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Social Processes in the Production of Public Spaces: Structuring forces and actors in the renewal of a deprived neighbourhood in Barcelona

CAMILO CALDERON* & LORENZO CHELLERI**

*Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agriculture Science, Uppsala, Sweden;
**Department of Geography, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

ABSTRACT: *Within urban design there is increasing interest in the close relationship between social, economic and political processes and the production of public spaces. This relationship, however, often remains abstract and is rarely illustrated in empirical studies. This paper introduces an institutionalist understanding to the production of public spaces, whereby emphasis is placed on the analysis of structuring forces and actors as a way to apprehend the complexity of the social processes guiding and influencing the planning, design and management of public spaces. The institutionalist understanding is illustrated in the case study of an urban renewal project in Barcelona. The results of the case study show the contrasts and tensions between the structuring forces and the different actors operating in the project, how structuring forces favoured the interest and claims of some actors over those of others, and the potential risks and challenges that this has for the use and value of the public spaces produced by the project. Thus, the article concludes by stressing the need to better understand and address the diversity and conflicts of interests that are ever-present in the development of public spaces and the power relations that characterise their decision-making processes.*

> "Cities are socially determined in their forms and in their processes. Some of their determinants are structural, linked to deep trends of social evolution that transcend geographic or social singularity. Others are historically and culturally specific. And all are played out, and twisted, by social actors that oppose their interests and their values, to project the city of their dreams and to fight the space of their nightmares" (Manuel Castells, 1993).

Introduction

Within the field of urban design, there is increasing interest in understanding the close relationship between social, economic and political processes and the way public spaces are provided and managed (Schmidt and Németh, 2010; Thompson, 2002; Inam 2002). This interest is based on the growing acceptance of theoretical conceptualisations of *space*, where it is argued that the production of cities, neighbourhoods and public spaces cannot be separated from their wider socio-political context or from the multiple, contrasting and overlapping ways people use, value and perceive them (Lefebvre, 1991). Central to this understanding is that *space*, and thus public space, results from complex social processes in which a wide variety of forces and actors interact,

combine, conflict and oppress, in order to determine how an urban area develops (Healey, 2007, Massey, 2005).

Understanding public spaces as the result of interactions or struggles between different forces and actors is not new. In geography and urban sociology, this is well established and has led to important discussions of democracy, justice, difference, conflicts and power relations in the planning, design and management of public spaces (see e.g. Low and Smith, 2006, Mitchell, 2006). Although such discussions are gradually entering the field of urban design, studies within this field continue to focus almost exclusively on matters of form, function and aesthetics, while the complexity of the social processes influencing the production of public spaces and their implications for urban design practice are seldom discussed or analysed (Cuthbert, 2007; Inam 2002). Therefore this study sought *to understand how different forces and actors influence the production of public spaces and to illustrate such understanding in the case study of the renewal of a deprived neighbourhood of Barcelona's metropolitan area*.

The paper begins with a theoretical discussion that provides an institutionalist understanding of the production of public spaces. Within this understanding, attention is given to the analysis of structuring forces and the variety of actors and agency relations as a way to apprehend the complexity of the social processes guiding and influencing the planning, design and management of public spaces. Using the theoretical discussion as an analytical framework, the second part of the paper presents the case study of the urban renewal project, using material obtained in field visits, the analysis of documentation related to the project and interviews with planners, urban designers, social workers, community leaders and local residents. In the discussion section, the results of the case study are used as an illustrative example of how forces and actors came together and influenced the public spaces produced by the project, showing the contrasting interests and power relations present during its planning, design and implementation. Based on the theoretical discussion and the results of the case study, the paper concludes by highlighting the need to better understand and address the diversity and conflicts of interests that are ever-present in the development of public spaces and the power relations that characterise their decision-making processes.

Social processes in the production of public spaces: An institutionalist understanding

In order to understand the complexity of the social processes shaping cities, neighbourhoods and public spaces, several authors have suggested the need to understand the relationship between the political-economy guiding the development of an urban area and the interaction between different actors involved in and affected by such

development (Cuthbert, 2007; Healey, 2007; Bentley, 1999; Madanipour, 1996). Central to this analytical framework is Giddens' (1984) *theory of structuration* showing how the interrelations between structuring forces and actors shape actions and decisions within society. Building on Giddens' ideas, Healey (2007, 1999, 1992) developed an institutionalist model for the analysis of the processes shaping the qualities of places. Within this model she argues that the ways of seeing and knowing the world and the ways of acting in it, are dynamic, deeply contextual and contingent to the interactions between the structuring forces and the different actors operating in each socio-political context. In other words, since there are parallel (and many times contrasting) ways of seeing and thus acting in cities, neighbourhoods and public spaces (Maruani and Amit-Cohen, 2007; Madanipour, 1996), it is the interactions between structuring forces and actors of a specific time/space context which determine, and at the same time exclude, the specific ways in which problems are framed and solutions are conceived within a particular urban plan or urban design project.

Although the applicability of Healey's model has had both its critics and supporters (e.g. Guy & Henneberry, 2000; Ball, 1998), in the field of urban design Smith et al. (2009) and Madanipour (2003, 1996) have used Healey's institutionalist perspective as a way to broaden the understanding of public spaces, from focusing on the physical alone to understanding the complex economic, social, cultural and organisational (i.e. institutional) factors affecting physical outcomes. From the dominant aesthetic paradigm to today's plurality of lifestyles, from the value of land in the market to the political and economic ideas guiding urban policies, it is the interactions between structuring forces and actors that create the lens through which planners and designers understand problems and frame solutions. As such, it determines the ideas and actions that are to be incorporated or prioritised in an urban project, as well as the inclusion or exclusion of actors, their interests and values, during its decision-making processes. This is ultimately reflected in decisions concerning the type of public spaces developed, allowing certain forms of collective/social behaviour, uses and functions and facilitating certain forms of movements, users, relations to the environment or aesthetics, while excluding others.

The way in which structuring forces and actors influence the planning, design and management of public spaces and the implications for planning and urban design practices are discussed below.

