

Participation

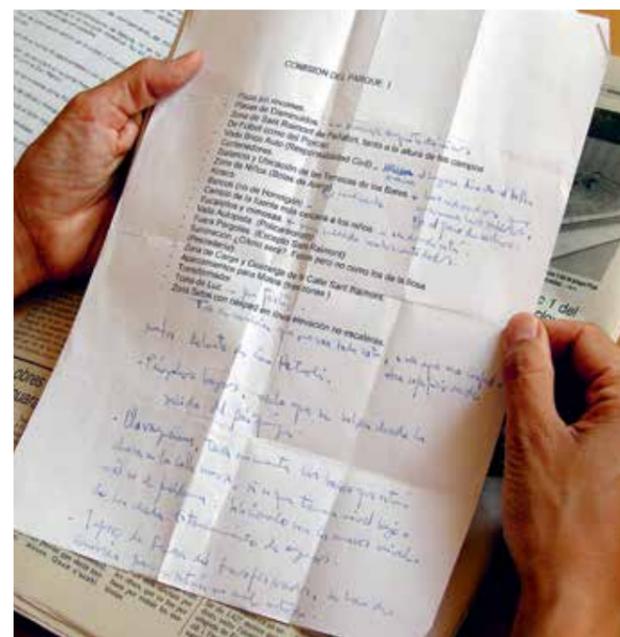
After winning a 2002 competition to renovate Plaza Pio XII, near the Gran Via and where the municipal area of Sant Adrià de Besòs begins, we were invited by the city hall to embark on a consultation process in conjunction with the Neighborhood Association. Local participation in an architecture project is still unusual in Barcelona, and was even less common at that time. With the first ideas about the future of the site, an informative session was presented in the plaza that was the subject of the project, in order to find out if they were happy with it and if they had suggestions to make.

Sheet, speakers and model

The first chapter of the process took place in a festive atmosphere: the local residents hung a sheet in the square and we took along a projector and the model. The Neighborhood Association brought some speakers on wheels, and while we waited for it to get dark they played summery music. Intermittently they announced the “Meeting in Park 1 [the name the plaza was given when the housing blocks were built]... for all those who want to learn about the project... this evening at seven...” When the light began to fade, we began to show the slides of the proposal, in the middle of the plaza. The residents followed the explanation and approached the model to touch it. The city’s head of planning led the meeting and, with the help of a single microphone, directed the question-and-answer session. People continued to arrive until they totaled some two hundred.

Monitoring committee

At this open-air session held in the plaza the next stage was prepared: setting up a monitoring committee, which we would meet with at regular intervals over the next six months. The idea was that the residents would pass their ideas and concerns to the committee members, and they would pass them on to us so that we could progressively add detail to the project.



There were some five meetings of this kind, some in the plaza and others in the Neighborhood Association offices. After the meeting we had a list of issues that the residents were unclear about, or believed should still be included. These issues were very specific: non-slip paving to avoid falls in damp winter weather; separation between areas for adults and children; and avoiding bushes where drug dealers can hide—this being a common activity in the current plaza. The type of planting was discussed generally: planting eucalyptus trees where the plaza turns the corner; maintaining the willow trees in the car parking area; keeping the three palm trees planted years ago by a resident to mark the birth of her children; and the colonnade of lime trees along one side of the park. Other issues were also discussed: the access requirements for motor vehicles (ambulances, deliveries, and so on) in front of the buildings; placement of outdoor tables in the bars that give on to the plaza; the location of trash collection points; and the design of the benches (recycling the existing ones). It was agreed that a line of small pergolas included in the project entry would be omitted, while the larger pergola would be retained in its original form: the residents, who had always felt they were in a kind of no man’s land between Sant Adrià and Barcelona, didn’t want to lose an element that could help provide the new plaza with a strong identity.

These meetings were very helpful in giving shape to the project: our responses to the lists of residents’ requirements, in the form of drawings, gradually built up trust on both sides that we were building together a well-rounded project for the site.

The model in the window-shop

Everything came together in an agenda that began with the meetings and adjustments to the draft project, between May and December 2002, up to the delivery of the executive project in mid-2003. The work began later the same year and continued until the end of 2004 and, in the course of the work, a model and a number of perspective views were set up in the window-shop of a garage on the plaza, for people to see the final plans. Over the different phases of the work the residents’ representatives remained alert to progress, and continued to participate in the project with comments, questions and observations, whether in a personal capacity or through the monitoring committee. They conveyed in both directions the issues of concern to the residents as well as matters internal to the construction work, meaning they played a key role in keeping the neighborhood informed, and helped to ensure that once the plaza was completed, it was rapidly incorporated into everyday use.

Plaza Pio XII Sant Adrià del Besòs, Barcelona, 2002-2005

