

THE ROLE OF HERITAGE IN THE ENTREPRENEURIAL CITY: THE CAS OF THE COSME TODA FACTORY IN L'HOSPITALET

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INTRODUCTION

This article offers an innovative approach to analyzing the role of industrial heritage in urban commodification, taking L'Hospitalet de Llobregat (shortened as L'Hospitalet or L'H) as a case study. The discussion will center on one of L'Hospitalet's main industrial enterprises in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, the former Cosme Toda ceramics factory, whose production is now redeveloped. L'Hospitalet is the second most populous city in Catalonia, second only to Barcelona. It is located within the Barcelona metropolitan area, which includes both cities together with 36 other municipalities. It is located southwest of the capital of Catalonia, Barcelona, and both have historically had a center-periphery relationship. Since the end of the twentieth century, L'Hospitalet's former industrial zones have been converted into urban areas in order to strengthen the city's conversion into an economic centrality. The increase in real estate and growing speculative pressure have led to conflicts over the conservation of buildings listed as industrial heritage. Therefore, this study analyzes the conflictive relationship between the institutional criteria of heritage preservation, the interests of the real-estate market and citizens' heritage-related demands. Inspired by the conceptual division proposed by Henri Lefebvre¹ between the city planned by specialists and the city lived by its inhabitants, we explore the role of heritage as a field of dispute. The conclusions aim to provide a few analytical keys to rethink the role of heritage within the urban dynamics of the entrepreneurial city.

HERITAGE IN THE ENTREPRENEURIAL CITY: DISPARITIES BETWEEN THE CITY AND THE URBAN

In recent decades, the growing interest in heritage conservation² has been directly linked to the process of the capitalist reappropriation of cities. There has been a "shift to entrepreneurialism in urban governance",³ whereby local governments, regardless of their political ideologies, promote urban policies that seek to turn cities into commodities. Behind the planning of the entrepreneurial city are the banking and financial sectors, together with real-estate companies.⁴ As the geographer Mercè Tatjer has studied, this turn has been "characterized by the entrée of financial entities and real-

estate companies into ownership of the urban space”.⁵ Heritage plays a strategic role in this type of governance. As British archaeologist Kevin Walsh suggested back in 1992, “the heritagization of space represents one of the mechanisms that can be used to attract capital”.⁶ When analyzing the role of heritage, it is therefore essential to unveil the *modus operandi* of entrepreneurial management. Understanding this connection is fundamental on a regional, national and global scale.

On the basis of this debate at the macro level, we will explore the processes that occur at the micro level, in particular regarding the outsourcing of the Cosme Toda factory in L'Hospitalet. The urbanization of this former industrial land has led to the construction of a new housing area that integrates the protection of industrial buildings listed as heritage into its design. In our analysis, we depart from the conceptual division proposed by Henri Lefebvre⁷ between the city and the urban, which alludes to the conflictive relationship that usually exists between the city planned by experts and the city lived by its inhabitants. The city refers to the morphological and material dimension, that is, to a physical-spatial structure that defines the arrangement of buildings, coupled with administrative regulations that organize the urban space. The urban, however, corresponds to the social and intangible dimension, shaped by the set of practices, social interactions and urban imaginaries that constitute the essence of life in the city.

The city is critically analyzed, revealing the financial and political interests behind urban planning. To this end, the interests of real-estate profitability promoted by the outsourcing of former industrial areas are investigated, with particular attention to the case of Cosme Toda. The urban dimension will also be examined through the discourses, demands and imaginaries of neighborhood collectives. The role played by citizens and their tactics of resistance to a speculative urban plan that threatens the preservation of heritage buildings will be explored.

The methodology used in this study includes a review of literature and archival documents containing the memory of urban plans. Moreover, testimonies published in the press have been collected in order to analyze the alternative discourses that have circulated in the media about what deserves – or does not deserve – to be preserved as heritage.

THE CITY: DEINDUSTRIALIZATION, INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE AND THE L'H BRAND

Heritage in urban planning dynamics

In the nineteenth century, the then-village of L'Hospitalet (it only became a city in 1925) went through an industrial boom that led to the appearance of many factories and housing for workers in what until then had been agricultural land. The neighborhoods that make up the municipality were created at that time.⁸ Our case study, the Cosme Toda factory, was built in the Sant Josep neighborhood.⁹ Its first line of business was on the ceramics industry, which was in demand because of Barcelona's urban expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries¹⁰ (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Panoramic view of the Infanta Canal in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat in 1957
Source: L'Hospitalet Municipal Archive

The industrial apogee lasted until the 1960s, when the first factories began to leave the urban areas of the municipality for good or in favor of new areas in the outskirts. The economic crisis of the 1980s led to the closure of several factories. L'Hospitalet was no exception to the process of deindustrialization was also taking place all over Catalonia and Spain.¹¹ In reaction, in 1976 the Pla General Metropolità (PGM) was approved to regulate land redevelopment after the displacement of industry.¹² This occurred during the urban developmentalism period of the Franco regime (1960-1975).

