

## COMMUNICATIVE PLACE-MAKING: PARTICIPATORY PLANNING AND THE ENHANCEMENT OF SENSE

*Pablo Juárez Latimer-Knowles\**

\*Departament d'Urbanisme i Ordenació del Territori, UPC, Barcelona, Spain, Email:pablojlk@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** The possession of a strong sense of place has been linked to the undertaking of environmentally responsible behaviours. As it is elusive at its deepest level, sense can only be addressed indirectly through the study of legibility. One of the aspects of legibility is the role of names and meanings in reinforcing the identities of places. That aspect has been highlighted by research on cultural landscapes and heritage parks. Acknowledgement of the relevance of the relationship between narrative and place within them has resulted in the construction of the concept of communicative place. Moreover, a growth of the demand for communicative places has been suggested. Understanding the way in which the growth of the endogenous share of that demand manifests in our environment is the aim of this article.

**KEYWORDS:** Sense of place, narrative, communicative place, participatory planning

### NOMENCLATURE

ILCL	International Laboratory on Cultural Landscapes
EASW	European Awareness Scenario Workshop
AVTN	Associació de Veïns de Trinitat Nova
PCTN	Pla Comunitari de Trinitat Nova

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The limits to growth that were foreseen more than three decades ago by the Club of Rome (Meadows, Meadows, Randers & Behrens 1972) have become all too evident in recent years. The debate that used to follow the approaches that dared taking those limits into consideration, has now moved to decision making on how to respond to the consequences of their transgression upon the environment.

In this context, several environmental professionals have linked the possession of a strong sense of place with the undertaking of environmentally responsible behaviours (Ardoin 2004),<sup>1</sup> following the reasoning that “People who know a place may come to care about it more deeply. People who care about a place are more likely to take better care of it” (Thayer 2003, as quoted by Ardoin 2004).

Regarding sense of place, architects that work and research on urban planning – such as the author of this article – are more likely to focus on how environments can enhance it, than on how it can be enhanced in their inhabitants. Therefore, among the several available definitions, they may find Kevin Lynch’s a pertinent one – hoping that non-architects will also do:

[Sense is] the degree to which the settlement can be clearly perceived and mentally differentiated and structured in time and space by its residents and the degree to which that mental structure connects with their values and concepts – the match between the environment, our sensory and mental capabilities, and our cultural constructs (1981:118).

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<sup>1</sup> The author refers to the sources that sustain this statement, which we just paraphrase.

Thus, tackling sense of place – even through a definition coined by an outstanding colleague – puts architects in front of a challenge: the challenge of extending their understanding beyond space, not only into time, but into how both time and space are experienced by people. Some architects have taken the challenge, however, and the conclusions of their works seem more than solid to build upon, as we wish, our answers to the new urban question.

## 2 SENSE OF PLACE AND PLACE COMMUNICATIVENESS

### 2.1 Narrative and place

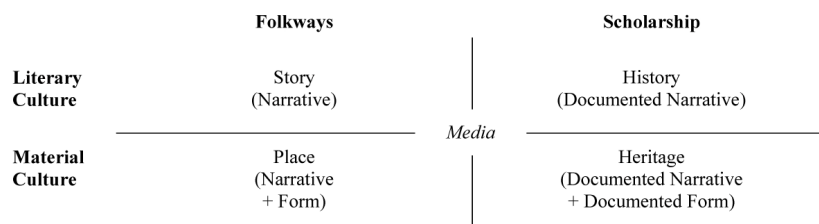
It is right among the holders of Lynch’s intellectual legacy that we find some of the most valuable contributions to the understanding of contemporary sense of place. Here we will refer to the products of the International Laboratory on Cultural Landscapes (ILCL), founded by several professors and researchers from the UPC and the MIT – the former, based in Lynch’s cherished Barcelona; the latter, his *alma mater* – in 2001.<sup>2</sup>

Lynch’s acknowledgment of the elusive root that characterises the deepest level of sense – which he named *significance* – (1981:143) was probably the reason for an early focus of his research on the second deepest: *legibility*, or “the degree to which the inhabitants of a settlement are able to communicate accurately to each other via its symbolic physical features” (1981:139). As one of its consequences, his first book – the imponderable *The image of the city* – already regarded names and meanings as qualities of form that can strongly reinforce suggestions of identity which are latent in physical form itself (1960:108).