Structuring forces and public spaces

Based on Giddens (1984), it can be argued that planners, urban designers, landscape architects and architects do not operate in a vacuum divorced from the influence of structural dynamics in society. Instead, their work is influenced by structuring forces that operate in each context, city or neighbourhood, although, as it will be explained at the end of this section, structuring forces are at the same time conditioned and shaped by the actions

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of these and other professionals and actors. Giddens (1984) refers to these structuring forces as allocative structures (the way material and human resources and distributed), authoritative structures (formal and informal rules and norms), and systems of meaning (knowledge and cultural structures which frame how actions are developed and legitimated). According to Healey (2007) and Madanipour (1996), within planning and urban design these structuring forces correspond to: 1) the sources and amounts of resources allocated for the development of an urban area; 2) the regulations and procedures governing the development of an urban area; and 3) the ideologies or discourses which inform what is considered to be the appropriate development trajectory for an urban area.

Structuring forces have guided urban development throughout time, observed in the influence that the social dynamics of a given time-space context has had over physical form. In recent decades the structuring forces influencing the development of western cities have been highly determined by the new role of information technologies, the formation of a global economy and the neoliberalisation of urban policies (Castells, 1993; Harvey, 1989). In many cases this has led to an entrepreneurial stance of *discourses* that guide urban development towards international ranking, global competiveness and economic growth, where public spaces are used for attracting high income groups, capital investment and tourism (Beaten, 2011; Pomeroy, 2011; Kohn, 2004). It has also resulted in the way that *resources* for the development of urban areas are increasingly dependent on private investors or often allocated to projects that render short term benefits or the highest profit on capital investment; which in turn has led to an increasing commercialisation, privatisation and homogenisation of social life and public spaces (Turner, 2002; Zukin, 1998) Affected also by the current socio, economic and political dynamics has been the *regulations and procedures* guiding urban development. Although these are now considered to be more democratic, they often reinforce the power and involvement of only a few actors and interests, while excluding less powerful ones (Rios, 2008; Van Deusen, 2002) or seen in the way that that principles such as 'sustainable development' or 'place-making' are often shaped in ways that favour only a few (Foster, 2005; Aravot, 2002).

The increasing awareness and priority given to social and environmental problems and the ratification of national and international policies on sustainable development has also influenced the structuring forces guiding urban development in many cities today. Thus *discourses, resources, regulations and procedures* have increasingly aimed towards alleviating global warming and promoting social integration, cultural identity and democratic principles. This has resulted in public space strategies based on green infrastructure plans, pedestrian and bicycle friendly neighbourhoods, place-making and participatory approaches, among others.

Although structuring forces guide and condition planning and urban design practice, the level of influence that such forces have depends on the way that the actors operating in a specific context and project, uphold, reject or manage them (Healey, 2007; Giddens, 1984). This is a central argument in Giddens' theory of structuration showing the interdependent relationships between structure and agency which Healey (2007, p. 20) describes as the '*relation between the shaping power of (…) structuring forces, local particularities and the ability of individuals to imagine and to mobilize attention and action, discourses and practices, in ways that challenge and potentially change these structuring forces, as well as sustaining them*". This means that attention needs to be given to the different actors involved in and affected by an urban project and the power or capacity they have to influence that project, which will be discussed in the next section.

Actors and public spaces

The development of a public space has the capacity to affect, among others, property rights, business interests, social dynamics, health and wellbeing, movement patterns, ecological networks and collective and individual values about a place. Consequently, the provision or transformation of a public space touches upon the interests and values of a wide variety of actors (individuals, groups or institutions) with different driving dynamics and histories, with diverse concerns about and attachments to the same place. From institutions, corporations, and investors (*funders*) to politicians and policymakers (*regulators*), from developers, planners and designers (*producers*) to *occupiers* and everyday *users*, different actors claim public spaces in different ways in order to carry out desired activities or achieve a desired state (Carr et al., 1992). In making choices about places and how to develop them, the interest, knowledge and lived experiences of different actors rub up against one another, raising questions about whose knowledge constitutes proof, and when, where and how such knowledge should be deployed (Campbell, 2002). Thus, disagreements and conflicts often emerge as each actor may try to shape a city's or neighbourhood's public environment based on their own interests and values, with or without consideration of what others may need (Harvey, 2005).

Understanding and coping with the contrasting interests and values of different actors has become one of the greatest challenges for theorists and practitioners of planning and urban design (Watson, 2006; Madanipour, 2006). This can be seen in studies that draw attention to the challenges that can arise in the provision of public spaces because of the increasingly pluralistic, multicultural and densely inhabited nature of many cities, where the use or interests of one social group can interfere physically or symbolically with another group's or individual's activity or values (Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht, 2009; Thompson, 2002; Zukin, 1998). In fact, in neighbourhoods with a wide variety of social groups and a limited amount of public spaces, tensions and

conflicts over how to develop and how to use these spaces are more likely to occur (Hernandez, 2008; Madanipour, 2004). Thus, the challenge for planners and urban designers is to create projects that bridge the differences between different actors, serving a large section of their different interests and values.

Different actors have different power and influence capacity, which affects which/whose interests or values are included/excluded from an urban project (Bentley, 1999; Flyvbjerg, 1998; McGlynn, 1993). The influence capacity of different actors is highly dependent on the structuring forces operating in the socio-political context of each project as in any particular time and place, the actors involved in the development of an urban area may receive reinforcing or conflicting signals from *discourses, resources, regulations and procedures* (Healey, 1992).Depending on whether a public space project is based on discourses that give primacy to economic benefits, environmental performance or social relations, a project may prioritize some of these issues leading to desired effects for some parties but undesirable effects for others (Maruani and Amit-Cohen, 2007; Foster, 2005; Aravot, 2002). Similarly, depending on whether a public space project is public or privately financed or on how inclusive and/or participatory its process is there will be a greater or lesser number of actors included in decision-making processes (Madanipour, 2010; Rios, 2008). Nonetheless, when given the opportunity or when engaged and organised, less powerful actors can mobilise, question and transform projects based on structuring forces that favour the narrow goals or interests and values of only a few actors (Healey, 2007).

