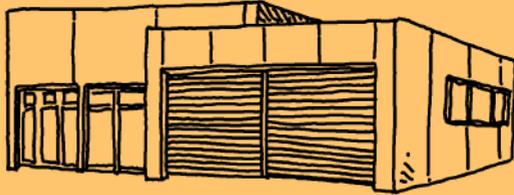


Casal de Barri Pou de la Figuera

The urban void where community is built
from 2003



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Casal is a publicly owned space, managed by the community of the Ciutat Vella neighborhood, with the goal of strengthening the social fabric, local participation and promotion of values such as solidarity, cooperation, social justice and diversity. It was born in 2007 as a result of the fight and mobilization of the inhabitants of the neighborhood, caused by a development project planned by the administration that did not meet the inhabitants' needs for social spaces for collective use and that had produced an urban void called "El Forat de la Vergonya".

After a period of municipal management through a service company, a participatory process was introduced that made Casal the first structure managed by the local residents (gestió ciutadana). Today, Casal is a community space for the neighborhood that hosts numerous social and cultural activities, and is managed by Federació Casc Antic Gestió Comunitària, a federation that brings together different collectives, according to a bottom-up organizational and collaborative model. Casal is a center that is open to participatory planning and design of the neighborhood and its communities, a place of conception, exchange, creation, meeting and training in opposition to the dynamics of cultural consumption.



WHERE

Plaza del Pou de la Figuera is a public space that was created around the urban void "Forat de la Vergonya" by the neighborhood resistance movements following the Plan Especial de Reforma Interior of 1986. In 1997, despite opposition from the local community, the first expropriations and demolitions took place, creating an urban void of about 6,000 sqm in the city center. After years of struggle and protests, in this space now stands a building, the main headquarters of community activities, built by the city as a result of the participation process enacted, and a community garden managed by an informal group of citizens, a participatory tool to involve the neighborhood and support the spread of the project in the neighborhood.

LOCATION

Urban

TYPE OF SPACE

Building
Open space (community garden)

ORIGINAL FUNCTION

Residential

YEAR OF CONSTRUCTION

2006

SURFACE AREA

Around 200 sqm (building)
Around 2,800 sqm (community garden)

OWNERSHIP

Public

CONCESSION

Free cession

CONDITION BEFORE ACTIVATION

Urban void

COMPOSITION OF THE SPACE

Big room (sala gran)
Small room (sala petita)
Office (oficina)
Community garden (horter)

WHEN

TIME OF DAY USED

Morning 7am - 1pm 30%
Afternoon ... 1pm - 7pm 50%
Evening 7pm - 1am 20%
Night 1am - 7am 0%

Workdays: 90%
Weekends: 10%

OPENING HOURS

Community garden: always open
Multifunctional space:
Monday, Wednesday and Friday:
10am - 2pm / 4pm - 8pm

WHAT

Casal de Barri Pou de la Figuera is a neighborhood space with free access and free activities whose goal is to offer a space for exchange, creation, meeting and learning through proactivity, commitment and responsibility, in opposition to the dynamics of cultural consumption. The space implements an open model that favors participation: the planning of activities, in addition to the proposals of the members of the common, is open to the proposals of the neighborhood, with the goal of giving space to as many initiatives as possible.

SURFACE IN USE

Around 200 sqm (building)
Around 2,800 sqm (community garden)

THEMATIC AREAS

Activism and politics
Commercial
Culture and arts
Design, crafts and production
Ecology and environment

Education and training
 Entrepreneurship
 Sport and leisure
 Technology
 Welfare

Casal is a hub for the activities of the neighborhood and its community, a fundamental tool for social life thanks to a busy calendar that includes both periodic activities, such as music, folk dance, gymnastics, rap and crafting courses, and single events such as film forums, presentations and debates on current events or political issues.

USER DEMOGRAPHIC

Children
 Families
 Local community
 Senior citizens
 Young people
 Under-represented people: disabled people, migrants, poor people

COLLABORATIONS

Artists and creatives
 Associations and collectives
 Citizens and local community
 Companies
 Other commons
 Professionals and freelancers
 Public administrations and public authorities
 Universities and schools

NETWORK

Local
 Regional
 National

WHO

Casal is a community space granted through an agreement for community management between the city of Barcelona, the Ciutat Vella district and the Federació Casc Antic per una Gestió Comunitària, a federation that includes 9 associations.

MANAGING ORGANIZATION(S)

1. Casc Antic per una Gestió Comunitària (federation, 2013)

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE MANAGEMENT

4 (2 full-time employees, 1 part-time employee, 1 gardener)

HOW

The open and participatory model of organization and management is structured around 4 interconnected main bodies: the general assembly, the highest decision-making body; a management and monitoring committee made up of representatives of the assembly; a monitoring and evaluation commission, made up of the municipal council and the management commission; and a work commission for the planning of activities.

