for the analysis of self-cultivation—as we define it—developed mainly by migrants who resorted to self-building during the twentieth century in Barcelona, Spain. Self-cultivation—as the object of study—fulfilled nutritional, ornamental, constructive, environmental, energetic, sanitary, and hand-crafting functions, and most probably helped to improve the resilience of migrant communities in their transit between the rural world and the city. The evolving condition as well as the connecting migrant situation between factors such as origin, social class, and gender place this research in a privileged setting to observe social practices, especially with regards to plans and projects on urban ecosystem infrastructure based on greater social inclusiveness. Through the definition of the key factors for this investigation a proposition for the methodology to be developed is outlined, and also a sample of its application.

self-culture / self-building / ecosistemic infraestructure / migrant resilience / urban agriculture

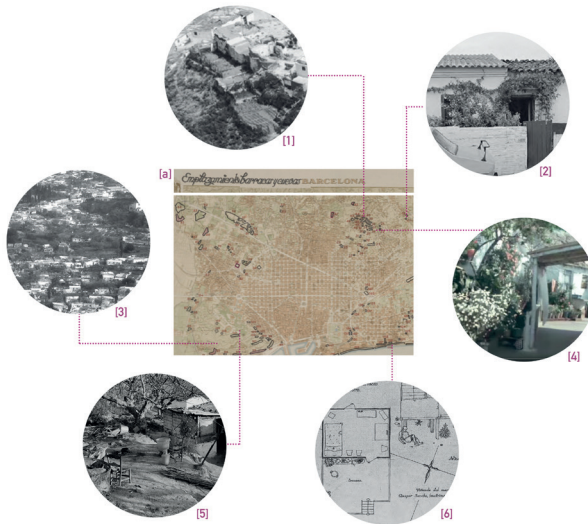


Figure 2. Distribution of self-building settlements in 1949 and detail of some self-cultures associated. Source: Own elaboration from: [a] Plano de Ayuntamiento de Barcelona (1945); [1,2,3,5,6] Camino et al. (2011); and Radio Televisión Española (1983)

The research presented in this document aims to analyse the crops grown by the migrant population that arrived at Barcelona throughout the twentieth century in the context of the rural flight to large Spanish metropolises. The starting hypothesis is that based on the phenomenon of what we call self-cultivation, there are a series of elements that illustrate the resilient capacity of such migrant families that make the transition between their places of origin—mostly rural—and the new urban life.

We define the term “self-culture” as all plant production and management that develops in a self-managed way by fulfilling different functions—nutritional, ornamental, constructive, environmental, and sanitary. The term emphasises its conceptual connection with self-building. Also emphasising in productive and recreational functions, and the use of edible and ornamental species that generally characterise the phenomenon studied. The relationship with aspects of the phenomenon is evident when referring to the Latin root “cult-”, in relation to its structural capacity on social relationships and the connection between the popular culture.

The main purpose of this investigation is to provide knowledge, from a contemporary viewpoint, on the needs of the population, and how urban ecosystem infrastructures can satisfy such needs (Chiesura 2004). Special consideration is given to the popular social classes—the leading protagonists of the studied phe-



Figure 3. Settlement in Monjuïc (1967). Source: Camino et al. (2011)

nomenon. The research also aims to gain knowledge on the ecosystem benefits that result from such interaction. As stated by Corner (2006, p. 28)—paraphrasing Harvey—designers and planners must combine form and aesthetics “with the advancement of more just, politically emancipatory, and ecologically sane mix(es) of spatio-temporal production processes”. Based on this, the research is situated as an ideal observatory given that the studied phenomenon combines the evolving nature of self-building (Turner 2018) and self-cultivation (Dixon, Wolschke-Bulmahn 1990) with social conditions such as class, origin, and gender.

