

Culture and authenticity in urban regeneration processes: Place branding in central Barcelona

Joaquim Rius Ulldemolins

Universitat de Barcelona, Spain

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Abstract

In the post-Fordist economy, culture has become an important resource for cities to compete at the regional and international levels. Thus, local elites have used culture as an instrument of urban regeneration and these processes increasingly seek to promote urban branding. Moreover, culture is seen as a way to generate narratives that help cities avoid the perception of standardisation, characterise cities as a unique urban space and create authenticity, which are necessary elements if a city is to be globally competitive. The case of central Barcelona and, specifically, the Raval district is exemplary and singular: the joint action of the cultural institutions and representatives of the cultural sector based in the neighbourhood have turned the Raval into an brand space of 'authentic Barcelona' that makes the official, tourist-frequented Barcelona more rich and complex.

Keywords

Barcelona, cultural policy, place branding, post-fordist economy, urban regeneration

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Introduction

Over the last decades, Barcelona has become one of the most successful models of urban development and place branding (Balibrea, 2001, 2004). A considerable body of critical literature concerning the so-called 'Barcelona model' has been generated during the last decade (Balibrea, 2001; Blanco, 2009b; Degen and García, 2008, 2012; Delgado, 2007, 2008). These studies emphasise the negative effects of urban regeneration and the instrumental role that culture plays in this process. According to analyses, the management model of town-centre regeneration uses a top-down approach

(Blanco, 2009a) and investments in large events at the expense of participatory policies or policies that serve social needs (Degen and García, 2012). Generally, these analyses tend to consider urban regeneration as a process of infrastructure creation in which culture plays an instrumental and subordinate role. In addition, the analyses often denounce Barcelona's artificial

Corresponding author:

Joaquim Rius Ulldemolins, Universitat de Barcelona, Facultat d'Economia i Empresa, Edifici Principal, Torre 2 - 4a planta Tinent Coronel Valenzuela, 1-11, Barcelona, Catalunya 08034, Spain.

Email: joaquim.rius@ub.edu

character, which is typified by the idea of Gaudi's Barcelona presented by local tourism promotion agencies (Evans, 2003). These analyses are correct to remark the perverse effects of the Barcelona model and the contradictions in the model between a participatory, sustainable rhetoric and a practice that is more focused on exogenous needs than on citizens. Nevertheless, these analyses fail to understand the current development of other branding processes in Barcelona and the way that these processes rely on cultural activity to find other sides to the official city image.

The building processes of city – and place in general – brands have become a subject of study, with plenty of approaches and research fields (Pike, 2011). Thus we can find studies aimed at giving guidance on the practice of branding from a positive view on this topic (Anholt, 2005, 2009) or, on the contrary, studies more critical of its social and urban effects (Harvey, 2005; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006). The awareness of these negative effects from an elitist and simplifying branding that repeats the same values and symbols for different cities has led to an increasing appraisal of the local communities' social and cultural elements in order to define alternative narratives concerning place brands (Julier, 2011; Moomas, 2002). This is a phenomenon noticeable in different districts of big and even medium-sized cities as – just to name some of the more prominent cases – Manchester, Göteborg, Turin or Barcelona (Jansson, 2003; Julier, 2005; Moomas, 2004; Vanolo, 2008).

Additionally, this paper will defend the idea that the symbolic processes of urban branding are not a simple consequence of infrastructure creation or the will to strengthen urban governance. Place branding processes must be understood as the result of the symbolic elaboration and the selection of some cultural place features to which the property of being place

representative is ascribed (Ren and Blichfeldt, 2011). Thus, place branding should not be confused with the characteristic features of the place but instead is a social construction, resulting from social interactions (Peterson, 2005), which can develop in an elitist (top-down) way, or in a more participatory (bottom-up) way (Julier, 2011). In some cases, branding processes have been developed in a planned way by local governments, economic agents, with the help of private consultancy firms (Aronczyk, 2008) or with the involvement of cultural elites (Julier, 2005). However, as we will show in the case of the Raval district in Barcelona, branding processes can be examined as non-planned ones; while it is true that, throughout these processes, cultural institutions have acted as catalysing agents, their development has been put into practice in a decentralised way from the different contributions of the cultural sector in a relatively self-driven logic of cross-fertilization across the territory (Currid and Williams, 2010). Likewise, although these processes represent a central element in the refunctionalisation of the urban space in the post-Fordist economy (Lloyd, 2010) branding processes developed by the cultural sector can encompass elements of critical reflection about the very same urban change processes they reflect.

The analysis of the city centre's transformation – particularly the Raval district, which is one of the most important projects of the Barcelona model (Goma and Rosetti, 1998) – reveals the mechanisms by which a marginal area is converted into an urban brand based on creativity, uniqueness and authenticity. This process has been promoted and facilitated by cultural institutions, creative industries and creators. By producing images and discourses that describe the Raval district as a unique and authentic urban space by virtue of the district's multicultural and Bohemian character,

it has been possible to reverse the stigmatisation of the Raval and create a Raval brand image that can be deployed locally and internationally.¹