The contrasting interests and values of different actors added to their different influence capacity highlights the political dimension of urban design practices and shows the power relations in which they are always inscribed (Bentley, 1999; McGlynn and Murrain, 1994).

Case study: Structuring forces, actors and public spaces in the renewal of a deprived neighbourhood in Barcelona

The theoretical discussion outlined above was used as the framework for description and analysis of the renewal of the neighbourhood of *La mina* in Barcelona. Focus was given to the way that structuring forces and different actors influenced the decisions and actions taken for the improvement of the neighbourhood's public environment. The analysis of the case study focused on describing the socio-political context in which the renewal of *La mina* took place, presenting the structuring forces and actors operating in the project and the physical and social environment that the new public spaces brought to the neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood of La mina

La mina is a neighbourhood built during the 1960s in what was then a peripheral area of Barcelona, surrounded

by small-scale industrial activities and close to the Mediterranean Sea. The neighbourhood was part of a low income public housing programme aimed at providing apartments for 10000 people. Following modernistic planning principles, *La mina* was conceived as an 18 hectare neighbourhood with buildings distributed along a complex network of public spaces (including boulevards, small squares and green areas and a 65 000 square metre park, *Besos Park*) and public facilities (Figure 1). Differences in population density and building and public space typology divided the neighbourhood's residential area into two: *La mina Vella*, characterised by five-floor buildings with small squares and gardens, and *La mina Nova*, characterised by long twelve-floor buildings with a significantly high population density (approximate 7000 people living in 6 housing blocks) and boulevards in between buildings.
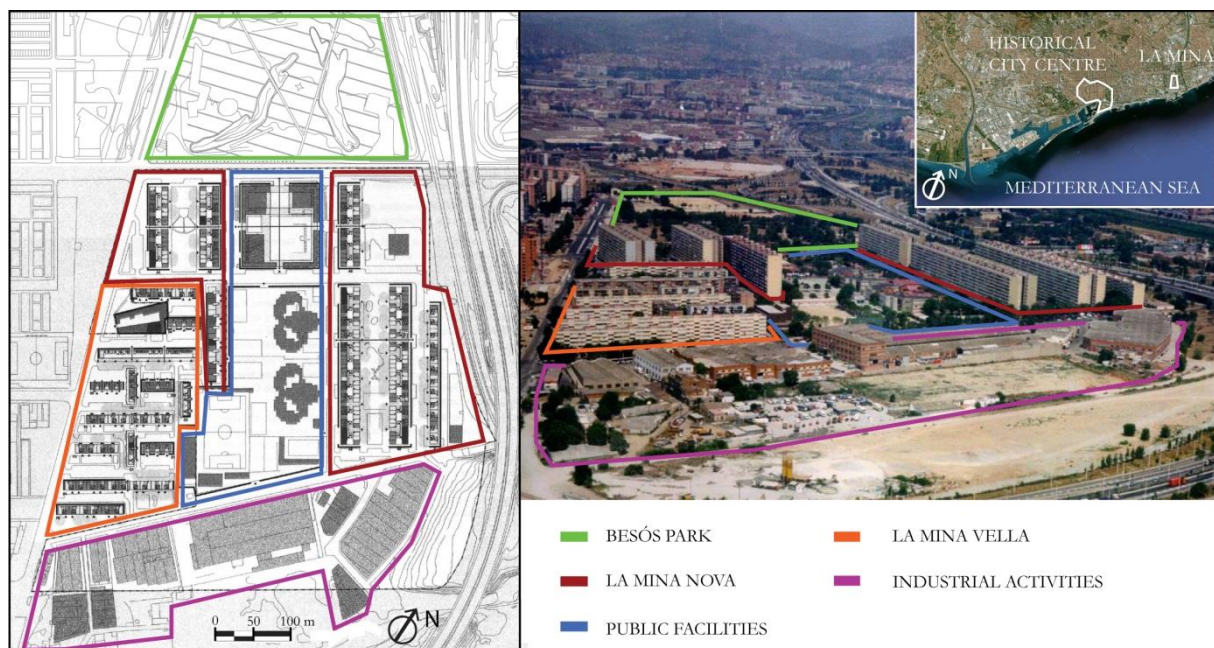

Figure 1. Morphology and land use of the different areas of *La mina*. Source: adapted from CBLM (2006).

Soon after its construction, the neighbourhood began a process of physical and social decay, which was strongly manifested in some of the neighbourhood's public spaces. High levels of vandalism and littering, product of the uncivil behaviour of a small part of residents, combined with poor maintenance by public authorities, the presence of drug dealers and users in some of the neighbourhood's public spaces and the high population density, especially in the area of *La mina Nova,* reduced the areas available for social activities and led to the deterioration of the neighbourhood's public environment. (Barcelona Regional, 2001a). All this created a general atmosphere of degradation, discomfort, territorialisation and social conflicts, which was considered to be the main problem of *La mina* (; Borja and Fiori, 2004; GDES, 2001; Barcelona Regional, 2001a). Despite the

fact that most social problems were located in the public areas of *La mina Nova* and *Park Besos*, the whole neighbourhood became stigmatised as one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Barcelona (Barcelona Regional, 2001a).

In the late 1990s, solving the deprived condition of *La mina* became a high priority on Barcelona's political agenda. The significant outcomes that were achieved with the large-scale urban transformation that the city's coastline underwent when hosting the Olympic Games in 1992,encouraged the continuation of the renewal of industrial and working class neighbourhoods located along the coastline, soon reaching the area of *La mina*. This provided strong political and economic support that led to a ten-year urban renewal plan aimed at improving both the physical and social problems of *La mina:* The Transformation Plan for La Mina (TPLM).

Structuring forces influencing the renewal of La mina

Over the past ten years, the neighbourhoods surrounding *La mina* have undergone significant urban renewal. Thus in order to understand the structuring forces influencing the TPLM and the type of public spaces developed, it is important to understand the socio-economic and political dynamics guiding the development of the greater area in which the neighbourhood is located.