For now, the work focuses mainly on how self-cultivation developed within the framework of the so called *baraquismo*.³ Barcelona together with Madrid was the main destination for migrants during the twentieth century—especially from the countryside to the city. In this context, overcrowded flats were very common, but also the reason why many migrants resorted to self-building (Oyón, Iglesias 2010). This phenomenon was so widespread that in the 1950s it reached at least 100,000 people, 7% of the city’s population (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2014). Despite a lack of concrete data, self-cultures would have been widespread throughout this context (Fig.2). With the data available so far, we conclude that self-cultivation could have contributed to the resilience of individuals and communities in various ways (Guillén-Espallargas 2020): Firstly, through the development of self-crops based

on the so called Traditional Ecological Knowledge (Reyes-García et al. 2014). This would have had consequences on the ecosystem of Barcelona, which was affected by the industrialization processes and therefore, had been receiving less management which ultimately would have meant a threat to certain species (Reyes-García et al. 2014; Guadilla-Sáez et al. 2019) with self-cultivators acting as mitigating factor for the process.

On the other hand, “self-building-migrants” would have constructed their community identity partially around self-cultivation, as a mayor link to their place of origin (Mazumdar, Mazumdar 2012) and as a sign of projection in the place of destination (Nesheim et al. 2006). With this in mind, the role of women stands out in the construction of such settlements (Gallego-Vila 2018) as well as self-cultivators, highlighted by their role in the Popular Iberian Gardening (Pinto 2005, Ríos et al. 2012). In the settlements, self-crops that occupied common spaces would be a demonstration of care for private and collective property (San Miguel 2004). Given the influence of materiality in the construction of a community (Fincher, Jacobs 1998) as well as the generation of social relations based on growing crops (Verde et al. 2000, Pinto 2005), the self-crops would have contributed to the establishment and development of connections that ultimately led to the organization of the demand on better living conditions as well as the strengthening of solidarity ties. Such issues conditioned by the ecosystem in Barcelona intervened in the self-cultivation and way of life of migrants (Watsuji 2016). Given that these same migrants would also have carried out a transformative process with positive consequences on the ecosystem, it is believed that there might be a mutual adaptation in which the system, a priori, would have benefited.

The research will attempt to deepen also other aspects that could enhance the apparent relationship between resilience and self-cultivation, such as the optimization of the internal flow of nutrients—through complex house gardening systems (Pons, Martino 1929)—, matter and energy—through the frequent reuse of materials (Pons, Martino 1929).

METHODOLOGICAL OUTLINE FOR THE ANALYSIS OF SELF-CROPS

The formulation of the hypotheses presented above is a result of a preliminary review based on photographic, cartographic, and documentary material. Since there are no previous investigations that address the phenomenon of this study, we are in the starting analytical phase, which allows us to have a general overview of the issue through which we can determine study cases and periods to be addressed in depth. Once cases have been determined, they will be defined on the basis of

the abiotic and biotic factors of the site that, a priori, determined the self-cultures in each case. Furthermore, we will target the practices of self-cultivation, comparing them with interviews that gather direct experiences from the main actors who intervened in the phenomenon. The dialogue between direct and indirect sources will be reviewed through a series of analytical devices—with a desire for detail—that will allow us to visualise the set of factors that determine the influence on resilience, as previously described, and to reconstruct—as far as possible—the specificity of such phenomenon (Fig. 3). This data will be subjected to environmental evaluation in order to establish an ecosystemic balance of the different actions that were carried out. Lastly, the structure of representation, description and communication is currently being examined. Below is a sample of materials (Fig. 1) that allow a partial approach on the application of the guide box.

CONCLUSIONS

Through what has previously been addressed, we have concluded that in the detailed analysis of self-cultivation we hope to verify a source of great interest in order to understand part of the resilient mechanism of the migrant communities that resorted to self-building. Furthermore, self-cultivation recognises an active willingness of the popular classes to address the transformation of integrating into urban life with the association of important ecosystem benefits. This activity, established in a large number of ways, opens up various possibilities for managing urban ecosystem infrastructure in contemporary situations that can have an impact on quality of life improvements. Finally, we consider that the study of self-cultivation in Barcelona during the twentieth century can serve as a basis for developing similar work elsewhere. In a context of attraction of large cities in which self-building is the only viable way to generate housing (Turner 2018), a deeper understanding of needs and requirements in relation to self-cultivation could make a substantial contribution to the effectiveness of a progressive, procedural, possible, and self-managed development.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Term that has historically defined self-building in the city of Barcelona.

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