

5.1 Multimedia in Communication: A Study on the Urban Image of Barcelona

Anna Maria Marinelli, Rosalba Belibani, Anna Gadola

Dipartimento di Progettazione Architettonica e Urbana
Facoltà di Architecture
Università "La Sapienza"
Roma, Italia

The Hypertext on Barcelona was realized within the interuniversity scientific research "La Produzione dei circuiti multimediali didattici per l'architettura e l'urbanistica" (The production of multimedia didactic circuits for architecture and urban planning), coordinator Prof. Paola Coppola Pignatelli - Dipartimento di Progettazione Architettonica e Urbana-Facoltà di Architettura, Università "La Sapienza", Roma, Italia.

During the numerous debates on the relationship between multimedia and communication of the project a long list of problems emerged: the understanding and the management of explorable fields opened by these new media; the informative overflow that can introduce irrelevant information; the "interactive" anxiousness that produces a continuous jumping from one theme to another without any understanding; the identification of the right contents of a multimedia product, that requires an elaborate culture of media languages; the education of the users on new models of learning. From the debates emerged in short a principal point: the necessity to study and to experiment a "multimedia tool" able of transmitting knowledge not through a simple sum of data but through a group of information. If every single tool has its own characteristics and if the combinations are not automatic, then the modes and contents should be examined. Is it possible therefore to invent a strategy of communication?

The sector chosen for this applied research refers to urban realities that offer many wide and articulated productions of images and allow for analysis and comparisons between different methods of design and representation. The difficulty in representing the identity of a city in its entirety creates the need for more images, that are partial but full of expressive values and therefore able to communicate, through their few symbolic elements, the complex meaning of the constructed reality.

The choice and the decodification of symbolic images represent a synthetic phase of analysis of the city that allows for the skipping of several logical passages to arrive at an interpretation of the urban meaning: a methodical reading of the urban structure in its historical and morphological aspects, is, however, necessary in the examination and verification phases. Our work had, therefore, as an objective the production of an hypertext that probed the problem of the evolution of the idea of a city through large scale projectual interventions.

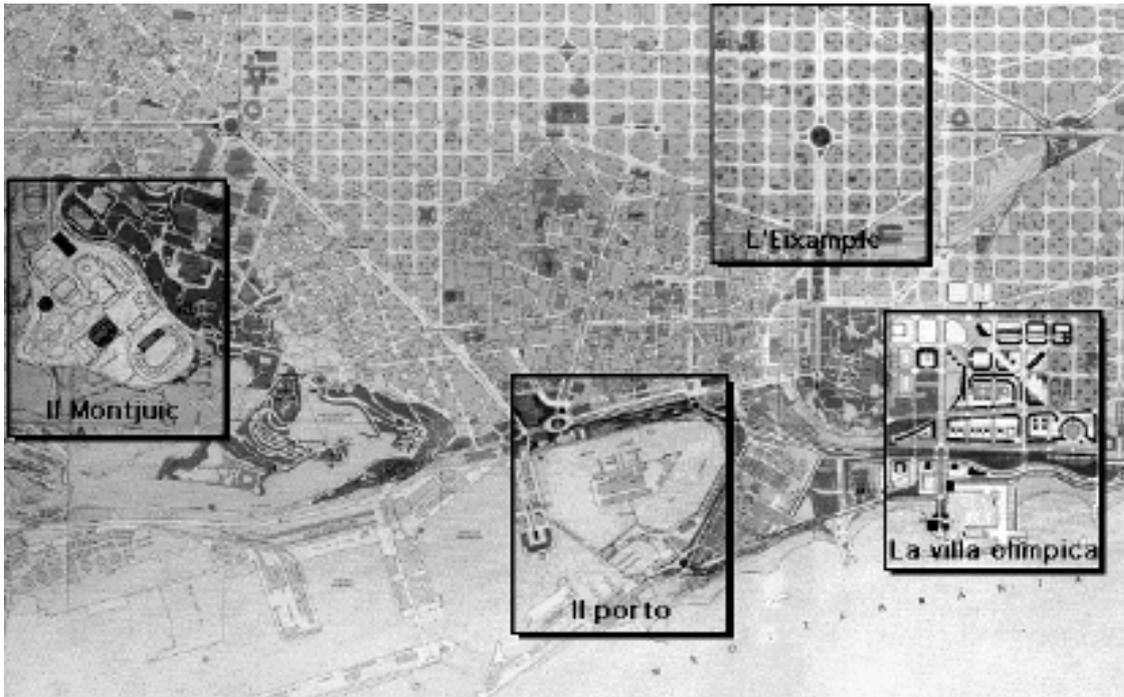


Figure 1. The

parts of Barcelona in the item Urban project..

