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Abstract

Ecological Urbanism.

The Superblock urban model in the case study of Barcelona

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Over the last decades several planning methodologies have been adopted to promote sustainable urban approaches able to satisfy the three aspects of sustainability (Ecological, Economic and Social) and reduce the human impact on the earth. This thesis deal the Ecological Urbanism approach, formalized in 2012 by a Spanish biologist, Salvador Rueda, director of *Agencia de Ecología Urbana de Barcelona*. In my research work I define its features: the strengths and the weaknesses so as to identify the sustainable outcomes for the urban system and the opportunities and threats of this 'new' urban approach.

The Ecological Urbanism forces to bring back the citizens' value at centre of the cities, optimizing the urban living conditions of the people and their capacity to relate each other. In this way, the first innovation of the Ecological Urbanism can be considered the value given to the public spaces, including all the living spaces, squares and parks but also streets and infrastructures, as the solution to reinforce the role of the citizens. Furthermore, the second novelty introduced by Rueda is the holistic approach promoted for the urban system. In fact, he doesn't limit the idea of Urban Habitability to a specific part of the city, or a new urban area, but he encourages a new urban vision for the restoration of the entire urban territory, also in consolidated cities. Rueda and the *Agencia de Ecología Urbana de Barcelona* have developed a particular tool in order to generate the Urban Habitability: the Superblock. The Superblock – *Supermanzana* or *Superilla* in Spanish – is a new urban dimension, between the buildings' block and the district. Inside it, the inner street will be closed to the crossing traffic and the road platform will become an entire public space for the daily uses of all the citizens, Image 1. In this way, the Superblock model will be the physical base for specific urban policies that should encourage an increase of the ecological, social and economic urban sustainability.

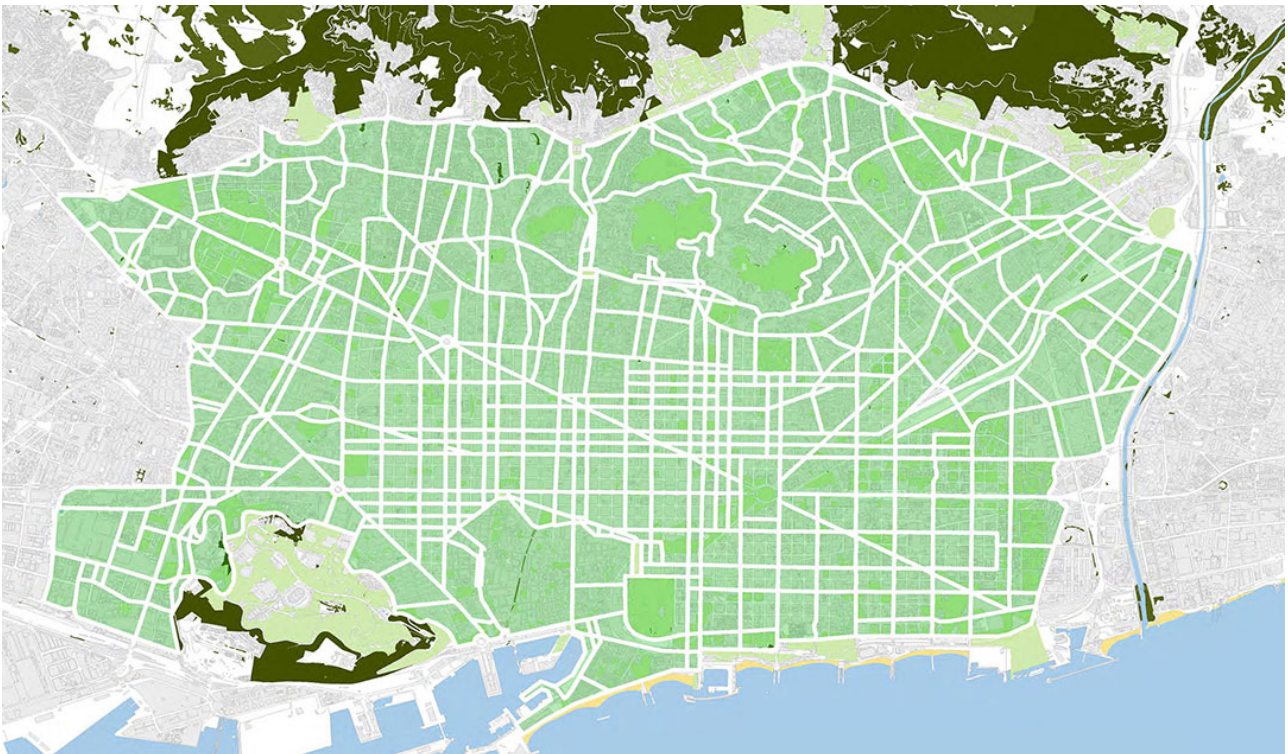
Image 1: Superblock model



Source: S. Rueda, *Ecological Urbanism, Its application to the design of an eco-neighbourhood in Figueres*, Barcelona, Urban Ecology Agency of Barcelona, 2014, pag.56

The aim of the *Agencia de Ecologia* is to replicate the Superblock scheme on the whole urban city, realizing as a result an orthogonal streets network that will be divided in two roads levels, basic streets and inner streets, creating an urban isotropic space, as in the Cerdà's vision, Image.2. The Superblock model would promote the complexity of the urban system, going beyond the functional division of the city imposed by the modernistic architectural movement. It would encourage a democratization of the urban space, applying the idea of Urban Habitability in the same way to all the neighborhoods, so as to avoid disparities within the same system. Moreover, it wants change the conviction that the private car could be the most useful and efficient mobility system for urban movements, in favor of more sustainable mobility.

Image 2: Superblock proposal for Barcelona



Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona, *El Pla de Mobilitat Urbana (PMU) 2013-2018*, 2015, Barcelona, Ajuntament de Barcelona

At the moment in the case study of Barcelona, the Ecological Urbanism renovation has taken place only in some pilot projects. The final goal of the Barcelona's Administration is to overturn the contemporary concept that the street is "a place of the cars", into "a place also for the cars". In this sense, the Superblock model seems like a merely tool to manage the vehicular traffic, but there is something more. It is the bearing structure of the Ecological Urbanism application, it will change the people's rights to the city, making accessible to everyone the public spaces and turning 'pedestrians' in 'citizens' (Rueda, 2016). Nevertheless, the new urban model is not enough to realize the Ecological Urbanism approach. Indeed, even if Rueda has defined the Superblock like the functional tool in order to reach the sustainability goals, the only application of urban traffic policies will not be sufficient. It is necessary to merge several urban policies, so as to implement the compactness, the complexity, the efficiency and the social cohesion but also guarantee the social and economic sustainability other than the ecological one.

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