Since the early 1990s, the large scale renewal of working class and industrial neighbourhoods located along Barcelona's coastline has become one of the most important strategies for making the city a leading global metropolis. Through this strategy, the greater area in which *La mina* is located has experienced significant urban transformation, guided by political and professional discourses (*systems of meaning*) aiming at creating a new centrality for the city that would boost real estate development in the area and attract capital investors, tourists, and new forms of production and services (Walliser, 2004). This has resulted in the development of strategic urban projects around *La mina* such as the *22@ innovation district* with companies focusing on knowledge-based services, including the planned international business and education cluster *Campus Diagonal-Besos*; the high-class residential and commercial neighbourhood *Diagonal mar*; and the *Area Forum* with convention centres, museums, a yachting marina, luxury hotels and office buildings (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Strategic urban projects surrounding *La mina*.

The type of urban environments that characterize the strategic urban projects surrounding *La mina* have been determined by the predominant architectural and design discourses guiding the renewal of areas located in attractive parts of the city. Within these discourses highly aesthetic buildings and public spaces are seen as an important instrument for improving deprived or obsolete neighbourhoods and a medium for attracting new high class residents/users, reactivating the real estate market and thus changing the negative perception of the place (see e.g. Bruquetas et al. (2005) and the example of the renewal of the Raval neighbourhood in the historic centre of Barcelona). While these types of interventions have made Barcelona very visible within international urban design and architecture circles, they have also received strong critiques from local community organisations and academics arguing that the fixation with aesthetics has conditioned project priorities and resources, led to strong gentrification processes and failed to address local needs (Majoor, 2011; Montaner and Muxí, 2002). As Balibrea (2007, p. 244) points out, the city is "*being built for only those who can afford it… embellished for the new citizen/consumer/tourist*".

The focus on large-scale urban interventions has made project's resources (*allocative structures*) to be highly dependent on public-private partnerships and/or financial strategies based on the real estate market (Delgado, 2007), Such dependence has made private developers powerful actors influencing the way urban projects develop, and made real estate and private interests a high priority (Majoor, 2011; Delgado, 2007). This has also led to planning and urban design processes and procedures (*authoritative structures*) that reduce

residents' capacity to influence projects and exclude dissident opinions (Casellas, 2007). As argued by Blakeley (2005), despite the existence of participatory processes and active civil society, many times the influence of these processes has been limited because of the municipality's strong development visions and its dependence on private investments.

Actors involved in or affected by the renewal of La mina

The location of *La mina* and its proximity to strategic urban projects added a wide variety of actors with direct and indirect influence on the type of public spaces that should result from renewal of the neighbourhood.

The first group of actors is the *government agencies* that regulated and funded 30% of the TPLM. This group was formed by four different agencies working at regional, metropolitan and local levels conditioning the project to the political agendas operating at these different scales. These agendas are expressed in the *Barcelona Metropolitan General Plan* where it is stated that *La mina* and the area surrounding it should be renewed based on the synergies that aroused from the strategic developments along the coastline. This meant a "*a radical change of its physical configuration, as well as the introduction of elements that give continuity to the quality and public use that has been established in* - Barcelona's - *coastline* (Barcelona Regional, 2000, p. 14). Thus, as argued by the Barcelona Field Studies Centre (2011), it was within the interests of this group of actors to improve the living conditions of the residents of *La mina*, but also, following the political discourses mentioned above, to create a social and physical environment that reinforced and did not conflict with the strategic goals established for the greater area in which *La mina* is located.

Another important actor was an external *funding agency,* the European Commission through its Urban II program, which provided 8% of the TPLM's resources. This actor operated in *La mina* by setting unbinding guidelines required for receiving financial aid, such as actions aiming at the renovation of existing buildings, the creation of green areas and improvements in public transport. Furthermore, these actions were to be complemented by social programs and involvement of the community in decision making processes (European Commission, 2008).

The proximity of *La mina* to the Mediterranean Sea and to the new neighbourhoods and projects constructed around it made it a very desirable neighbourhood for real estate development (Benvenuty, 2005). Thus, following Barcelona's tendency to fund projects based on profits from the real estate market and private-public partnerships, it was determined that private housing developments should guarantee the economic feasibility of the project, estimating that 30% of the TPLM's resources would originate from profits the provision of land (CBLM, 2006). This can also be seen as a result of the pressure that real estate market had in the area which

made *private developers* an important group of actors with indirect influence over the TPLM. For this group, the renewal of *La mina* should provide an attractive environment for investment and an opportunity to continue consolidating an area with high real estate value.

The *planners and urban designers* of the TPLM represent another important group of actors. These actors did not have interests of their own, since they followed the agendas and guidelines established by the *government agencies* and were supposed to gather and facilitate the claims made by the different actors involved in the project. Nonetheless, in the preliminary studies of the TPLM this group of actors considered the fact that the neighbourhood was now located in "*a privileged area* (of Barcelona)*, and a very attractive place where to live"* as one of the main ideas guiding their proposal (Barcelona Regional, 2001b, p. 2). Consequently, attracting new users, activities and residents, especially high income ones, was seen as the main strategy for improving the social conditions of the neighbourhood (interview with TPLM architect, October 24, 2010). Thus, it can be argued that this group of actors was aligned with the political and professional discourses prevailing in planning and urban design practices in the area surrounding *La mina.*

The actors belonging to the local community fall into two groups: *community organisations* and *residents of La mina*. The *community organisations* group consisted of 15 community-based groups and NGOs working in areas such as culture, sports, the arts and education. The *residents of La mina* comprised the different social groups living in the neighbourhood. Although most residents were low income, there were significant differences in terms of levels of education, employment conditions, lifestyles and ethnic background, making this group of actors a highly heterogeneous one.

