

PLATFORM

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An 'identity project' for Barcelona

For some years Barcelona has been undergoing a renewal of its concept as a city. It is a project that gives a new sense to municipal policy and the efficient work of the local government. It is a project that is not only about the city but for the city and its population. It is an ambitious project that is both global and local at the same time.

This is a project which must provide solutions for a city that has changed a lot over a very short period of time. So much so, that as Jordi Borja pointed out some weeks ago [El País, January 31] some residents are beginning to feel a certain detachment towards their city. It is a feeling that at times comes from a sense of loss, as Josep Maria Benet i Jornet so brilliantly portrayed in latest play, Salamandra.

Even so, the city is more alive than ever. It is a city that *beats*, as the City Council terms it. It is a city in which, alongside the locals, live more than 260,000 foreign residents, from both EU and non-EU countries, as well as some few million tourists that visit throughout the year. How then, do we come to terms with this dichotomy? How can we avoid some people feeling as if they are losing their city, while others believe that they are being left out?

In the first place, by accepting the reality of this new circumstance. We cannot continue thinking that we are the same as we were ten years ago when we are not. Barcelona, along with the other cities in this country, must take a good look at itself and recreate a pride in the city based on renewed foundations. Any policies which are adopted should not only be ambitious but also be anchored firmly in reality, as today we must recognise that the recipes of the 80s and 90s are no



Members of Barcelona's foreign community calling for papers in a recent demonstration / qp

longer of any use to us. The moment has arrived in which we must create a new identity-as-citizen or, as sociologist Manuel Castells terms it, an "identity project".

Castells came up with this concept more than 10 years ago as an answer to the inculcation of defensive postures and behaviours characteristic of numerous social, cultural and religious movements of diverse persuasion. These postures are based, in their exclusivity and rejection, on cultural or religious elements. Faced with the threat of the generalisation of any such fortress mentality, within this

framework of societies with a growing cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, Castells proposes the creation of a process of identity

Today in Barcelona, as in other large cities, there is a risk that such a fortress mentality may well appear. It is a risk that has to be fought not only with ambitious social policies, but also with policies of social integration. And to do this, we need to begin to talk openly of the on-going changes that these 260,000 new inhabitants of Barcelona imply. We also need to begin to give to this new identity (whether national, linguistic, cultural or

religious) the importance it has in today's societies, which are characterised by their diversity. We must understand that integration is not possible without the recognition of cultural, as well as religious diversity, thus implying places of worship different from those traditional and the acceptance of diversity in the manner of worship in public spaces.

In order to manage this reality, the moment has come for Barcelona to elaborate a new concept of city. It is time allow for all Barcelona residents, whatever their origin, to enjoy an identity project, "that which is built in practice when a community mobilises around a shared project", in the words of Manuel Castells. Without this shared identity, without this common project, there can be no policy beyond those of lip-service politics.

This is mayor Jordi Hereu's great challenge: to make sense of this new reality for the public by redrawing the map which will bring us back into contact with our own city. To do this, he must turn to his own generation, those who were born in the sixties and seventies, who are capable of thinking about the Barcelona they want to pass on to their children in 2020.

We must also count on the new residents of Barcelona, because the city's future middle classes and the popular classes that will continue to breathe life into this city are to be found here, among those who arrived not long ago. They are an intrinsic part of this identity project that Barcelona must be, and we cannot ignore them. We have a great opportunity and we cannot afford to let it escape.

This article first appeared in El País newspaper of February 21

LOST FOR WORDS

Shut up and fight

I too have booed Oleguer Presas. The Sabadell-born Barça player has been roundly lambasted inside and outside the stadium for his much publicised critique of the state of democracy in Spain. That, however, is not the reason why the defender – both on the pitch and as an outspoken supporter of the *okupa* movement – has received the full force of my displeasure, which has more to do with his uninspiring performances.

I still haven't read the offending article that ironically casts doubt on the neutrality of the Spanish judicial system and I doubt I'll get round to it. But observing the general howl of disapproval his opinions have provoked makes it obvious that the censure is not as much about what he stated – other commen-

tators have made similar points without being publicly goaded for it – as the fact that he, a mere footballer, dared to speak out on issues that do not concern him.

The fact is we like our football players to be stupid. Like gladiators in a Roman arena, they are there to entertain us with their successes and failures, and the more blood the better. "Take this sword (ball) and stick it in that guy (net) over there, and less of your fretting about the level of investment in the public health system," is our attitude.

Feudal lords, divinely-anointed bishops and absolute monarchs are thankfully in the past. In our society, power comes from below, whether



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spending or voting power. Don't get me wrong, power to the people is how it should be and what

we've been aiming for all along. Woe betide the company (for example, Leche Pascual) or the political party (the PP government in 2004, for instance) that gets its strategy wrong. If not, we will withdraw our support, the basis of their power, without warning or apology, leaving them high and dry, marginalised and irrelevant.

The problem is that this power has made us vain and lazy and we take our supremacy for granted. Increasingly obsessed with the trappings of materialism, we vote less and buy fewer serious newspapers every day. We are like a

pampered emperor who flies into a rage about the size of his grapes while paying no attention to affairs of state, which are left in the hands of corrupt officials acting in his name.

Oleguer Presas is just one local example in a long list of celebrities attacked for taking up a public stance on politics or social affairs. Whether we are talking about U2 lead singer, Bono, or heartthrob actor, George Clooney, their interventions have always invited sneering criticism from wide sections of the public and much of the media.

The message is clear to sports people, rock stars, actors or models: keep your opinions to yourself and stick to the job of entertaining us or you will be ridiculed in public. Sadly, nowadays the same often goes for politicians.