Post-industrial society, local government and the creative city

The American sociologist Daniel Bell (1976) uses the term 'post-industrial society' to explain the emergence of a new era in Western societies. Recent social transformations are not only explained by technological changes but primarily by consumer behaviour. This new centrality of consumption accompanies the expansion of the cultural sphere over society and the economy, which Rodríguez Morató (2007) conceptualised as the emergence of the culture society. This increased social centrality is combined with a loss of autonomy with respect to the social and economic sphere because of the growing instrumentalisation of the economy and politics (Gray, 2007). In the context of these transformations in which the local framework receives renewed prominence, governments have changed and gained importance. Thus, governments have moved from passively implementing state policies regarding public service to actively promoting local development (Quilley, 2000). As a result, the development of a so-called creative city has become a strategy to attract investment and highly educated and trained professionals, the 'creative class' (Florida, 2002). Fashioning a city's image as creative implies public policies aimed at developing environments for the creative class and exhibiting creative images of the city. This strategy involves the implementation of elitist policies that favour gentrification (Peck, 2005) and reflects the so-called *entrepreneurial turn* in local policies (Harvey, 1989a). Moreover, the strategy favours urban revitalisation on the basis of large architectural projects and cultural institutions (Bianchini, 1993),

spectacular events (García, 2004a) and the creation of cultural industry clusters (Scott, 2000, 2010). These policies and approaches share the goal of promoting the image of a creative city (Landry and Bianchini, 1995). That is, *city branding* consists of a holistic promotion of the city that associates the city with a global cultural icon (Evans, 2003) and the promotion of the social and infrastructure features of the city that facilitate the city's classification as 'creative' (Vanolo, 2008). These *city branding* projects are typical of the world's major capitals and also appear in medium-sized cities that desire to develop a strategy to compete in the global economy and attract investors and tourists (Castells, 1989).

With the redefinition of cultural policy objectives, local economic development agents and tourism agents have gained prominence over cultural agents. The agents of economic development and tourism pursue these instrumental objectives, rather than social integration or the promotion of intrinsic cultural values (García, 2004b). The aestheticising process of *urban branding* has been criticised as artificial, the 'Carnival mask' that hides the growing social and economic inequality in cities (Harvey, 1989b). In this context, the rise and promotion of fashionable new neighbourhoods can be interpreted as a refunctionalisation of centrally located urban spaces that encourages the symbolic development of creative industries and the configuration of cities as leisure and consumption spaces for the new middle class (Lloyd, 2010; Zukin, 1982).

The production of fascination and authenticity: Culture, brand and territory

According to the theory of a creative city, which has become a commonplace in the academic literature and urban marketing, to develop a creative city brand, it is necessary

to attract the creative class (cf. Florida, 2002). This process is understood to involve the creation of infrastructure to provide residential facilities and support professional development. A framework must be established for social interaction (the so-called *buzz* of Storper and Venables (2004)) and cultural variety and difference must be guaranteed, particularly multiculturalism (Landry and Bianchini, 1995). A dynamic local milieu (Zukin, 1995) must be promoted that offers a wide range of entertainment, restaurants and nightlife (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002; Lloyd and Clark, 2001). In addition, public spaces should be provided that are oriented toward leisure and sports for the middle class (Zukin, 1995).

However, the production of an image of a creative urban space does not only depend on infrastructure or factors linked to generic considerations concerned with facilitating interaction. It is necessary to provide the urban brand a narrative and a value (Sandercock, 2003) aimed at changing the perception of potential users or visitors, whether they are citizens of the whole city, international tourists or investors. Such a branding process cannot start from scratch or banish a previously existing culture. In contrast, the branding process must be based on the local identity because artificial narratives are not effective. That is, to be effective, *branding* narratives should be based on authentic values associated with the location (Jones and Smith, 2005) and establish a connection with the genuine local identity (Moomas, 2002). An authenticity that distinguishes the product helps the product compete with other products. In addition, authenticity can combine a constant reinterpretation (to suit consumer taste) with an idealised evocation of the past to strengthen a brand's popularity (Brown et al., 2003).

In general, this element is important for economic actors and has been revealed to be

a key factor for urban planners. The more specific and symbolically charged the identity (or narrative identity) is, the more the monopoly power of the space can be exploited to gain a competitive advantage (Harvey, 1989a) by creating entry barriers for products from competing cities (Power and Scott, 2004). In this case, an important problem for development strategies for creative cities and city branding is the imitation of strategies and the production of cloned and trite images (Muñoz, 2010). Such simplifications of the cultural diversity of urban spaces (Evans, 2003) can result in standardisation and trivialisation and thereby decrease a city's creativity (Landry and Bianchini, 1995). The attribution of the value of uniqueness and authenticity to the area is a key element in these branding processes. However, authenticity is not so much a consequence of the product but the result of a process in which popular culture and cultural industry manage to articulate a discourse concerning a cultural product or style (Peterson, 1997). In other cases, the relationship between place-product and authenticity is important to generating successful products, particularly where authentic luxury goods associate qualitative aspects of a location with the product (Beverland, 2005; Molotch, 2002). Therefore, one objective of urban and cultural policies has been to promote the singular and authentic elements of each area to coordinate a *place branding* strategy (Jones and Smith, 2005).