Over the years a notable quantity of iconographic material -photos, drawings, maps- on the city in its different phases of transformation it has been collected through bibliographic consultation and "on sight" viewing.

The documents collected have confirmed by their heterogeneity that, in order to represent a complex system like an urban structure, it is necessary to have "flexible" tools able to record the various relationships of equilibrium among the elements of the environment. The link between the different representative techniques made possible by the hypertextual tool can follow a logic that puts in evidence, the elements that, with their non transformability present themselves like morphological reference points of the structure, and *the parts* of the city that, with their insertion had modified the pre-existing structure (Fig.1). The reading of the transformations of the environment derive from a continuous process of pre-existences and additions, permanencies and mutations, that are documented not only through traditional plans and perspectives but also through recording its different uses in time by the inhabitants.

The possibility of also representing territorial transformations through the various images of the use of the city is certainly more legible in cases of microscopic structural modifications. In fact, many different uses documented and readable by comparison of images before and after correspond to changes in the formal and functional equilibrium among the different parts of the territory (Fig.2).



Figure 2. Photographs taken in the '70's referred to in the item Images and uses.

The urban transformation of Barcelona, object through time of deep structural modifications, the last of which was on the occasion of the 1992 Olympics, offered a unique occasion for verification.

Starting from a bibliographic collection, a catalogue consisting of structural elements of maps and projects and photographic documentation taken in previous study travels, our plan of work included the following series of operations:

- a) re-reading the transformations in time of the urban image in its entirety and in several significant details;
- b) determining the symbolic elements able of interpreting the urban values in their new structural aspects;
- c) comparing real data with symbolic elements in their evolution in order to verify the hypothesis of a double iconographic series: one of specific images able of describing in an univocal manner the urban structure, the other of symbolic images able of representing in a more general manner the character and the meaning of the city.



Figure 3. The Miró's painting used as background in the visual items.

The complex theme of the transformation of the city opens up to many different paths of research, from the analysis of the urban structure to the design, the reconstruction and the informatic methods of representation. In particular Barcelona offers itself either to a traditional analysis or to a reading through sequences and confrontations, through the richness of its visual suggestions created by the complexity of its transformations, due to the continuous stratification or exceptional interventions.

The choice of the Hypertext to demonstrate the above is obvious. The different materials, such as texts, maps, photographs and drawings can be used in multiple and dynamic associations to describe the city, its uses, transformations, formulation and designs of its parts and elements.

A *navigation scheme* allows for the visualization of the entire structure of the hypertext. The reading is organized in themes, the NODI (knots) -linked to one another by a RETE (net) of *research paths*- which are freely associated in a sequence driven by the interest of the users (Fig.3). During the navigation one can select any one of the following items:

-Urban development - Ideas -Urban Project -Images and uses - Constructions and dynamics.



Figure 4. A photograph of The parts of Urban Project.

The urbanistic and the historical item, entitled Urban development, permits a text reading of the urbanistic plans of the city by scrolling. The journalistic item, entitled Ideas, offers a review of cultural debates regarding the intervention of transformations. The planning items, entitled Urban Plan, offers the possibility to explore through "the parts" episodes that characterize the city (Fig.1). For example it is possible to take a path that illustrates the historical system of Eixample, of 1859, from its macro urbanistic structure to the geometry of a single block, the Mançana, by examining and reviewing the restoration of several blocks. In addition, this section illustrates several projects intended to upgrade new neighbourhoods and requalify the pre-existing urban structure through a summary chart that permits a reading of the architectural episode with photos, drawings, sketches and texts (Fig.4 and Fig.5).