The interests, values and needs of both the *community organisations* and *residents of La mina* can be seen in the claims and opinions that were expressed during the participatory process of the TPLM. Although there were differences between the claims of the members of both the *community organisations* and the *residents*, 70% of the opinions gathered during the participatory process claimed that the problems of the neighbourhood were more related to social matters than its physical characteristics and stressed the importance of finding solutions to problems existing in the neighbourhood's public areas and relating to social conflicts, littering, public disorder and illegal activities (ASAB, 2002).Both groups of actors welcomed physical improvements, but emphasised that unless social problems were addressed, physical changes would not do much to solve the deprived situation of *La mina* (Barcelona Regional, 2001a). The need for new playgrounds and meeting areas was also among the priorities of the community, not because there was a lack of them but because the high density population of the neighbourhood (especially of *La mina Nova*)*,* often lead to a rapid deterioration of these areas and conflicts

among residents (Cr-Polis, 2006).

Public spaces for social mix in the Transformation Plan for La mina (TPLM)

Being guided by and responding to the structuring forces and the actors described above as well as aiming at solving the multiple problems of *La mina,* the TPLM was based on an integrated and participatory urban renewal approach that combined physical interventions with social programmes (CBLM, 2008). A main objective of this approach was to improve the neighbourhood's public environment both physically and socially.

Influenced by the structuring forces and the interests of the *government agencies, planners and designers* and *private investors* described above, the physical improvements proposed by the TPLM were grounded on the idea that "*the complexity and magnitude of the problems of the neighbourhood made crucial a drastic change in its physical environment*" (CBLM, 2008, p. 14). For the *planners and designers* "*the main problem of La mina was not its density but its lack of* (class/income) *diversity (…) It was the fact that the existing public facilities and public places offered activities that were only for the residents of the neighbourhood and not for anyone from the outside (…) what was missing in La mina were normal people, professionals, lawyers and even posh people*" (TPLM planner, October 24, 2010). Consequently, social mixing and a close physical and social relation of *La mina* with the surrounding strategic projects (especially with the *Campus Diagonal-Besos* planned to be located beside the neighbourhood) became the main strategy for improving the deprived situation of the neighbourhood and led to a large scale transformation of *La mina* (ASAB, 2002).

The large scale physical transformation was given high priority despite many residents' concerns about the suitability of such propopsal for solving the main problems of the neignbourhood (ASAB, 2002; MLM, 2001). As one resident stated: "*the project should aim at benefiting us* - the residents of *La mina - and not the Forum 2004*" (MLM, 2001, p. 19), referring to the projects surrounding the neighbourhood. It was also given priority despite independent studies that highlighted that a deficient built environment was not the main problem of the neighbourhood (e.g. GDES, 2001; Borja and Fiori, 2004). Opinions and alternative suggestions that questioned or were very different from the proposal made by the *planners and urban designers* were dismissed based on the fact that for the former "*no alternative solutions were presented*" and the later "*could not achieve the level of transformation and stimulus that was required for the improvement of neighbourhood*" (ASAB, 2002, p.7). Only a few of the *community groups'* suggestions that did not imply major changes to the strategy and proposal made by the *planners and urban designers* were included.

The urban transformation of *La mina* entailed the demolition of approximately 10 hectares of land (half of which were occupied by public facilities and public spaces and the other half by the small-scale industrial

activities) and the construction of a new urban environment (Figure 3). This last consisted of: a *rambla* (a wide

street with a tree-lined promenade in the middle and an international symbol of Barcelona's public life) running

across the neighbourhood; new residential buildings (1,145 new apartments, 733 for the free market and the rest

for social housing) with commercial premises on the ground floor; and new city scale public facilities (a library,

a primary school and a police station located next to the *rambla* and a high-school, a church and a sport centre)

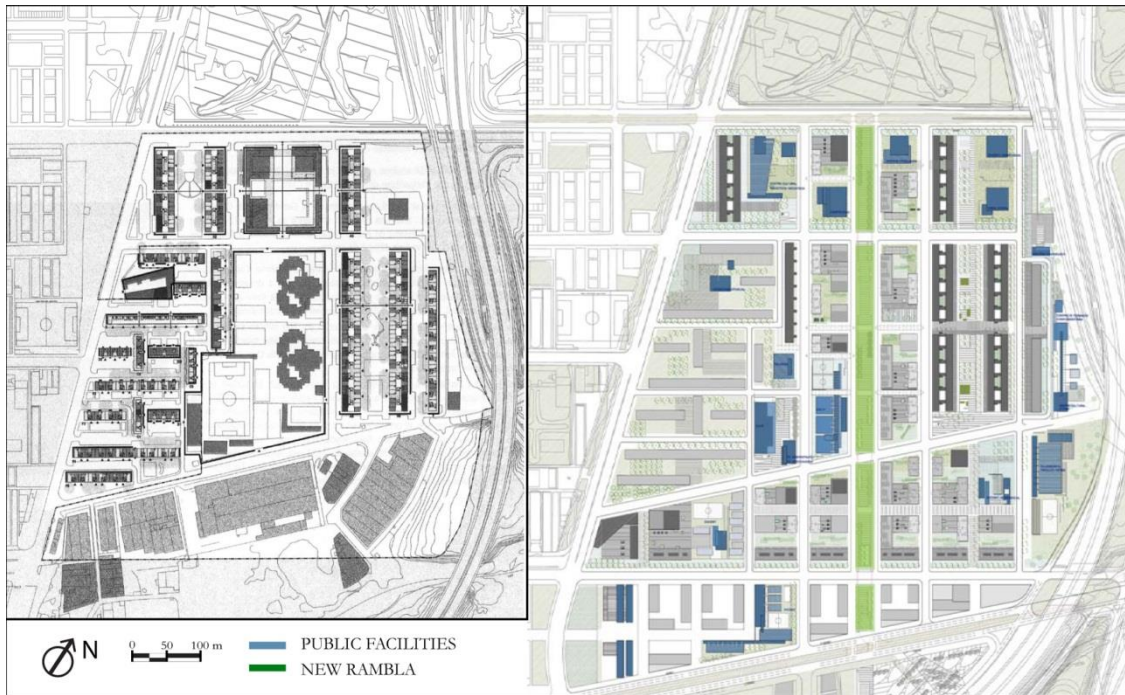aimed at serving both residents and outsiders.