In the case of urban regeneration, the transformation of a location into a brand is perhaps a slightly more complex process. The transformation begins from a negative connotation of the urban space for which the brand is developed, which is perceived as a marginal and dangerous space (Lloyd, 2010). To convert this location into a space for consumption and creativity, a key step is to provide the space with a new, symbolically attractive and safe image for the new

middle class (Zukin, 1982, 1995). Thus, the branding process may generate gentrification processes that distort the location's unique and authentic character and transform the location into a standardised space (Peck, 2005). In addition, this process can result in the expulsion of the artistic community (Kostelanetz, 2003) and the decline of the creative scene (Molotch and Treskon, 2009). Therefore, it is important to combine the processes of urban regeneration and the refunctionalisation of town centres with the needs of post-Fordist capitalism and the clustering of creative industries (Scott, 2000). The creation of leisure spaces should be associated with new lifestyles (Kearns and Philo, 1993) without removing the potentially distinctive character – the source of 'local authenticity'. In certain cases, the 'immigrant district' label can evolve from a stigma in the case of city centres to a positive element in the promotion strategy for that type of urban space (Taylor, 2000).

The Barcelona model and urban branding: From the model to the brand

As stated by Arturo Rodríguez (2005, 2008) the Barcelona Strategic Plan for Culture has a long history. However, primarily since the 1980s, Barcelona has developed as one of the most advanced models of an entrepreneurial city (Marshall, 1996). The Barcelona model can be understood as a city project led by the local government with the aim of transforming the city economically, socially and culturally (Marshall, 2000). There is a certain degree of consensus that the Barcelona model successfully combined urban renewal and cultural planning (Subirós, 1999). Moreover, Barcelona is a city with a considerable heritage and substantial cultural activity, which this urban development model managed to preserve and enhance. Local elites who were aware of

this legacy converted culture into a key element in the redefinition of future strategies for the city (Rodríguez Morató, 2008), and the local government determined to convert the cultural and knowledge sectors combined with the tourism sector into vectors for local economic development (Trullén, 2001). Barcelona has generated a model of urban development to a large extent based on culture, which has tried to combine the attention to the local population's needs with an enhancement of its self-image among the citizens through internal promotional campaigns in order to create a social consensus on the city project (McNeill, 2001), with an increasing effort to project the city's image internationally. In this sense, Barcelona has become a brand (Balibrea, 2004). This brand is focused on emphasising the city's Mediterranean temperament and the figure of Gaudí and his creative character while dismissing the memory of the city's industrial economy and its history of political rebelliousness (Balibrea, 2007). The selective historical memory that Barcelona's branding has involved has caused certain academics and political activists to describe Barcelona as 'The Liar City' (Delgado, 2007; Espai en Blanc, 2004).

However, there is a consensus that the Barcelona brand image has enjoyed remarkable international success as a high technology city, a conference location, and a city of trade fairs and arts festivals (García, 2004a, 2004b; González, 2011; Majoor, 2011; Trullén, 2001). This process has been the outcome of the combined efforts of Barcelona's local government and the Catalan regional government, who from the decade of the 1980s have generated a paradiplomacy that has resulted in their leading of city or region networks, with a special tendency to employ culture as a resource both to build up a network of contacts and complicities and to gain visibility in the international arena (Zamorano, 2012).

The results of these actions can be seen in different facets of the city's economic activity, but perhaps the clearer indicator of this success is reflected in the steady increase in the number of international tourist visits to the city (Casellas et al., 2010), which increased from 2.4 million visitors in 1993 to 7.13 million in 2011 (Turisme de Barcelona, 2012).

Urban regeneration, cultural clustering and place branding in central Barcelona²

The Raval is a Barcelona central district that was urbanised during the first half of the 19th century. In this district, the first industries and working-class tenements were established. The district was the stage for the anarchist struggles that characterised *Rosa de fuego* (Rose of Fire, which was Barcelona's name during the 19th and early 20th centuries) and, also during the early 20th century, a Bohemian neighbourhood (Aisa and Vidal, 2005). However, the working-class socio-political activism and Bohemian tradition was brutally repressed by Franco's regime (1939–1975), who left the district to its fate as a ghetto in a spiral of social and urban degradation where drug trafficking and prostitution thrived.³

Thus, during Spain's transition to democracy, the Raval degraded and became the area of the city with the worst indicators of social exclusion. From 1970 until 1986, the Raval lost 40% of its population (Subirats and Rius, 2008). At the beginning of the 1980s, one priority of the new democratic city council, which had a social-democratic orientation, was to regenerate the city centre (PROCIVESA, 2002). More economic resources were invested in this intense urban regeneration process than in any other urban project in Barcelona (Goma and Rosetti, 1998).⁴ Nevertheless, some authors have highlighted gentrifying or negative

consequences for the local community (Degen, 2003; Degen and García, 2008, 2012; Delgado, 2007, 2008; Miles, 2004, 2005; Sargatal, 2001, 2003; Tabakman, 2001). In this project, one strategic objective was to replace the stigmatised administrative designation 'District V' and the area's popular name 'Chinatown' with the neighbourhood's medieval appellation: the Raval (Villar, 1997). The aim was to express the urban, economic and symbolic change in the area (Subirats and Rius, 2008). In fact, the re-naming was the first necessary step in the area's new creative urban branding.

However, the name Raval was absolutely unknown, even to the district's inhabitants. A journalist wrote, 'Around the year 1964 nobody knew it was the Raval district. I wrote a study for my newspaper, *Escenas del Barrio Chino* (Scenes from Chinatown), and I was with people who had lived here all their life. None of them remembered it was called the Raval when they were young [...]. It was not until 1984 that the districts of Barcelona were changed; hence the name Raval reappeared with force' (Huertas Claveria, 1998). The name change did not occur without resistance from certain residents and intellectuals who celebrated diversity and criticised the neighbourhood's lack of urban and social unity. Despite the resistance from a segment of the old neighbourhood population, the 'the Raval' became the brand image of the urban and social change. The name's rapid adoption by the district's residents and the rest of Barcelona indicated that the transformation had been accepted (Subirats and Rius, 2008). However, the working-class and anarchist character of the district was erased. In the Raval branding, a process of ideological selection occurred (Aisa and Vidal, 2005).