Through its studies of relevant interventions in European and American cultural landscapes, the ILCL has pursued this thread. One of the ILCL’s founders, Joaquim Sabaté, has proposed a polished definition of the concept of cultural landscape<sup>3</sup> and linked it to the one of heritage park:

A cultural landscape is a geographical area associated to a historical event, activity or figure, which therefore possesses aesthetic and cultural values. The creation of a heritage park involves guaranteeing the conservation of the heritage resources of a particular cultural landscape, whilst using them to reactivate the region in economic terms (2004a:8).

As it may be seen, when dealing with cultural landscapes the abovementioned time dimension becomes particularly important. Furthermore, its development into the concept of history has a counterpart in the development of names and meanings into the concept of narrative. The reason is that, as William Cronon puts it, “although narrative may not be intrinsic to events in the physical universe, it is fundamental to the way we humans organise our experience” (1992:1368). ILCL’s co-founder Dennis Frenchman confirms it with a simple yet extremely eloquent schema (2001:263) that illustrates the relationship between narrative and place (see Fig. 1 below).



**Figure 1** Narrative and place (reproduced from Frenchman 2001)

Frenchman describes the schema as follows:

[The schema] compares aspects of *literary culture*, involving printed words and language, to parallel notions of *material culture*, involving objects, physical forms, and spaces. The products of

<sup>2</sup> A complete presentation of the ILCL can be found in Sabaté (2005a).

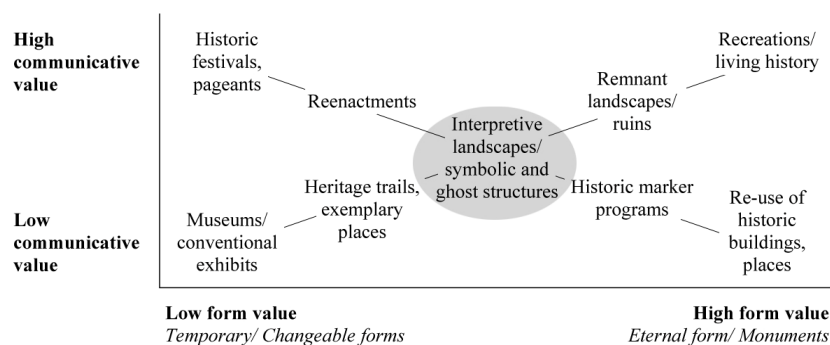
<sup>3</sup> With regards to the ones given by the UNESCO and USA’s National Park Service.

both cultures can be divided into those relating to *folkways*, the common wisdom and activities shared by a particular group, and *scholarship*, involving the documentation of knowledge and critical reflection. Within the literary realm, *stories* are narratives shared by a particular group; *history* consists of documented narratives. Within the material realm, *place* is created when narratives are joined with form. [...] Finally *heritage* refers to the combination of documented narratives and documented forms (or places) inherited by each generation from its predecessor (2001:263-264).

The sharpness of the model shows the correspondence between the literary and the material realms, as well as the difference between them. It is the latter that leads Frenchman to stress the importance of the communication and translation devices – summarised as *media* within the schema – that provide a bridge between the two and make it possible to talk about *communicative places*: places the history of which can be experienced simultaneously to their forms, owing to the incorporation of communication and translation devices within the environment (2001:265).<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2 Typology of communicative places

Frenchman (2001:269) takes the model one step further with the construction of a typology of communicative places. Within it, each type finds its position according to the relative importance of communication and form in relation to the experience of their users (see Fig. 2 below).



**Figure 2** Typology of communicative places (reproduced from Frenchman 2001)

Frenchman provides two examples:

For example, re-created environments – those that provide a setting for living history – are places that have both high form and high narrative content. By contrast, traditional museums have low form and low narrative content, because they house collections of artefacts (or even buildings) that are removed from their environment and explained with labels (2001:270).