Figure 3. Urban structure of *La mina* before (left) and after (right) renewal. Source: adapted from CBLM (2006)

With a total width of 40 meters and a 14 meter wide tree-lined promenade in the middle, the new *rambla*

was considered to be the most significant physical intervention of the TPLM and conceived as the new centrality

of *La mina*. A space that would ease the high and conflicting use of the existing public spaces, becoming a

vibrant place for social relationships and activities where both existing and new residents and users could come

together and revitalize the neighbourhood's social life. Its linear shape gave space for the construction of new

roads and a new tram line, allowing the connection of the *La mina* with the surrounding projects and the future

continuation of the *rambla* to the coastline, crossing the planned *Campus Diagonal-Besos* and arriving to the

yacht port of the *Area Forum* (ASAB, 2002). Furthermore, the design of both the *rambla* and the surrounding

buildings intended to renew and diversify the neighbourhood's appearance, bringing to it Barcelona's

contemporary architectural/urban design style, making it attractive for the new residents (CBLM, 2006), and thus

helping to the financial strategy opted by the TPLM as well as benefiting the interests of the *private developers*.

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Responding to the *community organizations* and *residents* and their demands of making interventions in areas with a greater concentration of social problems, such as *La mina Nova*, the TPLM improved common areas of the high-rise buildings (stairs, elevators and entrances), which were deteriorated and a source of conflicts among neighbours. In the boulevards between the buildings of *La mina Nova*, an area with more than 1000 children below 14 years of age (Barcelona Regional, 2001a), three small playground areas were provided. Improvements were also made to existing streets and sidewalks, as well as the provision of 9 small playground areas in *La mina Vella* and *Besos Park* (Figure 4).

Figure 4. New public spaces of *La mina*. A) Panoramic view of the *rambla* and the new buildings. B) *Rambla of La Mina* and tram line. C) New playground in *La mina Nova*. D) Improved sidewalks. Source: Consortium of *La mina*.

Following the guidelines and conditions established by the *external agency* as well as the demands of the *community organizations* and *residents* the TPLM implemented several programmes to cope with the social problems present in *La mina*'s public spaces (Figure 5). In collaboration with local community-based groups and NGOs several community activities have been organized in order to deal with the differences and conflicts among the different social groups in the neighbourhood An institutional outdoor playing area was built in *Park*

Besos aiming to encourage greater use of the park and change the unsafe and negative perception that most residents had of it. Programmes aimed at dealing with public disorder, littering and vandalism included public campaigns on civil behaviour and environmental awareness. Furthermore, a police station and a centre for drug addicts were also located in the neighbourhood in order to control the presence of illegal activities (CBLM, 2008).

Figure 5. Social programmes and activities organised within the TPLM. A) Institutional playground area in *Besos Park*. B) Social activity organised by community-based group. C) Recreation activities organised by NGO. D)) Leaflets of public campaigns on civil behaviour and environmental awareness. Source: Consortium of *La mina*.

Physical and social environment of La mina after the implementation of the TPLM

The new built environment of *La mina* has brought a dramatic change to the neighbourhood, making it more accessible and connected to its surroundings, as well as equalling the aesthetic/design standards of the nearby strategic projects. While some residents see this as a significant improvement for the neighbourhood, for many others, especially those living in *La mina Nova,* these improvements have not created the changes that the community saw as decisive for solving the neighbourhood's main problems. As expressed by a resident: *"where are the changes? I don't see them anywhere. Are they because you have built a library, a rambla and all that?*

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That is an aesthetical change, not a deep change ... which is what most of us were concerned about" (interview, 23 October, 2010).

Complains are based on the fact that although the *rambla* and most of the surrounding buildings were finished by 2008, the social revitalization that was expected to occur with the new built environment has still not happened. Two main reasons explain this. The first one is that the TPLM's main strategy of attracting new residents/users and of a close relation to the surrounding strategic projects has been hindered by a very slow occupation of the new apartments and commercial areas as well as by the fact that the construction of the *Campus Diagonal-Besos,* which was planned to be ready by 2011 and serve as a driver of change for *La mina*, has not yet started (in both cases this has partly been due to the economic crisis of 2008). This has had considerable implications for the TPLM's budget, significantly affecting the continuation of some social programmes and other actions planned in the area of *La mina Nova*. Among these were the complete and partial demolition of some of the high-rise buildings and the relocation of the affected residents to the new public housing. An action that was based on suggestions made by *residents* and *community groups* and which they highly prioritize during the participatory process in order to change the confined character of the area, reduce the population density and thus improve the intensive and conflicting use by residents of the boulevards between the buildings.

The second reason hindering the social revitalization that was expected to occur with the new built environment is that the existing residents have found very little use for the new built environment and the new *rambla.* As stated by a resident: "*the rambla is very pretty but almost nobody uses it, nothing ever happens there*" (interview, 26 October 2010). During the participatory process the community suggested the inclusion of playgrounds, gardens and large gathering places in the *rambla* as a response to the social practices and needs of the existing population (Cr-Polis, 2006). Nonetheless, arguing that these places already existed in other areas of the neighbourhood, the *planners and designers* did not include any of these features in their design. Instead they opted for a design that conditioned its vitality to the commercial activities that were to be located in the first floors of the buildings, providing very few options for everyday non-commercial/non-event based public use.

Furthermore, even if more than half of the new apartments have been sold, the new residents are seldom seen using the public spaces of *La mina,* "*they make their lives outside of the neighbourhood, up to now there is no social mixing*" noted a public servant of the TPLM (quoted in Tusell, 2011). All this has resulted in the new built environment becoming a desolate area with very little public life (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Low use of the new built environment of *La mina*.

