

ParcCentralPark: citizen initiative in public space

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1 Zone 0 :: From Central Park to ParkCentralPark : "forgive the inconvenience, we are working to improve the city".

Poble Nou - Barcelona Mercalab - 2004, time to reform!

The property speculators are attacking again !

Between the hooligan Barcelona of the centre & the fashion Barcelona of Diagonal Mar in Poble Nou are 5 strategically situated hectares. On the 29th of May 2004, a group of people decided to use (some people say squat) some land abandoned by the Barcelona City Council. They only realised its strategic importance when a group of riot police arrived to stop 40 people cleaning an open piece of land. We understood that we had put our finger on a sensitive spot.

We are living difficult times in this city, the monster of speculation advances inexorably swallowing everything in its path. The battle has begun. The objective : public space. The enemy : global property speculation and anti-social politics.

The Forum of Cultures (144 days of culture shopping from may to september 2004 - see <http://www.forumbcn2004.org>) has shown how the the most pessimistic predictions were right. Trying to recreate the so-called "olympic spirit" of 1992, the whole Forum operation was revealed as empty rhetoric at the service of the Barcelona trademark. "La botiga mes gran del mon", the biggest shop in the world as official posters announce, oasis of international tourist & property capital, and an experimental laboratory of globalisation, new social peripheries and the reappropriation of urban space.

Lucrative projects for the few go much faster than the city's capacity for management and construction, and the social movements are a real problem which delay them. For this they wanted to cut out the root. For this the Guardia Urbana (city police) watched, "strategically" located, the whole zone.

And for this, also, a whole regiment of BCNeta (municipal cleaning services) worked - or rather, slaved - "cleaning" up a social project of appropriation of public space by the citizens themselves.

2 Zona 1 :: Parc Central, Centre of polemic : a bit of history.

From 1999, the land at the crossing of the streets Diagonal and Pere IV already has its future use assigned - ... or perhaps not : the construction of the so-called Central park. The project is assigned to famous French architect Jean Nouvel, also responsible for the Agbar building (a spectacular tower, belonging to a company that is privatising public water, intended to symbolise the new Barcelona).

ParcCentralPark is the name of a project generated by various artist collectives, associations and people from diverse walks of life. A name with a certain touch of humour that recalls the grandeur & the unfulfilled agreements of the band of illustrious despots that govern this city. The participants in ParcCentralPark, rather than revindicate, are doing it themselves, reclaiming this space for public use. This area has become the arena of a whole cluster of urban initiatives that return public space to the inhabitants of the city.

Various artistic initiatives reveal and denounce the speculation in the area and call for the participation of citizens in the transformation of urban land.

The official project was to inaugurate Central Park in 2004, but with so much accumulated work - especially the Forum - there has only been time to "clean" half of the land. The expropriations have been rapid and huge, and the neighbours have had to leave without help from the local government and without receiving the appropriate indemnisations.

In 2003 the last house on the Diagonal side, touching the new rich area, was torn down. On the rest of the land there are still some old factories full of artists studios and the art centres of Hangar and Can Font ... On the 30th of September 2004 arrived the notification of demolition of Can Ricard, a workshop shared by 60 small companies and projects without the economic capacity to move. This future that is announced but is not at all clear. On the one hand Mr. Narvaez, representative of the district authorities, has promised that work will start next year (2005). On the other hand news has leaked from the City Authority that the necessary permissions will not be delivered until 2006. In other words, the same nonsense as usual from this so-called left wing government.

The ParcCentralPark project represents the possibility of citizen participation in the process of defining how our city is developed. For this reason a wide call was made to invite people to participate actively in the design of future landscapes to create friendly and alive spaces.

"Voltaire's cynical advice in *Candide* - "Cultivate your own garden" - can no longer be considered simply as an amoral bon mot. The world has changed considerably since the Enlightenment. Meanings have shifted. "Cultivate your

own garden" sounds today like hot radical rhetoric. Growing a garden has become – at least potentially – an act of resistance. But it's not simply a gesture of refusal. It's a positive act. It's praxis."

Hakim Bey.

<http://www.autonomeia.org/avantgardening/sample.html>

3 Zona 2 :: ParcCentralPark: going into the reality of a disobedient project

MAY 2004

- Last week of May : preparations. Gathering of materials, cleaning ... installation of a wireless internet access point covering the park and publication of a website (<http://parccentralpark.net>) : digital technology as public space and in public space.

- 29-30 May : inauguration of ParcCentralPark. Started with a day of cleaning and construction in the park. A brigade of riot police arrived by surprise and blocked the entry to the whole park claiming that we do not have the corresponding permits and that the zone is dangerous. These permits had been requested sufficiently in advance but there had been no response from the district. After hours of negotiations with the representative of the Sant Marti district a permission was obtained to have access until 7 p.m. A large part of the area was cleaned and the first visual reappropriation tools installed : a huge inflatable, signs with the name of ParcCentralPark and an area to meet and discuss future actions :

- The release of the documentary film Ciutadans 22@ , planned for tonight, must be done somewhere else given the impossibility of setting up the projections in the park itself due to the police intervention.

- "The revolution of the geraniums", one of the park's symbols : the planting of a garden as a political action questioning the use of the city's natural resources.

-evening of 30 May - BCNeta (municipal cleaning services) destroy everything done up to now.

JUNE 2004

- The combination of tradition and innovation : Sant Joan (summer solstice) fire with projections and connections with Fadaiat, a multi-event carried out between Tarifa & Tanger to construct virtual bridges at the most disputed gate to Fortress Europe.

JULY-AUGUST 2004

- Artisticoprecarious actions in situ: construction of artificial glass lakes.

- Sustainable projects to protect from the summer heat : construction of areas of shadow.

- Urban archaeology : experimental excavations and the discovery of the history of the last few years.

SEPTEMBER 2004

- Open air cinema. Each friday of september at 22h. Documentary films about speculation and movies. Program published online.

OCTOBER 2004

- ParcCentralPark is part of the Central Park Commission working on the presentation of alternative urbanistic projects. Discussions are currently under way with municipal representatives and the architects - amongst other propositions is that of a public self-organised medialab.

4 Zona 3 :: ParcCentralPark isnt the only project and didnt happen alone

similar projects of resistance :

Creatief Beheer (Rotterdam)

<http://www.bamboebus.nl>

Park Fiction (Hamburg)

<http://www.parkfiction.org>

Reclaim the Beach (Londres)

<http://www.swarming.org.uk/recl/recl.htm>

Forat de La Vergonya (Barcelona)

<http://www.plataformabcn.net/forat.htm>

Groups, collectives & projects that participate in ParcCentralPark:

<http://www.bcnova.com>

<http://www.citymined.org>

<http://www.fadaiat.net>

<http://www.forumbcn2004.org>

<http://www.platoniq.net/poble9/>

<http://www.riereta.net>

<http://www.rotorrr.org>

<http://www.sitesize.net/>

ParcCentralPark website

<http://www.parccentralpark.net>