



Exhibition «Cerdà and the Barcelona of the Future. Reality versus Plan»
20/10/2009 – 28/02/2011

An impressive Idea

Joan Busquets, the commissioner of this exhibition, explained that Ildefons Cerdà's idea – the Eixample of Barcelona – is so powerful that it has imposed itself without the backing of an absolute monarch or the help of a strong political power to order its construction. This is a mystery that always surprises foreign experts: a mystery which Cerdà's intelligence and tenacity explain a great deal about. The Eixample was built in just over 40 years, on the vast empty plain separating Barcelona from its surrounding towns. For 150 years, Cerdà's model has determined the morphology of Barcelona. And it will continue to do so. All this happened in a country that didn't have the power of a State, or even great municipal strength.

The idea of the grid dates back to ancient times, linked to cities of remote historic origins. However, Cerdà's interpretation has a dimension of modern rationality – from the strict width of the streets to the richness of the interior spaces – which, at the same time, is integrated perfectly into the mindset of its residents. There is a mixture of order, discretion and homogeneity that allows flowing subtle differences and has the virtue of generating empathy with the emerging Catalan bourgeoisie of the time.

The Eixample, as a way of putting the interior and the exterior in order, connects very well with the modern individualism of the future. At the same time, it has a great ability to contaminate. The main avenues, the Diagonal and Gran Via, are two lines, simply marking the possible extension of the model beyond Barcelona, without saying it, only hinting at it, but without ambiguity. Many of the ways of extending Barcelona – from the 22@ district to the Olympic Village – are more or less correct reinterpretations of the Eixample.

One of the aims of this exhibition is to discover the secrets of this impressive idea, to see the processes behind its concretion and propagation. Above all, the exhibition sets out to explain that the idea was so powerful that, in this space, the life of the community has only improved it. It is the destiny of powerful ideas that distinguishes them from simple occurrences or brilliant intuitions: they are not damaged by the use of life but they shine; life brings out their entire generative capacity.

The shape of the city forms the basis upon which the city is identified and recognizes it as its engine for growth. In Barcelona, this base is the Eixample. A paradigm of a dense, neat city, of the balance between private life and commercial activity, the number of inhabitants and the people who work in the Eixample is very similar.

This exhibition also wants to look towards the future. Particularly in one sense: to interpret the fundamental lines of Cerdà's idea so that it could become a useful instrument for the new changes that the city would have to confront. Cerdà, who is considered the founder of modern urban planning, is one of the fundamental figures that Catalonia has given to the world. He has been forgotten, unknown and mistreated by his own country for a long time. The Eixample, his greatest creation, worked for him. And now, 150 years after his plan was approved, the Eixample continues to provide a living testimony to its designer's ability to think and promote. The exhibition acknowledges the greatest legacy that has been left to this city. A legacy so great that it is the very soul of Barcelona.