Frenchman goes on to suggest that the diagram transcends the mere mapping of the types: it also informs increasing connections between them in cities, along the lines that it implies. Since these lines are two crossing diagonals, the type placed at their intersection – he argues – can be seen as the matrix for interconnecting and organizing the other ones (2001:270). That central type is the *interpretive landscape*, which was pioneered at Franklin Court – at the National Historical Park in Philadelphia – where the original home of Benjamin Franklin is outlined as a steel *ghost structure* in response to the lack of knowledge of its

<sup>4</sup> Frenchman does not give a strict definition. The one we propose infers from his argumentation, where the expression “communicative places” (2001:263) alternates with “narrative places” (2001:258/269). Even though the latter is the one reflected in the title of the article, we consider the former to be more accurate, for it alludes not only to narratives, but also to their communication.

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actual appearance, and quotations of the Father of the Nation, exposed foundations and other artefacts provide a “sense of the person as well as the place” (2001:268). Consequently, a “balance and interplay between narrative content, media, and symbolic form, allowing each message to find its appropriate place without overpowering the others” is reached (2001:270).

Finally, Frenchman suggests that the demand that public spaces be not only convivial but also communicative is growing significantly (2001:258). The role of communicative places as potential enhancers of sense makes us regard that suggestion as one of utmost relevance to this argumentation. Therefore, a question that is related to it is posed here: how does the growth in demand for place communicativeness manifest in our environment?

### 3 GROWTH OF THE DEMAND FOR PLACE COMMUNICATIVENESS

#### 3.1 Reinterpretation and representation of place identities

Who demands that a place be communicative? When do they do it? And how? These are queries that stem from the main question. There is more than one valid answer to each of them. An immediate one – or more precisely, a set of three – is related to the peak of tourism in the information society: visitors to a touristic site often expect it to be easy enough to be interpreted – in other words, communicative – especially if they have to pay for entrance. When that is not the case, it is not rare that they complain about it. Most readers may recall similar experiences. However many we may gather, though, they are likely to share a common feature: the exogenous character of the demand that is involved. That does not play down their importance at all, nonetheless it seems distant from the accent on the residents required by the definition of sense upon which this argumentation is based. Therefore, we may focus on the endogenous demand.

In the effort to do this, the narrative-place model in Fig. 1 needs to be expanded by examining an aspect that we have not yet touched on: the transition from the schema’s *folkways* to *scholarship* – referring to the latter as *knowledge* from now on to avoid misunderstanding. The integration of translation and communication devices within the environment is the result of a process. But what is the process itself?

A broad answer may start from Niels Boje Groth’s insights on contemporary place identities.<sup>5</sup> Groth draws attention to how globalisation, on the one hand, has caused changes in the economies of regions and cities so radical that they risk losing their identities. On the other hand, it forces them to become more visible. Thus, today’s regions and cities face the threat of losing identity as well as the challenge of finding new ones (2002:17).

In this context, discourses on identity exhibit two strands, which have been named *ethnos* and *demos*.<sup>6</sup> Groth summarises and interprets them as follows:

One strand, *ethnos*, stresses the importance of heritage. [...] The arguments are emotionally-based, binding individuals and community together in common feelings and inherited cultural values. The other strand, *demos*, stresses the importance of the contract. [...] The arguments are rationalist, binding citizens and society together in joint agreements on civil rights and duties. [...] urban and regional identities owe much to multi-layers of historical and current processes rather than one all-embracing cultural spirit of each urban and regional community. Urban and regional identities are not inherited in any authentic manner. Rather, they are artificial and have to be visible by interpretation and representation of local culture, practice and aspirations (2002:17-19).

What Groth refers to in a rather harsh tone – we may have chosen the adjective *spontaneous* instead of *authentic* – is none other than the process that we are aiming to modelise. Although that process is indeed a problematic one, the distinction between *ethnos* and *demos* may shed light on it. In order to test it, we shall adopt that distinction not as a mere antagonism, but in a dialectic key.

It is possible in this way to understand the transition from folkways to knowledge as triggered by the reinterpretation of local culture, practice and aspirations that are required to make a place identity visible. As a result of this understanding we may identify the aspects of folkways with the common feelings and

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<sup>5</sup> We are in debt to Hague (2005) for the awareness about this source.

<sup>6</sup> The author refers to the sources that sustain this statement, which we just paraphrase.

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inherited cultural values of *ethnos*, and their reinterpretation with the contract featured by *demos*. Is it possible thus to identify the aspects of knowledge with a new, synthetic,<sup>7</sup> *ethnos*?