Concurrent with the name change, the creation of a cluster of cultural institutions was planned. The institutions established the necessary infrastructure for the Raval

branding process. In July 1987, Pascual Maragall, Barcelona's mayor, determined to assign the design of the future Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA) to the American architect Richard Meier. The museum was inaugurated in 1995. In the adjacent *Casa de la Caridad* (House of Charity) area, another cultural project was created: the Center of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (CCCB), which opened in 1994. These new facilities generated a unique and innovative cultural action model focused on the promotion of the culture of cities and reflection on the urban phenomenon. Therefore, this urban renewal consciously and intentionally became one of Barcelona's creative spaces (Rius, 2006). MACBA and CCCB represented a fundament of the singularity and authenticity of the Raval urban space and became a driving force of the city's brand promotion.⁵

The development of the Raval cultural institutions has been promoted by public administrations (under the leadership of the Barcelona City Council). These administrations have encouraged the creation of multiple cultural, educational and research institutions, including the Arts and Design Promotion (FAD), the College of History and Geography and the Film Archive of Catalonia, which have attracted numerous representatives from the cultural and creative sector, such as theatres, design studios, art galleries and publishing houses (Figure 1).⁶ The district's creative cluster has a single governing body, known as the *Fundació Tot Raval* (Foundation for all Raval), which was founded in 2002. The foundation unites public, private and third sector agents in favour of urban reform.

One of the first activities organised by the CCCB between 1995 and 1999, was the City of Words activity, which 'under the motto "the path of memory", sought to open or recover the memories of the Raval citizens through words' using banners displayed on

the balconies of the district (CCCB, 2000). In 1998, the largest display of the neighbourhood's historical memory and branding empowerment occurred: Scenes from the Raval (Figure 2). The project focused on listing and analysing literary works dedicated to the district.⁷ An exhibition and a series of debates on the district's cultural heritage and urban regeneration were held and published in print and on the internet. This project involved numerous intellectuals and writers and had a substantial local and national impact. Although the neighbourhood's marginal, Bohemian past was often mentioned, the mobilisation of these accumulated cultural resources had the effect of lowering the mental barrier that dissuaded tourists or residents elsewhere in Barcelona from entering this neighbourhood because they considered the neighbourhood marginal and dangerous. In addition, emphasising the Raval's historical assets and social diversity seemed to create the reputation of an inspiring space for artists.

Perhaps one of the most effective actions in the international promotion of the Raval brand image was the decision by the CCCB to sponsor the Sonar Barcelona Festival of Advanced Music and New Media Art. Currently, the Sonar Village is held at the CCCB annually. During the day, the festival present concerts, conferences and demonstrations on electronic music, bringing together thousands of young people from around the world.⁸

The arts and the Raval brand image

The public initiative and the cultural policy represented a first step in the Raval branding and the construction of a narrative associated with the district's unique and authentic character as an urban space. However, since the inauguration of the Raval cultural facilities in the mid-1990s, the district has become