Since it began in 2000, the TPLM has implemented around 70 social programmes to improve the social conditions of the neighbourhood in terms of employment, education, support to local businesses, and for coping with the problems present in the neighbourhood's public environment (EUKN, 2011). Priority has been given to programmes aimed at reducing the number of school dropouts and unemployment which have had significant outcomes (CBLM, 2008). However, according to residents and community leaders, the social programmes that aimed at the problems present in the neighbourhood's public areas lack continuity, have low coverage and are attended by very few residents, thus improving little the social conditions of the areas that were considered to be problematic (interview, 9 March 2011). Adding to this, has been the rapid deterioration of some of the improved shared areas of buildings and the playgrounds that were installed in the area of *La mina Nova* caused by high use and vandalism.

The fact that problems related to littering, uncivil behaviour and vandalism are still present in areas of the neighbourhood always considered problematic has made it difficult for many residents to value other improvements made by the TPLM, especially since resolution of these problems was always highlighted as critical for improvement of the neighbourhood. Community leaders and residents criticise the priority given to and the large amount of resources spent on the construction of a new urban environment that they argue is disconnected from the rest of *La mina* and has done little to solve the social problems of the neighbourhood (interview, 15 January 2012).As argued by a group of local residents "*the neighbourhood feels like if somebody put makeup on an old sick lady, on the outside she looks very good but in the inside she is still dying*" (interview, 26 October 2010). To this, those in charge of the TPLM responded that "*it will take many years before the social*

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changes in La mina can be seen (...) we have to wait until the new residents, users and activities come to the neighbourhood (...) Meanwhile the social programs will continue " (interview, 27 October 2010).

Contrasting interests and power relations in production of the public spaces of *La Mina*

Urban planning and design projects are influenced and shaped by the structuring forces and actors operating in each socio-political context (Healey, 2007; Madanipour, 1996). In the same manner the TPLM, its priorities, the type of urban environment and the physical and social characteristics of the public spaces that resulted from it, were determined by the particular political and professional discourses, ways of allocating resources, planning procedures/regulations and interests and values of different actors operating in the area in which *La mina* is located. Figure 7 summarizes the analysis of how the TPLM's actors influenced the project.
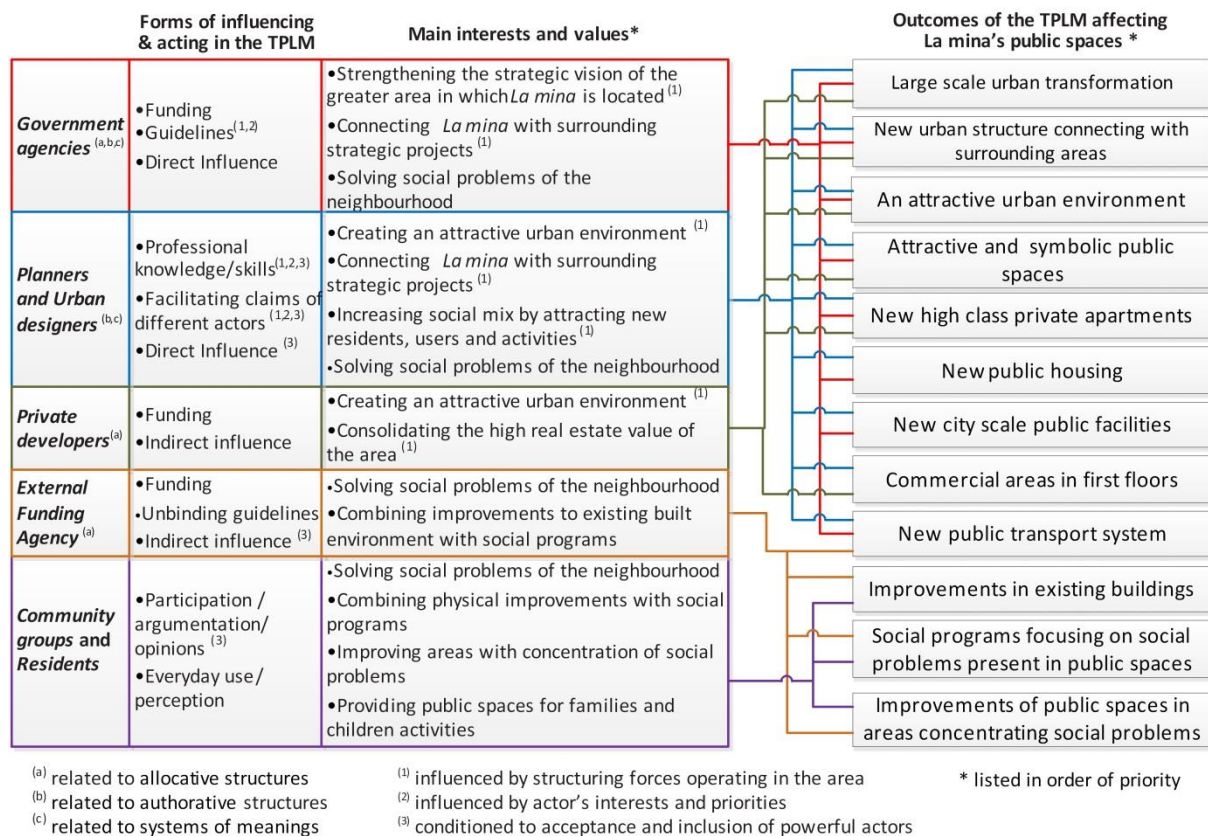

Figure 7. Actor's influence in the renewal of *La mina* and its public spaces

The location of *La mina* within an strategic area for the development of Barcelona's metropolitan area and that is highly valued by the real estate market, defined the specific socio-political context and thus the particular characteristics of the structuring forces guiding the TPLM. It also increased the amount of actors affected by and

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interested in the renewal of the neighbourhood, adding more demands and claims to the project (regional and metropolitan political agendas, economic interests and opportunities, pressure from the real estate market, specific planning and design tendencies) than just those of the existing residents.

