

DON'T KILL

WHO KILLED PERE IV?

Greta Girone, Helena Trancoso, Daniela Kleiman

Contemporary Landscape Projects Critique

Master in Landscape Architecture Barcelona, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya



Carrer Pere IV

COME, LOOK AT THIS! THERE HAS BEEN A MURDER!

Who is the victim? Who is Pere IV?

Originally the Pere IV axis existed as a main territorial path with great importance to the city development, linking Castel Montjuic and the primary road to France.

The visual connection between the Castle and La Serralada Marina is still present.

Due to its historical role and importance in the industrial development of the city, Pere IV is one of the most evident examples that survived Cerda's imposed grid, which unifies Barcelona's urban fabric.

The incompatibility between both traces marks the atmosphere of Poble Nou.

Nowadays, seen as a residual trace of its industrial past, the axis has lost its essential function as a territorial, urban and local connector.

Both ends of the axis are unclear.

HOW DID THIS CAME ABOUT?: UNDERSTANDING PERE IV

Our first step of the investigation was to take a close and objective look into the real situation of the site, the victim and the crime scene. We had at least 4 layers of information we needed to digest and deconstruct:

22@: Dissecting the 22@ urban plan, we could identify the main social conflicts that marked the past years of Poblenou. These conflicts arisen mainly due to the incompatibility between the established dynamics and activities that strengthen the neighborhood identity, and the "ideal urban plan" based on the total rebranding of the area, focusing on increasing the attention (and value) of potential technological investments. The new technological hub of the city. The plan appears to lack of any social integration, dialogue with the preexisting architecture and history. It chops the entire Pere IV axis into different "technological zones".

REALITY: Until 2018, Pere IV has suffered four major urban interventions. The first one is exactly in the middle, due to the expansion of the Diagonal. It not only creates an evident cut between the northern and southern parts of the axis, but it achieves to "crown" it

with a new enclosed public park that rejects the city's history and the surroundings with its "green walls".

The 3rd and 4th urban interventions are new streets cross sections, the pacification of the urban street. Once again, this is seen as a unique opportunity, in this "free site", to expose the great Barcelona branding of innovative solutions for public space. On the southern section, implemented on a more established area with more activity, the project appears to unite the preexisting architecture and the new skyscrapers near the Diagonal axis, giving the neighborhood a new "face". The northern part is a total different situation. Still under construction, the project for this area looks detached from the site and is almost built for a future city that is still to come and erase the gigantic industrial drosscapes.

PERCEPTION (VISIT): Our first physical encounter with this case was two days after the investigation was presented to us. As we walked along the crime scene and its surroundings we could sense the fragments left of Pere IV. After crossing over the train tracks it felt like a brake from Barcelona. We found a strange mixture of activity in groundfloor, low density neighborhood, industrial heritage and empty plots. It was a limbo, we could not describe where we were standing.

As we walked towards Parc Central we could see more density, residential use, new and renewed buildings, and activity in groundfloor. The streets were getting wider, skyscrapers appeared, it looked like a business district, everything very new.

We entered the Parc Central and there was silence, it seemed as if we walked into another dimension. It was very empty and the walls surrounding it prevented whatever contact with the outside world. We felt it was completely isolated. It was hard to have an orientation but we kept walking.

Once outside we kept walking towards Rambla de Prim. It felt as if we crossed a border of some kind. There was almost no activity, there were large empty plots and the industrial heritage was evident. Interventions on the old buildings were made by the few residents of the area. It seemed it was a way to feel some attachment, make it their own and give life to the street.

Closer to Rambla de Prim we saw big industrial warehouses abandoned, little activity in groundfloor, small workshops. We started to feel a bit tired and we realized there was absolutely no shadow on the way, the sun was at its hardest and it was 30 degrees. The area was of low density, few residential buildings. It

was complete contrast compared to what we saw before Parc Central. How can this also be Pere IV, he had so many faces.

WHAT IS IT NOW? : **THE FACTS**

Pere IV crosses two districts Provençals del Poblenou in the north and Poblenou in the south. If we analyze and compare the statistics for both districts we can find evidence of the radical changes in time. From 2011 to 2017, Provençals del Poblenou, lost 20% of its total polulation, while Poblenou, gained 5% of its total population.