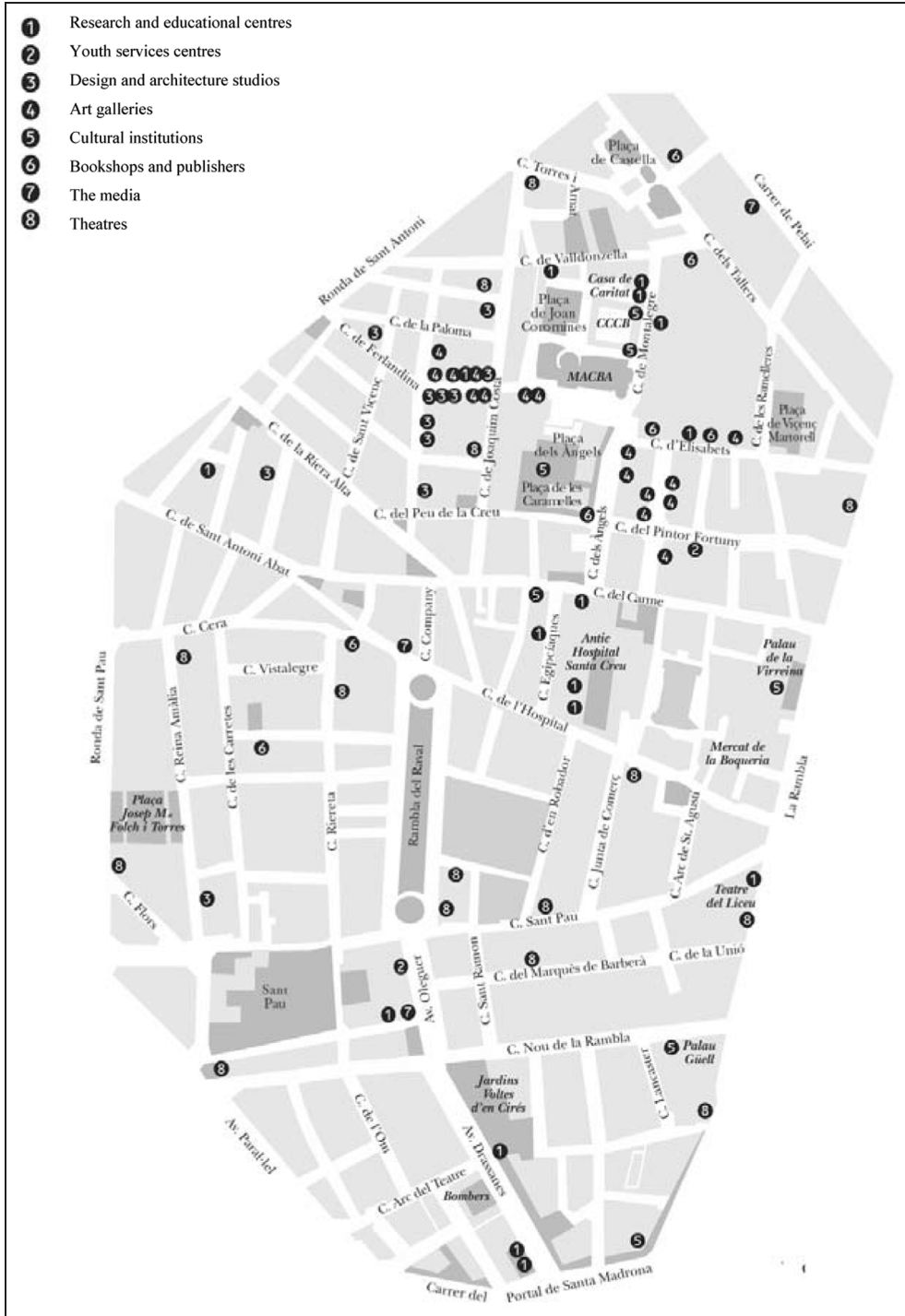


Figure 1. Cultural and educational institutions and creative enterprises in the Raval (2012).



Figure 2. Exhibition Scenes from the Raval (1998) and the Sonar Village (2011) – Center of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (CCCB).

Source: Photo by the author.

the space and subject of artistic creation. The Raval has provided the neighbourhood a unique and differentiating value with respect to other urban spaces. These artistic creations display an image that can be used as a counterpoint to the official Barcelona brand image associated with consumption and mass tourism spaces, such as the *Eixample* and Gaudí buildings. The artistic creations associate the Raval district with real, authentic values of a space – in the sense defined by Peterson (2005) – that is socially and ethnically distinct and occasionally dangerous, dirty or a setting for social conflict. As will be shown, several literary and audiovisual works, which had local and international audiences, consolidated the Raval brand image as an urban space of cultural consumption and production.

For example, Ruiz Zafón's novel, *The Shadow of the Wind* (*La sombra del viento*),⁹ characterised the neighbourhood in a dark, mysterious way: 'When we reached Calle Arco del Teatro, we continued through its arch toward the Raval quarter, entering a vault of blue haze. I followed my father through that narrow lane, more of a scar than a street, until the gleam of the Ramblas faded behind us' (Ruiz Zafón, 2001). In addition, the Raval has provided the setting

for plays, such as *Smells* (*Olores*) by Josep Maria Benet i Jornet (2000), in which the author reflects on the district's reform and criticises the Raval's loss of identity. Marc Martínez's play *Super Raval* (2001) also concerns the Raval, analysing the ambivalent relationship between immigrants and residents in the neighbourhood. *It's Raining in Barcelona* (*Plou sobre Barcelona*) by Pau Miró (2004) also situates the dramatic action in the Raval and presents 'a dark and fragile triangle formed by three characters (a prostitute, her pimp and one of her regulars) [and] has as a backdrop this peculiar proximity between the hidden city, globalising consumerism and the world of high culture so typical of Barcelona's Raval area'. Finally, the box-office success *The Vampire in Raval* (*La vampira del Raval*) (2012) was a musical based on an event that occurred in 1912 in the neighbourhood: the kidnapping of children for the amusement of the rich. The scandal was used as a metaphor of the relationship between money and desire.

Similarly, the Raval has attracted filmmakers. The documentary *Under Construction* (*En construcció*), directed by José Luis Guerín and released in 2001, examines the neighbourhood's transformation. Another documentary, *About Children* (*De*



Figure 3. Street Art in the Raval.

Source: Adam Lang, 2006.

ens) by Joaquim Jordà (2004) is a reflection on pederasty, poverty and urban reform. And *Mónica del Raval, Autobiography of a Whore* (*Mónica del Raval, autobiografía de una puta*) (2009), frankly portrays the semi-secret and marginal world of the neighbourhood's impoverished prostitutes. In a casual and festive manner, the director Cédric Klapisch presents the multicultural and Bohemian atmosphere of the area in the successful film *Pot Luck* (*L'Auberge espagnole*) (2002). Despite the film's somewhat banal and conflictless interpretation of this urban space (Balibrea, 2004), the protagonist, as he walks past the CCCB, ardently defends the neighbourhood in front of his lover who complains about the neighbourhood's dirty streets. Therefore, the film is a plea for the neighbourhood's authenticity and value. Finally, we cannot fail to mention that *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* by Woody Allen depicts two dual realities of the district: the remodelled MACBA square and St. Ramon Street, where poor women prostitute themselves. Thus, the Raval is subject to apparently contradictory interpretations. The district is represented as a new leisure space for the new middle class in *In the City* (*En la ciudad*) by Cesc Gay (2003). However, the district is also the scene of marginal and tormented lives, as in the film *Biutiful* (2010)

directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, in which Javier Bardem portrays the last days of a former drug addict. Both films seem to contradict Barcelona's official image by presenting a series of problems related to this urban space, urban reform and social exclusion. However, these two visions present the area in a unique, authentic and strongly symbolic atmosphere that can elicit a fascination with or the rejection of this space but which makes the Raval a focus of public attention. In short, the Raval represents a resource that, as we shall discuss below, is exploited by part of the artistic community and the shopkeepers to enhance the Raval brand image and promote it locally and internationally.

The arts community, business sector and the Raval brand

The Raval brand image as a creative territory does not only emerge from external cultural productions but also manifests itself on the district's streets. Another element that contributes to a creative brand image is street art, for example, graffiti, tags, stencils, stickers, and painted posters (Figures 3 and 4).

Many of these examples of street art clearly affirm and celebrate the district's



Figure 4. *Raval Power* and *Super Raval* stencils, 2008.

Source: Photos by the author.

artistic or multicultural identity, for example, stencils with protest slogans, such as *Raval power* or *Super-Rawal*. Certain stencils mark the territory of the artistic community and are repeated throughout the neighbourhood. Thus, the markers contribute to the association of creativity with the district's brand image.

On the whole, the street art strongly contributes to the Raval branding, which is highly visible to tourists and other visitors to the neighbourhood, who are typically young individuals attracted by the culture, educational facilities and leisure that the Raval offers and the neighbourhood's 'hipster' atmosphere. The brand is reflected in the

various entertainment venues (clubs and theatres). In fact, the clubs and theatres use the area's name as a defining element to associate the Raval with multiculturalism. They aim to distinguish the Raval from the competition, that is, as a valorisation strategy, for example by referring to the strong presence of the Pakistani or the North African community in the neighbourhood (Figures 4 and 5).

In addition, the association between the fashionable shops and the neighbourhood as a brand is highly visible in the adoption of the current name of the Raval district or its former names, which refer to the quarter's Bohemian reputation (e.g., District V and Chinatown). In many cases, the branding of the Raval initiated by the Barcelona City Council has been adopted by the private sector, which establishes the name as a socially accepted and commercially promoted brand (Figure 5 and 6).

This neighbourhood branding process initiated a new phase with the 2005 *ravalejar* campaign (a neologism that combines *Raval* and the Catalan verbal suffix *-ejar*). Using the name of the district as a verb and translating it into the various languages that are used in the neighbourhood (in addition to Catalan and Castilian, there are Urdu,



Figure 5. Club Zentraus Raval Bass Session; Raval Launch Show; Concert of Barcelona Raval Sessions; Raval Off – Sonar Off Party.

Source: Photos by the author (between 2006 and 2012).



Figure 6. 1: Raval Text; 2: Hostal gato Raval; 3: Candela bar restaurante en el Raval; 4: Bar Raval; 5: Distrito Quinto; 6: RR, la Reina del Raval; 7: Raval-Bar; 8: La Xina Art; 9: Central del Raval.
 Source: Photos by the author (between 2006 and 2012).

Arabic and Tagalog) is a means to attract active support for the area and its creative, multicultural character (Figure 7).

According to the head of the Foundation for all Raval:

a particularity that this neighbourhood has is that when you know it, you love it, and it becomes an attitude. Through the Foundation for all Raval and the Barcelona City Council, we commissioned an advertising agency to produce a campaign to improve the image. And instead of proposing a logo – which is what we requested – the agency developed a multi-implementation campaign termed ‘rava-lejar’. And this verb suggests an attitude that each individual understands in his or her own way. In this district, there is no ‘posing’ as in



Figure 7. Banner Ravalejar (2008).
 Source: Photo by the author.

other districts; there is an authenticity. It’s an authentic neighbourhood, not a theme park. (Interview with the deputy director of the

Foundation for all Raval, who is also a gallery owner and restaurateur, 2008)

Thus, the promoters of the Raval brand image present the image not as a simplifying icon, although to a certain extent the brand is such an icon, but as a demonstration of authenticity that facilitates the expression of individuality in accordance with the need for individuation fostered by postmodern consumption (Bell, 1976). Although the 'ravalejar' campaign desires to present the reform and its effects positively, the campaign demonstrates the possibility of developing a successful narrative about the neighbourhood and providing the brand with positive values. As a result of such campaigns and the positive branding effect, we can observe a steady increase in cultural offerings, renovation and leisure. With annual visitor traffic estimated to be 18.8 million, the Raval is Barcelona's fourth-ranked commercial area (Fundació Tot Raval, 2012).