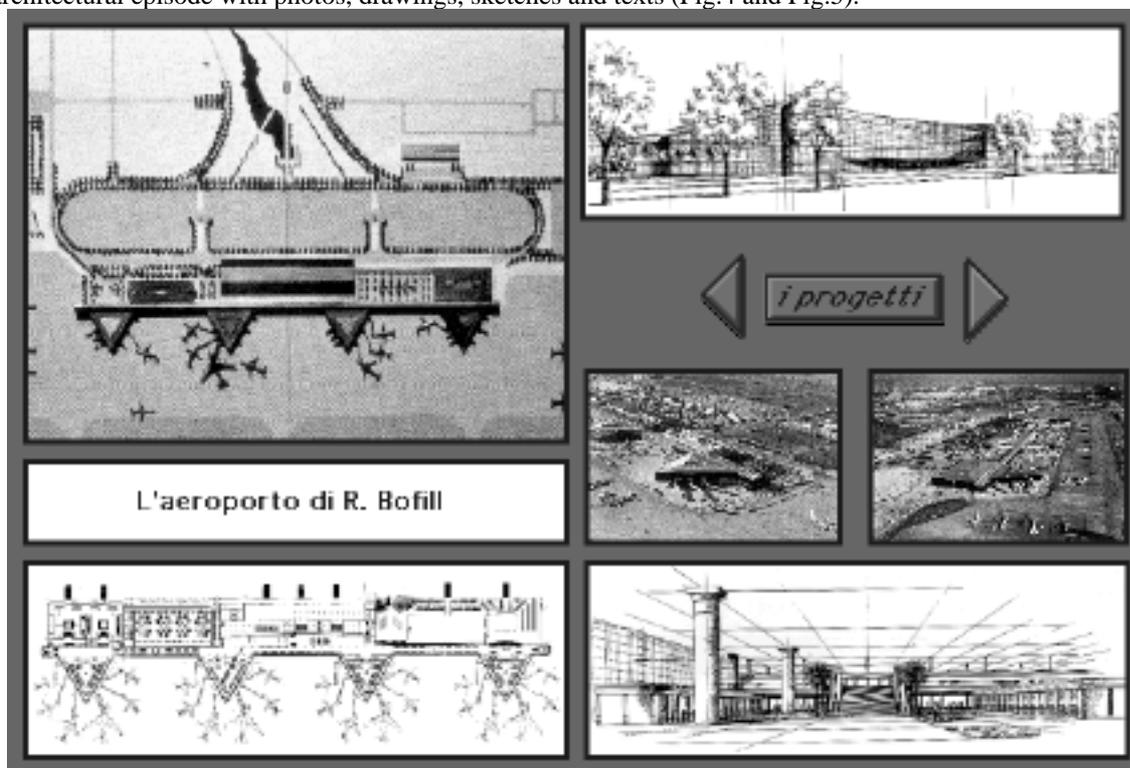


Figure 5. A

projectual chart of Barcelona's airport.

With these paths, composed of texts and images, the information on the city are deeply examined in many direction with the possibility of acquiring additional data from biographical references.

The reader can choose to approach the urban idea through the impressions of images in the visual items of Images and uses and of Constructions and dynamics.

The item entitled Images and uses offers an historical reading of the city through the visual impression that emerges from the comparison of the images taken during the 1970's and '90's.

The item Construction and dynamics sensitizes the reader to the urban idea through images taken during the work in progress of the city's transformation. In this case the role of the "figures" became more complex, passing from the illustration of the written text to the direct and synthetic reading of the city's transformation, both physical and of its uses.

The research aims to analyse the variations of the relationships among the urban structure, the projects and their descriptive and interpretative images, composing the results in a multimedia product able to communicate the complexity of the urban structure.

Conclusions

The successive phase of the research would like to have as its objective the production of a new hypertext in order to thoroughly examine the theme of the evolution of the idea and of the image of the city through more interesting and recent large scale projects. We are presently working on a comparison between the cases of Barcelona-Olympic game '92, Seville-Expò '92 and Lisbon-Culture capital '94 to demonstrate how the cultural-commercial-sporting occasions have an influence on different urban situations creating new forms of the city.

In the construction of this new hypertext will flow together more hypermedia aspects than multimedia contents. Hypermedia aspects, thanks to the hypertextual software evolution, will be associated and related to in the communication path the following media:

1. linguistic texts of comment;
2. fixed iconic texts (photos of the city and of projects, slides);
3. cartographic supports (drawings, sketches), that for their descriptive nature and communicative synergy are between the linguistic texts and the iconic texts;
4. animated texts (computer images and movies);
5. sound and musical texts.

**Order a complete set of
eCAADe Proceedings (1983 - 2000)
on CD-Rom!**

**Further information:
<http://www.ecaade.org>**