The increase of land value per m2 gives evidence of the speculation in real estate development that this area is suffering, from 2011 to 2017 Provençals del Poblenou's and Poblenou's land value has increased 20%, and their rentals (month/m2) increased 30%. These increases forced many residents' evictions that could no longer afford living there. It has also resulted in demolitions of old buildings for the construction of new developments.

The northern district landuse is 28% industrial and only 12% residential, while in the southern district, Poblenou, 16% is industrial and 27% residential. Just by looking at these numbers we can see that the area is divided by its use, this may explain the lack of activity in the northern area.

WHAT SHOULD WE THINK OF IT? : **Pere IV is dying**

Perception of others – potential witnesses interview (positions and versions)

We decided to go to the crime scene to ask around and see if we could find some clues. The first subject was Maria, a 47-year-old woman who works at the Escola Pere IV, "I love Poblenou, I lived here all my life and worked for the school for 14 years, sadly I had to move six years ago because suddenly the rent increased and I could no longer afford it. Many of my neighbors had to move as well. Everything changed, Pere IV is a line of before and after depending where you are standing." Nostalgia just poured out if her eyes, her attachment to Pere IV and all Poblenou was very clear.

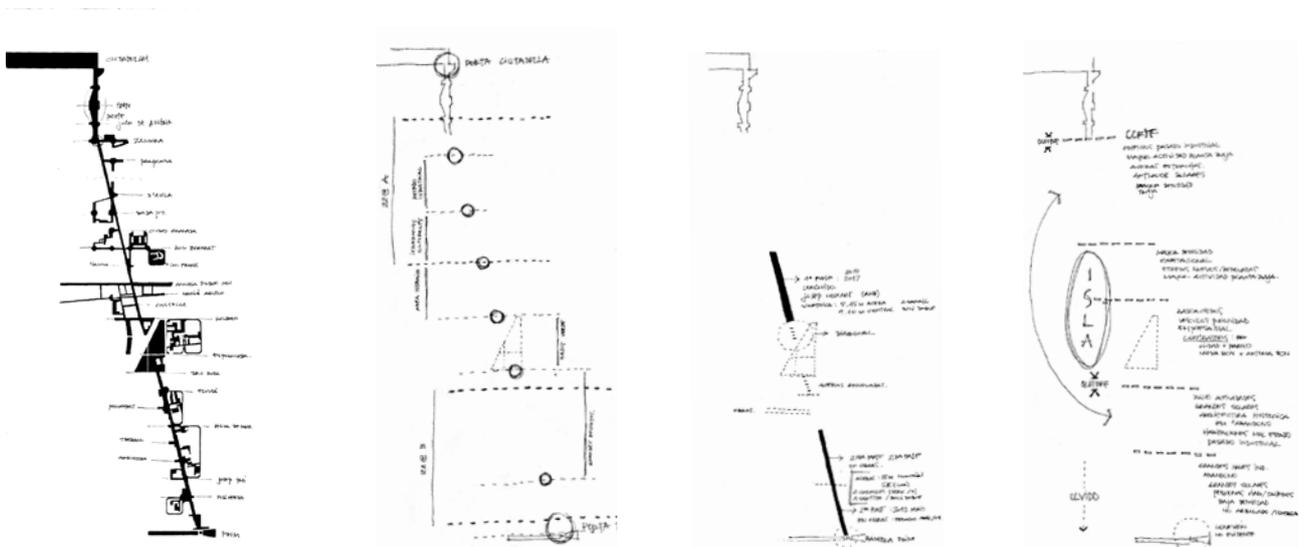
After a while we saw an old lady walking by and we approached her. It seemed she lived there for a long time, so we thought she could give us more information. Indeed she has lived in Poblenou since 1944, she knew all about Pere IV. When we asked her about it she immediately started to tell her story with a lot of rage, "Pere IV had life, it was always busy. I had it all there, my school, my bakery, everything. Poblenou is now trendy, rents are ridiculously high, Barcelona has sold her identity for a plate of lentils. Pere IV is useless, disconnected, DEAD!" The woman could not hide her anger and walked away. She was definitely resentful.

pere iv

22@

reality

visit



We decided to take a brake and grab some coffee at café Caffeine, we overheard some foreigners talking in the next table. We thought we could ask them some questions and get a different perspective. Robert and his wife recently moved in to Poblenou one year ago, they did not know about Pere IV, but told us they frequently go to the Parc Central to walk their dog. The only thing they could say about Pere IV was that it was quiet, modern and had an industrial vibe. This was not very useful, so we had to keep asking around.