Conclusions

The promotion of a creative city has become a major objective for urban planners (Landry and Bianchini, 1995). In this context, city branding has become a primary tool for the international promotion of cities that wish to present themselves as creative (Evans, 2003). Nevertheless, prevalent views on the development of the creative city insist on the importance of infrastructure or social context, as opposed to cultural factors (García, 2004b). However, this paper has demonstrated that culture is not only one instrument among others to promote the development of the city or urban regeneration. Culture can be exploited by the political and economic elites in order to legitimate and create consensus on the urban regeneration processes (Julier, 2005), where an urban residential gentrification, a change in business use and a control on the use of public

spaces can take place (Degen, 2008). In these cases, branding processes take place in an elitist and restrictive way, selecting those non-problematic features for their medium-class users, investors or tourists (Peck, 2005). However, branding processes can also be developed with the participation both of the cultural institutions and a plurality of creators from different cultural sectors that, through cross-fertilization, set up a place brand in a more multi-dimensional and integrating way (Julier, 2011; Therkelsen and Halkier, 2011).

Barcelona has developed a powerful place branding process, which is strongly associated with a certain interpretation – a socially and politically distorted interpretation – of the city's historical and cultural legacy. The branding has progressively focused on enhancing the use of culture in promoting the city internationally and to tourists (Balibrea, 2001; Degen and García, 2012). Within this framework, in central Barcelona and, particularly, in the Raval district, culture has become an essential tool to reverse the process of urban marginality and social stigmatisation. An intensive programme of urban regeneration has been developed that has successfully constructed cultural infrastructure in the district's centre. The programme has created a cluster of cultural institutions and industries. However, this process of regenerating infrastructure has been combined with an intense branding process of the district and an aestheticisation of the urban regeneration process. This process originates first from the cultural activities of these same cultural institutions. These activities emphasise the accumulated cultural resources of the area (tangible and intangible cultural heritage, such as the literature on the area) and generate a Raval brand image. This brand has been intentionally based on an idealised and distorted historical memory and combined with the heroic story of the district's transformation using the same elements found in *branding* processes (Brown et

al., 2003). Nevertheless, the Raval's uniqueness as multicultural space and a field for new lifestyles and consumption has been emphasised, drawing the attention of artists and other creative individuals.

Thus, this process has increased in scope and generated successful cultural productions (best sellers, plays and audiovisual works with local and international impact). These productions have promoted the brand and increased the neighbourhood's reputation as a centre for creativity (Beverland, 2005; Molotch, 2002). These works of art have created the image of a Bohemian, multicultural Barcelona and made the primary Barcelona brand image, which is associated with Gaudí and the bourgeois architecture and urbanism of the early 20th century, more complex (Evans, 2003). Additionally, the Raval's arts community and commercial network have been involved in the promotion of the district's brand and have reclaimed the district's name, thus reinforcing and consolidating the branding process. The Raval has a remarkable attractiveness for Barcelona residents and tourists, who are seduced by the district's hint of uniqueness and authenticity. The urban regeneration process has not only been a process of infrastructural regeneration but also has been symbolic and characterised by its resistance to erasing the district's assets. In contrast, the branding process has absorbed the Raval's heritage and uses it as an element of uniqueness and appraisal based on a certain interpretation of the quarter's historical memory and the process of urban change. This transformation has detractors because of the transformation's potential to become gentrification and cause social conflict (Miles, 2005). The Raval case, within the framework of the Barcelona model, has been characterised for being a relatively integrating process for the local community, where urban regeneration has been promoted which has recovered and put into value most

of the historic memory, the material and immaterial cultural heritage and the social and cultural diversity of this urban space. The socio-cultural wealth of this zone has allowed the generation of a more multi-dimensional brand building process, associated with values of authenticity, which has achieved the promotion of the district locally and internationally without falling into a impoverishing standardisation of its image, so commonplace in other international branding campaigns, planned by elites or consultancy firms. All in all, the use of culture in an urban regeneration process and in the creation of a place brand has set the Raval within an international tendency comparable with other cases where the brand has been generated in a more participatory way, but the Raval holds an outstanding and singular position because of the diversity, wealth and mass media projection associated with its cultural production. As a result of these processes Barcelona's local and international brand has become richer and more complex.

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Notes

1. The creation process of the brand Raval is embedded in the urban regeneration process initiated in the 1980s – we will deal with this in the section 'Urban regeneration, cultural clustering and place branding in central

Barcelona'. This process, as we will see next, could be described as a gentrification process by some authors. The main goal of this paper is not to determine whether there exists a gentrification process in the Raval, as this is an exercise with social and scientific interest but would require writing up a complete article. The Raval has been the subject of several articles where the initial hypothesis was the existence of a gentrification process: we could cite – without claiming to be exhaustive – several articles published in the 2000s decade, as Sargatal (2001, 2003), Tabakman (2001), Riol Carvajal (2003), Delgado (2008), Mónica Degen (2003, 2008) or Malcom Miles (2004, 2005). These studies examine some features of the urban and social transformation of the Raval district, having in common a denunciatory stance against the local urban policy and its perverse effects on the local communities, as well as consequently exposing some real state speculation processes, the elitizing course of some urban spaces or the mercantilist drift of urban planning processes from the 2000s on (Degen and García, 2012). Other authors have examined the process from a global perspective, comparing the community's situation before and after the reform and admit that, despite the negative effects mentioned above, generally it might be argued that the local community was not expelled (Martínez Rigol, 2000) and also admit that the neighbours affected by the reform were rehoused in newly constructed homes within the district, with a significant improvement of their living conditions (Aramburu, 2000). The Raval reform has some grey areas but for the most part the social and cultural continuity of the district has not been cut short, though it must cope now with a social and urban environment more open to the flows coming from the rest of the city and the country (Aisa and Vidal, 2005). Thus, 20 years after the start of the reform – and with a longitudinal perspective broader than the articles cited above – we have been able to verify, by means of one study co-directed by us, that this is the most socially and culturally diverse district of Barcelona, with 42% of neighbours born or