Developmentalism was characterized by “the expansion of public and private development neighborhoods towards the peripheries of the city and the metropolitan area (...) despite the lack of the necessary conditions and infrastructures”¹³ (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Housing estates, 1973.
Source: L'Hospitalet Municipal Archive.

The dismantling of L'Hospitalet's industrial area coincided with the country's transition to democracy in the late 1970s and early 1980s a period when the protection philosophy radically shifted.¹⁴ As a result, in 1985 the Special Plan for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of L'Hospitalet (abbreviated as PEPPA) was published (with a revised edition in 1988). The preservation of the industrial heritage would soon take center stage. In the 1990s, a plan was devised for L'Hospitalet to become an economic centrality in competition with Barcelona. At the end of 1996, the new urban regeneration strategy took shape in the so-called *Plan L'Hospitalet 2010* (hereinafter Pla L'H 2010), which laid out the guidelines for its urban development over the following three decades. It is in this context that heritage was taken into account with the aim of reinforcing L'Hospitalet's conversion into a marketable brand:

Now the goal is to further the city's projection abroad as a fundamental part of its new economic development model. The presentation of the heritage creates identity and a sense of citizen pride. The L'H model has to be complemented with the presence and story of the city's memory.¹⁵

This plan soon required more specific legislation that regulated real-estate activity on industrial land. As a result, the *Plan de Reforma de las Áreas Industriales de L'Hospitalet de Llobregat* (PRAILH, Plan for the Reform of the Industrial Areas of L'Hospitalet de Llobregat) was approved in 2002. After it, three other strategic urban plans were subsequently approved to consolidate first an economic district in 2002. The first was the Distrito Económico Gran Via¹⁶ (Figure 3). Secondly, a cultural

district in 2014 – Document inicial de conformació del Districte Cultural de la ciutat de L'Hospitalet de Llobregat (Initial document of conformation of the Cultural District of the city of L'Hospitalet de Llobregat).¹⁷ Finally, a biocluster in 2022 – Pla director urbanístic-PDU-Biopol-Granvia.¹⁸



Figure 3. Distrito Económico Gran Vía of L'Hospitalet. In the foreground the chimney of the old Godó and Trias textile factory.

Photo: Joan Cortadellas. Source: El Periódico, 2023.

The construction of these urban plans, from the *Pla L'H 2010* of 1996 to the *PDU-Biopol-Granvia* of 2022, has strategically attempted to regenerate L'Hospitalet's image to allow it to compete with the other cities in the Barcelona metropolitan area and attract international financial investment. This conversion of L'Hospitalet into an image for urban marketing is the context in which decisions about the preservation of the industrial heritage are taken today. Therefore, it is necessary to highlight the framework of this entrepreneurial urban management when analyzing the urban transformation of former industrial areas and buildings, such as Cosme Toda (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Redevelopment of the Cosme Toda Factory. L'Hospitalet, 2022.

Photo: Margarita Díaz-Andreu.

The redevelopment of the Cosme Toda factory: From ceramic industry to real-estate factory

The Cosme Toda factory building is one of the main industrial heritage sites in the Barcelona metropolitan area. The first building of the old ceramic factory was built in 1884,¹⁹ although it was later extended. In 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, the factory was collectivized and used to manufacture war material, and a few months later, in 1938, an explosion caused by a fire affected part of the buildings.²⁰ After the postwar period, industrial activity resumed,²¹ and its trade name was

changed to Fabricación de Cerámica S.A (Manufacture of Ceramics Ltd.) in 1950. A decade later, at the height of the construction boom, the company stopped manufacturing ceramics, moved to the outskirts of the city and became a warehouse for the sale and distribution of bathroom and kitchen items (Figure 5).