We walked through the Parc Central to see if we could find more people, but it was very empty, may be because of the time. But we finally encountered a middle-aged woman walking her dogs in the Parc Central, she told us she has lived in Poblenou for ten years and experienced the radical changes of Pere IV overtime. Surprisingly she did not know about Pere IV's history or importance, she only knew about its existence, she said, "Pere IV was the ugliest street in Poblenou with a lot of traffic, now it is quiet, great to walk through, ride bikes and safe to enjoy more of Poblenou." We found it very odd that she lived all these events and had no idea of Pere IV.

We walked further towards Rambla de Prim and stopped near Carrer de la Selva de Mar at a small workshop that look it had been in business for a while. Inside we met the owner, a middle-aged man that works and lives there since 1992. First he seemed surprised of our questioning, but then he relaxed and started to tell his version. He told us how important Pere IV was for the neighborhood; he described it as the spinal cord. He said "Pere IV is dying. Decisions are made without taking citizens' necessities into account and only acting on speculation and ambition. Everything seems disconnected now, I have been losing a lot of customers, Pere IV used to be very busy and lively." After these interviews we had a lot to analyze and think of, these versions gave us a lot of clues.

LARGER PERSPECTIVE :

The 3 Ws - what + why = who : Deciphering the Typologies of Death

After a few tough weeks going over the clues, the witnesses' testimonials and the facts that only gave us a glimpse of the real situation revolving the potential murder of our victim (Pere IV), the team decided to break down the information we gather until now, using logical and critical thinking, to see if we could find some hidden logic and crack this case wide open. After we hit a wall on the case, where motives see-

med elusive and the original suspect didn't quite fit when we looked at a larger perspective of the crime (and definitely did not answer all of our questions), we needed to go back to the first steps of criminal investigation: determinate the what + why = who. What happened? Why did it happen that way? Understanding these two basic questions should lead us to: Who did it? Was it just one killer? What was the motivation behind the actions that took place?

This was no minor case for a couple of fresh investigators. Our victim was extremely complex. Pere IV had been, in more than 100 years, attacked several times, not by one, but probably by multiple suspects, and it is now hanging on the balance between life and death.

Trying to find the what + why, we started on the one thing that was clear to all of us, the wounds on the victim showed us different patterns of attack. This should imply different suspects, so we broke these patterns into 2 different categories of death. What we called: The Typologies of Death. In order to be successful in preventing the final death of Pere IV, we need to differentiate between The Physical Death and The Soul death to fully understand the motivation and methodologies of the killers.

On the physical death category, we had two main suspects: The City (with potential to evolve to a Soul Death) and The Architect. These were careless murderers who left visible traces of their attacks. The lack of empathy and respect for the victim made it easy for us to trace their identity, motivations and methods. But we need to make a note on this particular category of Death: Our victim proved to be extremely resilient through different changes throughout time. This demonstrates that the so called "Physical Deaths" could, in the end, be treated and healed in time. To have a chance in doing so, our reading and critical eye should be extremely precise in identifying where exactly are this wounds and what actions could prevent this physical death turning into a soul death.

On the soul death category, ours suspects, The Citizens, The Private Investors and potentially The City, were more slippery and hard to track/identify. These are normally patient, coldblooded and meticulous murderers. And the consequences on this type of death can be devastating and definite, with no turning back.

Here are the transcribed notes of the investigation:

THE ARCHITECT

(typology of death: physical)

Motive: money, glory, convenience, ego.

Weapon: name, insensibility, carelessness.

How: hired assassin.

Consequences: forgetfulness, oblivion.

THE CITY

(typology of death: physical, potential soul)

Motive: Barcelona brand, sell an image

Weapon: urban plan: @22

How: poisoning (slow death)

Consequences: isolation, lost of identity, it attracts the external at the expense of the expulsion of the local.

THE CITIZENS

(typology of death: soul)

Motive: extreme nostalgia, selfishness, individuality, inflexibility, neglect, fear of change.

Weapon: lack of unity and sense of community, lack of dialogue, polarization.

How: self-destruction.

Consequences: abandonment, fragmentation, detachment.

THE PRIVATE INVESTORS / SPECULATORS

(typology of death: soul)

Motive: money.

Weapon: pressure, destruction, disrespect, dismantle.

How: premeditated murder.