living in the district before the reform, with a presence of immigrant people coming from 27 countries outside the European Union – meaning 43% of the district population – and with 15% new residents coming from Spain or other countries of the EU, mostly young and middle class people (Subirats, 2008). This trait, along with other indicators about infrastructures and living conditions of the local community, may lead us to think that this is a clear case of urban regeneration which, despite some negative elements, is relatively sustainable (Barber and Pareja Eastaway, 2010); there has not been a rupture between the former and the current socio-cultural realities. This fact can be reflected in the cultural productions examined in sections 'Urban regeneration, cultural clustering and place branding in central Barcelona' and 'The arts and the Raval brand image', many of those referring to the district's historic memory and social issues. Nevertheless, as we have shown in other publications (Rius, 2006 and 2008), on the business and economic level the Raval has gentrified through the establishment of an offer aimed at the new residents and users (trendy bars and restaurants, nightlife clubs, clothing and designer object shops, etc.) in an adaptation process of these marginal districts towards the new post-Fordist economy (Lloyd, 2010).

2. Other Barcelona areas have undergone urban changes within the Barcelona model, such as the Distrito 22@, focused towards the so-called Knowledge Economy in the Poblenou district. This shows the local government's ambition for leading the urban and economic change of the city (Casellas and Pallares-Barbera, 2009). Other approaches, less indulgent with this process, emphasise the negative effects of this urban reform plan on the local community and the artists settled in the district (Martí-Costa and Pradel i Miquel, 2011).
3. It is commonplace in the literature written during the Spanish political transition to describe the Raval as the district of the Civil War's defeated (1936–1939) and a place where the anarcho-syndicalist militancy and the Bohemian lifestyle – especially the one related to homosexuality and transvestism, with a

- long tradition in the district (Villar, 1997) – had to go deep underground in response to the repression of Franco’s regime, who punished political activism and homosexual behaviour with severe imprisonment terms until the 1970s (Moix, 2013). However, this tradition of political activism and Bohemian lifestyle lived on and revived during the years of transition to democracy, recovering or creating again a network of political activism and Bohemian venues still active today (Aisa and Vidal, 2005).
4. In the early 1980s, the district’s renewal began. The project was managed by a joint venture, Promoció de Ciutat Vella (PROCIVESA) (Promotion of the Old City) and involved the demolition of 500 buildings, the construction of 1200 new public housing units, the restoration of 45% of the houses and the opening of three large public spaces and many other small urban interventions that represented a total public investment of 1.215 billion euros from 1984 to 2004 (PROCIVESA, 2002). This renewal process has involved deep changes in the three districts that comprise it (Born, Bari Gòtic and Raval) with similar change processes in business and economic uses (Subirós, 1999). Nevertheless, the Raval case is specific by reason of the intensity in the use of culture by the public administrations and the emergence of several artistic communities and initiatives (Rius Uldemollins, 2008).
 5. Unlike other cities – such as Bilbao, which went for a franchised museum (Plaza, 1999) – in the Barcelona case a hybrid model of cultural institutions was created, with a strong participation of civil society and the cultural sector (Rius, 2012). In the MACBA’s case this took shape in a focus on conceptual art whereas in the CCCB’s case, in becoming a centre of reflection and revitalisation of urban culture. These are two different projects, the common denominator being the rejection of an international standardisation of cultural institutions, the acceptance of social and urban conflict as part of their reality as an institution, and the reckoning of the local and urban elements as a source of reflection and cultural production. All of this can be reflected in their very own activities as well as in those indirectly encouraged as we will see below (Rius, 2006). Therefore these cultural institutions can be considered as catalysts in the processes whereby the symbolic value of authenticity in the district brand is constructed.
 6. As Figure 1 shows, the presence of cultural and educational institutions or creative companies in the Raval is not homogeneous throughout the district and we can see a tendency to clusterisation in the north area. This is due to the social and urban heterogeneity in the district, reflecting in part the historical division between the North area (the Distrito V) and the South area (the Barrio Chino) (Aisa and Vidal, 2005; Villar, 1997) and the clustering effect of cultural institutions on other public institutions and private agents (Montgomery, 2003). Nevertheless, this division between north and south is becoming blurred owing to the opening in 2012 of a new major cultural facility in the South area, the *Filmoteca de Catalunya* (Subirats and Rius, 2008).
 7. From the end of the 19th to the beginning of the 20th centuries, the Raval was one of Barcelona’s primary literary spaces. According to the Literary Geographies of the Raval (*Geografias Literarias del Raval*) cultural project, elaborated by the CCCB, there are 56 novels or theatre productions and 12 collections of poetry dedicated to or set in the Raval.
 8. Each year, Sonar, which is an international festival of electronic music, welcomes musicians and fans of this style. Many of the participants are foreigners, who literally invade the Raval district during the five-day event. In 2011, 89,000 spectators and 499 artists from 42 countries participated. According to the Sonar organisation, approximately half of the advanced tickets are sold outside Spain, and only 25% out of the 185 accredited journalists represent the Spanish media, which indicates the festival’s international impact.
 9. Ruiz Zafon’s novel is a best seller with an international audience. Fifteen million copies have been sold, of which approximately two-thirds are translations into other languages.

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