*Figure 5. Cosme Toda factory and surrounding, 1955.
Source: L'Hospitalet Municipal Archive.*

In 1999, a first urban regeneration project was announced for the so-called ‘Cosme Toda block,’²² but it never came to fruition. In 2001, the three buildings of the Cosme Toda factory were listed as heritage buildings and included in the PEPPA heritage protection list. This meant that the conservation of these historic buildings would be controlled by means of a regulation to which future urban plans for the sector had to adhere (Figure 6)



*Figure 6. Cosme Toda Factory, 2001.
Source: Diputació Barcelona*

The first plan to urbanize the Cosme Toda block was approved by the Urban Development Agency (ADU) in 2007. However, the project also failed to materialize due to the 2008 economic crisis. It was

not until June 2016 that the project was publicly presented by Mayor Núria Marín Martínez (a representative of the Socialist Party of Catalonia and mayor since 2008). The implementation of the new plan began at the end of 2016. The new urban plan included the remodeling of historic buildings to convert them into public facilities and the construction of residential buildings. It also stipulated the creation of a parks and gardens area and a road artery (Figure 7). Since then, this urban requalification of the land has been governed mainly by legal considerations and a forecast of the economic costs that would be earned from building and selling the new housing. Therefore, it “ensures a sufficient margin to cover the technical and financial management of the operation”.²³

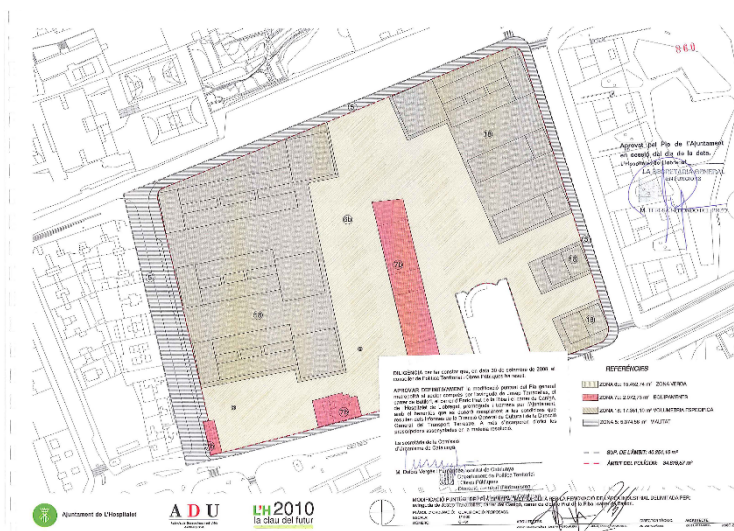


Figure 7. Map of the reform of Cosme Toda. The industrial heritage is shown in red and with the reference “zone 7b.” Source: File 17 of the PEPPA, 2008.

The urban planning regulations stipulate the total number of dwellings to be built (885) and the height of the eight buildings in the housing plan.²⁴ According to Article 264 of the General Metropolitan Plan, the new buildings must have at least one hour of direct sunlight per day. However, the map of shadows that appears in the plan report approved by the City Council wrongly calculated the shadows because of either error or omission. This has led to an increase in the number of dwellings built, exceeding the number allowed by the regulations by 34.5%.²⁵ This irregularity reveals that the real-estate market’s interest in economic profitability is behind this urban operation, giving continuity to “the irresponsible urban development and overcrowding in L’H”²⁶ (Figure 8)



Figure 8. On the left, the calculations of the sunlight in the approved plan. On the right, the calculations by an expert. Source: Rodríguez, 2022.

THE URBAN: CITIZENSHIP'S DEMANDS AND IMAGINARIES

In this section, we explore the reactions to the new housing plan coming from *the urban*, i.e., from the lived space.²⁷ We focus on the neighborhood associations of L'Hospitalet, very active during the transition to democracy,²⁸ but at that time with no claims related to heritage. The concern for heritage issues only appeared around 2003,²⁹ leading several neighborhood associations to defend the heritage buildings threatened by real-estate projects. One of them is the Stop Masificació L'Hospitalet Cosme Toda platform, founded in 2019 when residents of the Sant Josep neighborhood became aware of the construction irregularities of the new housing plan due to non-compliance with the so-called shadows law. In addition to reporting this to the Urban Development Agency (ADU), the platform warned about the appearance of a sinkhole during the excavation. This event confirmed the warnings of several neighborhood groups about the “possibility of locating historical remains in this part of the city”³⁰ (Figure 9). These archaeological remains found after excavating the land were not catalogued as heritage within the PEPPA heritage protection list. To meet the citizen demand to preserve the historical heritage, the City Council contracted an archaeological survey, which was carried out in parallel to the urbanization project.³¹ In December 2020, the City Council plenary declared the industrial remains of Cosme Toda Cultural Assets of Local Interest,³² and they were incorporated into the PEPPA heritage protection list. There is some resistance to this by members of the neighborhood, given that they consider the documentation and protection of the archaeological remains insufficient. In this sense, the response of Stop Massificació L'H Cosme Toda shows how heritage is produced in a disputed field. The preservation of this industrial heritage is disputed between the voices authorized from the institutional sphere and the imaginaries and demands of the citizens:

