



The future of cities

The most serious demographers say that, in pre-historic times, the life expectancy of humans was around 18 to 19 years of age. In Spain, at the end of the 19th century, it was around 36 or 37. A century later, it was about 80. At the same time, during the 20th century, the world population grew from 1.6 billion to 7.7 billion. While life expectancy has doubled over the course of a century (when previously it had taken the entire history of mankind in order to double) and the population has quadrupled – despite the fact that the 20th century was the deadliest in history, with four genocides and large-scale political massacres – there can be little doubt that the demographic bomb was the most important event of the last century. As a result, the world population has gradually shifted from the country to the city. We live in a massively urbanised age, meaning that the city has become “the container of all the world’s problems” (Zygmunt Bauman) and the natural place for social and political conflict.

This urban explosion is threatening the model of the city, “the place of a an individual humanity” (Marc Bloch), which took shape in Europe towards the end of the medieval era. In many places, there is the feeling that the balance between the *urbs* – the matter of the city – and *civitas* – the spirit of the city – is being broken, and fostering an unease in urban culture that is spreading around the world, as one of the first indicators that globalisation also affects urban sentimentality. It is a persistent, cross-cutting malaise that manifests itself everywhere and takes on clearly distinct forms. As if it contained an answer to the question about cosmopolitanism: shared, universal feelings, with different, local formulations that are perfectly comprehensible to all.

Within this context, reflection about the future of cities is key. It also raises pressing problems of scale, of instruments of relationship and coexistence between strangers. In short, the possibility of strange and diverse people living together is the essence of the city and the main problem facing the immediate future of humanity.

Everything is liable to change. No institutional form is eternal. It could well be that what we call the city today will no longer exist as such and we will have to invent another name to identify it. However, if we want to preserve the things that have made the city the privileged place for autonomy and individual freedom, we will have to articulate urban policies which, if possible, will guarantee the conditions in order to keep this idea of the city alive. This necessary cultivation so that the city will continue to be worthy of the name, has a number of inescapable components: density, public space, an open character and a certain referential form. Everything is newer and newer in a city subjected to this dual game of spatial constriction and the acceleration of time that we refer to as globalisation. However, the logic of permanent change which, since Simmel, we know has characterised the city, and is restless by definition, is perfectly acceptable if we can preserve density – which makes the city much more efficient and lively; public space – which is the urban place par excellence, where encounters between strangers become real; the open character, of an identity that can never be exclusive, because everyone has their place inside the city; and the form of reference that is akin to the material spirit of the city. Barcelona’s form of reference is very clear, thanks to Cerdà. This form ought to contaminate the metropolitan agglomeration. In other words, we have much more precise indications than other cities in order to know which direction the change of scale should take.



Prologues by Josep Ramoneda to the CCCB's catalogues

Local, Local! The City to Come looks at the urban territories of the immediate future where we see the threats: the physical destruction of the city through the urbanisation of dispersed urban forms; or the spiritual destruction of the city through surveillance hypercontrol and individualistic overcompartmentalisation, to the detriment of communal, free and shared spaces. It is also a series of indications about the potentialities that the impact of the global can have on cities, provided that the power of the local imaginary has sufficient capacity to metabolise inputs and make them its own. In fact, this is the lesson of the past few years. The city has proven its vitality. Global viral power has failed to put an end to it, and the Numantine defences of local identities have failed to suffocate it. Once again, the city is saving itself through density, diversity and the ability to change. The city that fails to follow suit will fall: goodbye city.