NATURE OF THE INITIATIVE

Bottom-up

TYPE OF MANAGEMENT

Horizontal

ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Public grants
 Self-funded

TYPE OF ACTIVITIES

100% Free

Read the agreement
 for the community
 management of the
 common





How did your story begin?

Between the late 1990s and the 2000s, the City of Barcelona demolished many buildings, leaving a 6.105 s^{qm} empty lot in our neighborhood that people called “El Forat de la Vergonya” (The Hole of Shame). As a reaction, people started occupying it and organizing activities such as urban gardens, playgrounds for kids, concerts and festivals. The neighborhood community mobilized against the urban and speculative model of the city, in favor of the defense and reappropriation of a public space, and in 2003 the conflict escalated to the point that the citizens destroyed the fences that the City had built around the area. In 2006 the municipality agreed to initiate a participatory project that led to the construction of a public square. It was a great victory for the neighborhood, because this is the largest space without asphalt in the city that conforms to all the functions requested by the inhabitants: an enclosed space that the community can use free of charge.

The building that hosts our cultural center was built then, after the agreement with the city: a community space that was granted by the city to the neighborhood. However, from 2006 to 2013 Casal was not managed by us, but by an enterprise that was already managing other cultural centers in the neighborhood, so it had some sensitivity towards the community.

In 2013 the City proposed a new form of management called “Plataforma de Gestió Ciutadana”, and the management of some public spaces such as Casal has been entrusted to a federation of entities that are in charge of the management of the space and receive annual public grants for this purpose.

“Our functional form is: responsibility, compromise, autonomy.

We created a sort of neologism: ‘Encircant el barri’, which means to shape the neighborhood like a circus. We always use dialogue and conversation, this is our principle”

to shape the neighborhood like a circus. We have been working on this project for 5-6 years, and it’s starting to give continuity to the different projects initiated by people from the neighborhood. There were more projects related to the circus, but they were not talking to each other, so we decided to coordinate between them and mostly to initiate a project on “street circus”. Because the street circus projects are for free and this is our prerogative: to work on a project that is a circus school with a social mission. We are working on it, trying to implement our values in this work: responsibility, autonomy, compromise. It is not easy because we need more space, and we have to find a form of management. Step by step we will invade the neighborhood with the circus.

Is there a practice or value that represents you and you think may be an inspiration to others?

The project of the Circus (Encircant el barri) is a broad project that involves public and private spaces, cooperatives and individuals working towards the same goal. “Encircant el barri” is a sort of neologism, meaning

What is the secret ingredient that makes your story unique?

One thing that represents Casal is its functional form, which is the triangle “Responsibility, Compromise, Autonomy”: it allows people to feel this space, to sympathize with it. By “feeling” this space, people can grow and at the same time sympathize with other people who are part of the Casal. No one can take possession of the space on a specific time or day of the week, because maybe one day another person proposes an activity that is more important than the one previously taking the space. So we have to understand which is the most important need in every moment.

For me the good thing about having a small place like ours is that this negotiation takes place every day. Because each day brings new projects and new people, and this need to co-exist is the best thing about Casal, that differentiates it from other spaces: it involves constant relationships between people who come from very diverse backgrounds.

We have an inner regulation that we use in extreme situations, when we have serious issues with someone and we have to stop an activity. But so far we have used it only once. We always use dialogue, conversation. This is our principle. We have conflicts all the time, because people are very different, people sympathize more with some people, and less with others... So for me the elements that allow a project to work are patience, dialogue, giving people the opportunity to meet, to recognize each other.



Interview with: Aidà Almirall Serra

Did you know?

Plataforma de Gestió Ciutadana

The city of Barcelona has a well-established history of public services and facilities managed by citizens, whose efforts throughout the years have brought about the creation of cultural, educational, and sports associations specifically designed to run them. Today, this opportunity is provided for and guaranteed by Article 34 of the “Carta Municipal de Barcelona”: “Non-profit entities, organizations and civic associations may exercise municipal powers, or participate on behalf of the City Council, in the management of services or facilities whose ownership corresponds to other public administrations. The civic management of municipal competencies can be used for activities and services that can be managed indirectly, is always voluntary and not-for-profit, and is awarded by public tender when there are several entities or organizations with identical or similar characteristics.”

This principle of bottom-up subsidiarity was recently strengthened thanks to the commitment of 18 local entities, including Casal, which in 2009 founded a network (Plataforma de Gestió Ciutadana) to defend and promote all the associations that manage or aspire to manage Barcelona’s public facilities. Today, the “Platform” continues to meet to give visibility to this model of community management and promote it in all neighborhoods of the city.