Consequences: gentrification, increase in land value, expulsion, eviction, land use change, loss of historic value

CONCLUSION:

In this story, all the involved entities have their share of blame for this crime. It is evident that each of the subjects mentioned, has played a fundamental role in the physical and partly spiritual death of Pere IV over time, acting selfishly and without foresight. In many cases, the physical and moral actions carried out were not really the result of an act of bad faith, on the contrary, it was the desire to preserve what led to so many decisions and proposals.

Could there have been more respect for the history of the place? Of course.

Could the projects have paid more attention to the society and personality of the district? Without a doubt.

If they wanted to make changes over time, could the different entities have been more sensitive to the future feedback of the people who live on the street and its surroundings? Absolutely.

Are there still some aspects that can be saved? Yes!

The list of the guilty is long, but it is now also long the time that separates us from the first murderous act. What leaves us a glimmer of hope is the possibility of saving the soul. The historical soul, the one that makes the wrinkles of old ladies wrinkled when they talk about it with nostalgia; the soul of the neighborhood, always sewed by the long axis that with strength and character still tries to save itself from the incontrovertible orthogonality of Cerda's grid; the one that tries to jump the glass walls of the central park to keep together new skyscrapers with small shops; the one that still houses beautiful industrial works that pray not to be reused as new high-tech campuses.

How can this be saved? It is clear that the first and perhaps only step forward is the change of attitude that all the entities should have towards the future of Pere IV. You can no longer just think of the prestige of the starchitect forgetting history, you can no longer want to sell an image of a brilliant rational city when the real image is that of unhappy citizens, you cannot choose a plot make large residential buildings or technological clusters without thinking about the history of the corner shop that has always been there, and neither can you choose this as a solution to avoid the death of a piece of street in your neighborhood.

In this investigation, a strong negative attitude with the past has been found, almost a nostalgic memory that translates into the collapse of the possible collaboration between citizens and city. The citizen com-

plains that before Pere IV was a better place, that he had to abandon it because the rent is too high, that where before there was a neighborhood cinema now there is a skyscraper. All true, all justifiable, but what you are not aware of, is that seeing Pere IV as dead and defenseless has disastrous consequences. It means that the citizens, who have now lost all hope, give their approval to the complete change of the little historical heritage still intact. New projects include the destruction of historic houses and shops, of industrial buildings of magnificent beauty and great architectural value, and citizens currently give their disillusioned "yes" because in the end it is better to see this than the almost deserted road.

The city meanwhile, followed closely by pretentious architects and eager contractors, wins the battle for the demolition of another piece of history in favor of money-making buildings without much trouble. It is not aware of the already great damage done in recent years to this historic street and the entire neighborhood. Or maybe it is, but closes his eyes, yielding to the lust of yet another work of a starchitect and the disrespectful longing of contractors who are just waiting to get their hands on the old houses.

Everybody would look happy after all. Nobody wants to see a part of the city turned off, practically dead. No one seems to realize, however, that this is their ultimate weapon to permanently kill the soul of Pere IV. The right compromise is not this, you must once again have attention, sensitivity and respect for the place you are going to touch. Such a drastic change of use, of character, will imply sooner or later a change of users, first in small steps, then definitive, and no longer, in a few years will have consciousness and memory of what existed under the new big constructions.

This is not to say that the historical remains should be left as they were, untouched and unchanged, as if they were ancient ruins. On the contrary, progress and improvements are necessary, but it must always be done remembering where it is planned, without repeating the past mistakes, based only on values and objectives too far from the historical permanence. The aim should be to recreate a neighborhood street, suitable for everyone, with activity and vitality, with better spaces for walking, creating new interdisciplinary dynamics, but always with an eye for respect. Don't kill Pere IV, Pere IV will survive.

Sources:

- <http://cartahistorica.muhba.cat>
- 22@ Barcelona Plan
- 10 years of 22@: the innovation district, Adjuntament de Barcelona
- https://www.slideshare.net/Barcelona_cat/leix-pere-iv-eix-cvic-i-patrimonial-del-poblenou-de-la-ciutadella-al-bess
- Roadmap to a new 22@, The Role of BIT foundation, David Martinez Garcia
- Poblenou: Més de 150 anys d'història, Arxiu Històric del Poble Nou
- Anuario Estadístico de la Ciudad de Barcelona
- <http://www.bcn.cat/estadistica/castella/dades/anuari/cap01/C0101050.htm>
- <http://www.bcn.cat/estadistica/castella/dades/inf/barris/a2011>
- Barcelona Dynamics