The archaeologists continue their cataloguing efforts, but soon the industrial heritage of more than a century of history is going to be destroyed. Culture and history have a price in our city: the price set by the real-estate market. If you go by the #Cosmetoda zone you'll see that they have begun to install children's playground equipment on a concrete foundation. We residents are asking ourselves, will these swings make up for all the services that the neighborhood has been requesting for decades? Can the neighborhood absorb the almost 4,000 new inhabitants who will live in the 24 buildings (885 apartments) to be built? How does it make sense to increase the population in the most densely populated city in Europe?³³



Figure 9. Archeological remains found during excavations.

Source: Facebook page of the platform Stop Massificació L'H Cosme Toda, 2022.

The new plan approved by the City Council contrasts with what the public is voicing. This is illustrated by an alternative plan drawn by an anonymous neighbor. The disparity between the city planned by specialists and the city imagined by its inhabitants is stated in the text accompanying the image published on social media (Figure 10):

Dreaming is free, and probably not very realistic... But dreams can sometimes be the start of many realities... What image would you rather for the #Cosmetoda area: the first one designed by a resident of #lhospitaletdellobregat or the second one designed by the urban planners in the City Council? Anonymous³⁴



Figure 10. Project approved by City Council and proposal by a resident of the neighborhood. Source: Facebook page of the platform Stop Massificació L'H Cosme Toda, March 1, 2021.

The alternative plan proposed by the neighborhood indicates their demands, which always revolve around preserving the heritage. They point to a lack of green areas and urban facilities and to an increase in housing overcrowding. They also condemn the irregularities detected in the urban plan and its gentrifying effects and, finally, the need for participatory processes.³⁵ Although the City Council made the project public to the neighborhood associations on June 13, 2016, participatory proposals to decide on the new functionality of the heritage buildings (community facilities) have not yet been initiated. This is one of the points that appears in the petition backed by 5,300 signatures in the campaign led by the neighborhood platform, Let's Rescue Cosme Toda from Speculation before it is too late (Salvem Cosme Toda de la especulació abans de que sea demasiado tarde). The petition to halt the urban development project was delivered to the City Council on November 4, 2021. In it, the platform asks that that “a participatory process with citizens be launched to agree consensually to the urbanistic development for the former factory area and the uses it will have in order to improve residents' lives.” The case of Cosme Toda reproduces another of the paradoxes of heritage processes: “even when the heritage is presented as something that belongs to everyone and therefore is (or should be) a sphere of citizen concern, not everyone has the chance to participate in the discussion and definition of heritage policies”.³⁶

The real-estate pressures of the Cosme Toda redevelopment plan have endangered the conservation of the heritage. They have also led to gentrification, which may well lead to the displacement of the current inhabitants of Sant Josep neighborhood.

CONCLUSION: HERITAGE AS A FIELD OF DISPUTE

The analysis of the redevelopment process of the Cosme Toda factory has unveiled the existing disputes surrounding the preservation of industrial heritage. For this purpose, Lefebvre's distinction between the city and the urban, i.e., between the planned city and the city lived by its inhabitants, has been used as the basis for our analysis. The result of the study provides evidence about the

management of industrial heritage as a field of dispute among institutional technical criteria, the profitability interests of the real estate sector and citizens' needs and imaginaries.

The city's entrepreneurial management practice is reflected in the urban plan devised for the Cosme Toda block. The interest of real-estate profitability governing its urbanization criteria is evident. The irregularities of the plan with respect to the shadows regulation has allowed for more housing than what was apportioned by the urban planning regulations. This municipal permissiveness in the face of speculative practices gives continuity to the overcrowded urbanism that has historically characterized L'Hospitalet de Llobregat. This illegality has been condemned by the Stop Cosme Toda platform, alluding to the defense of heritage. The way in which this process has been implemented has brought to light the limitations of citizen participation and the demands for a fairer and more participatory urban model.

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NOTES

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