The structuring forces and the actors of *La mina* described above, shows two main and contrasting strands of interests and claims trying to influence the renewal of the neighbourhood and its public spaces. Two strands exposing the tensions between global/city and local/neighbourhood scale actors, interests and influences present nowadays in many urban projects (Sassen, 2006). The first strand aimed at improving the neighbourhood's public life based on the spill-over effect that would result from a large scale physical change, the creation of an urban environment with high quality and attractive public spaces, the close relation with surrounding strategic projects and by attracting new residents, users and activities. Actors belonging to this strand operated at the city and metropolitan scale and were directly related to and/or conditioned by the structuring forces guiding the development of the greater area in which *La mina* is located: the *government agencies*, *private developers* and *planners and urban designers*. The second strand claimed the need of physical and social actions that would directly benefit the existing residents, reclaiming the areas of the neighbourhood where most problems occurred, providing more meeting spaces for children and families and giving higher priority to social programs and activities than to changes in the neighbourhood's built environment. This can be seen in the interests and demands of those actors interested in and operating at the local neighbourhood scale and outside the structuring forces guiding the TPLM: the *community organizations, residents* and the external *funding agencies*.

The two different strands of interests and claims managed to influence the TPLM into a plan that integrated physical interventions and social programmes, which can be seen as an attempt to create a project that balances the differences between actors, serving their different interests and values. However, the way in which such integrated approach was implemented, the type of solutions that was given higher priority, the omission of the concerns and proposals of the actors belonging to the local community and the low use and value that the existing residents have of the new public spaces, demonstrates the power imbalance between the different groups of actors involved in and influencing the TPLM. It also shows how in urban areas where multiple, diverse/contrasting interscalar interests and actors meet, powerful actors are often the ones making substantial physical changes while the claims of less powerful groups take softer temporary forms.

The TPLM's participatory processes could have created an opportunity for balancing the power of the different actors, giving them equal capacity of influencing and finding solutions established through a variety of criteria that intersected different values and interests. However, the alignment of the first strand of actors with

the structuring forces guiding the project gave them a greater power over the TPLM's decisions and thus the type of public spaces that would result from it. Such alignment made it difficult for the actors that belonged to the local community who relied only on their opinions and arguments to have a high influence over the physical transformation of the neighbourhood and its public spaces. As expressed by one of the community leaders: "*we worked for more than a year, making proposals about how we wanted our rambla to be. Surprised we have seen that without any consultation or discussion, we have been presented with a design that is closed to modifications. It was the same for many of the other suggestions we made (...) this is the way that the municipality works, throwing underground all what the neighbours did (...) where are our proposals? What was the reason of our participation?*" (FRB, 2007).

The current low use and desolated condition of the new built environment and the new *rambla* means, as in any social process, that time will show if the priority given to the interests and values of the first strand of actors was the best strategy for improving the deprived conditions of *La mina*. Nevertheless, the current low use and value that the existing residents give to the new urban environment, the continuation of problems consider critical for the improvement of the neighbourhood and the discontent of residents with the way how the project developed, shows the potential risks and failures for urban projects following structuring forces and actors' interests and values that are too dependent on global dynamics and a market economy and disconnected from the everyday non-commercial use and needs of local residents. As in *La mina*, such dependency hinders the actions of the actors that should matter the most, the daily social and symbolic practices of everyday users, to influence and shape the socio-spatial environment resulting with the provision of the new public spaces.

Conclusions

The paper discussed and illustrated how public spaces are the result of complex social processes, influenced and shaped by the interrelation between structuring forces and a wide variety of actors operating at different scales, at different times and through different means. From global economic dynamics to local urban policies and political agendas, from the ways an urban project is funded, the professional discourses and ideas that guide planning and urban design practices in a given city to the wide variety of interests, values and everyday practices of the different actors involved in and affected by an urban project, it is the interactions between these different forces and actors that affect the goals, priorities and solutions implemented by an urban project, conditioning the use, function and appearance of public spaces, as well as determining the people that benefit or are excluded from them.

The case study showed that the characteristics of the structuring forces influencing an urban project, the number and diversity of demands, interests and values of the actors involved and affected by it and the contrasts that may exist between these, depend on the specific socio-political context in which that project is located. In some contexts structuring forces and the different actors may be aligned or managed in a way that produce public environments that meet the interests and claims of a wide majority (e.g. in projects with few stakeholders, in areas were most actors share interests and values or in decision-making processes that give equal influence capacity of influence to all actors). Other contexts may bring with them a wide variety of actors with contrasting interests which as shown in *La mina* can result in tensions between those representing global and city scale political-economic dynamics and the ones focusing on local problems and everyday use of public spaces. Furthermore, the study showed how the characteristics of the structuring forces operating in each context determine the power and influence capacity that different actors have over the development of public spaces, and how differences and conflicts among actors are handled. These forces, added to the low influence capacity or political representation of some actors, can lead to decision-making processes that as in *La mina* favoured the interests of the actors that were aligned with the *discourses, rules* and *resources* while excluding those that were disconnected from them. Consequently, this can result in a lower use/value and possible exclusion of this last group of actors from the public spaces that are produced.

The theoretical discussion of this paper as well as the results of its case study suggest that urban design practitioners need to have greater understanding of the social processes guiding the production of public spaces and need to incorporate such understanding into their practice. They also need to be more aware of the role they play in such processes, reflecting on how their values, ideas and actions, consciously or unconsciously, either reinforce the narrow interests of powerful actors or market oriented dynamics of public space provision or on the contrary challenge or balance them in order to achieve more just urban environments. Furthermore it calls for practitioners to be better equipped with skills that allow them to implement and manage decision-making processes in which the character, quality and use of public spaces is established at the intersection of a wide variety of voices. Some of these competencies include stakeholder mapping, analytics of power relations, participation and facilitation techniques and the coordination of strategies that integrate the physical, ecological, economic and social dimensions of urban development. These skills will allow them to better understand and address the diversity and conflicts of interests that are ever-present in the development of public spaces and the power relations that characterise their decision-making processes. Only by doing so, planners and urban designers can respond to and balance the multiple forces and actors operating in the production of public spaces

and thus accomplish truly just and democratic outcomes in their work.

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