The consequence of accepting this prospect is a description of place identity as dialectic between (re)presentation – *ethnos* – and (re)interpretation – *demos* – that leaves room for both emotional communion and rational agreement. According to this, the schema in Fig. 1 corresponds to (re)presentation, and may as well be extended to (re)interpretation. We thus undertake this extension, by means of an extrapolation: narrative – as the presentation of literary culture – will give way to narrative-making – as its interpretation –; and the combination of narrative and form – within the material realm – will yield its place to the combination of narrative-making and form-making.

### 3.2 Communicative place-making

The next step is to establish the facets of these processes that relate to both folkways and knowledge. In the former case – the study of which somewhat transcends the scope of this paper – it may be sufficient to agree that the aspect of narrative-making is *storytelling* itself, and the aspect of the combination of narrative-making and form-making is what social scientists straightforwardly call *place-making*. On the other hand, the identification of knowledge-related aspects requires a closer understanding of the reinterpretation of place identities. For the purpose of attaining that understanding, we shall resort to the expertise of Cronon and Sabaté in literary and material realms, respectively.

Cronon (1992:1371-1374) suggests ways not to succumb to the complexity of such processes of reinterpretation. Following the proposal of a list of qualities that a contemporary story should aim for – such as depth, breadth, simplicity, inclusiveness, coherence, erudition, innovation, and pleasantness – he acknowledges that success depends on the fulfilment of at least three other conditions. While the former qualities can be considered as constituent of the narrative, the latter refer to its relation with reality and – what makes them more relevant to us – have implications in *making* itself. They involve three dimensions. The first one concerns the historical dimension: a story cannot contravene known facts about the past, nor their significance. The second one concerns the environmental dimension: a story cannot ignore the nature and the complexity of its setting. The third one concerns the social dimension: a story must meet the expectations of the informed, diverse local community. The last condition, however, encompasses – or at least verifies – all the others, to the extent that a truly informed and diverse community may not accept a deficient story. As Cronon puts it:

“The stories we tell about the past do not exist in a vacuum [...]. We write as members of communities, and we cannot help but take those communities into account as we do our [historiographical] work. [...] They [members of those communities] are in a position instantly to remind me of the excluded facts and wrong-headed interpretations that my own bias, self-delusion, and lack of diligence have kept me from acknowledging” (1992:1372-1373).

As if engaged in a dialogue with Cronon, Sabaté remarks with regard to the material realm:

“Along these lines, we may stress that residents themselves are very important cultural resources, in fact essential for the future of a heritage park – due to their knowledge, their memories, their history, and their enthusiasm – once they realise the value of the accumulated heritage. [...] The best initiatives of heritage parks acknowledge it, and involve the residents in their design and promotion. The best projects that we have analysed are highly participatory. The great majority of the ones that have succeeded are boosted by local actors – the so-called grassroots – and arise from the people – bottom up” (2004a:24; tentative translation).

The conclusions of both authors enable us to put forth the knowledge-related facets of the reinterpretation of place identities that we aimed to recognise. Within the literary realm, *collective writing* may be the more accurate expression to refer to the process of documented narrative-making that we have

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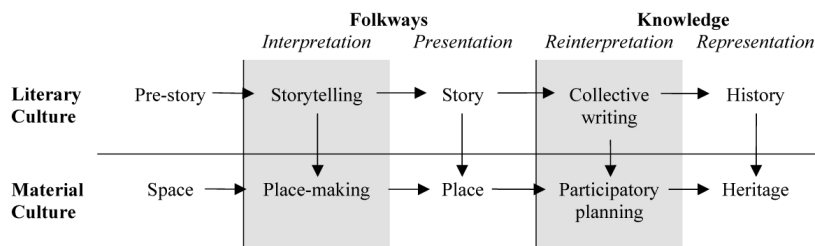
<sup>7</sup> As a consequence of interpreting folkways as a thesis, and its reinterpretation as its antithesis – hence completing a dialectic triad.

discussed. Within the material realm, *participatory planning* appears to be the best practice in the combination of documented narrative-making and documented place-making. Together with the ones that we have identified previously, these concepts construct the new, extrapolated schema of the relationship between narrative-making and place-making (see Fig. 3 below).

	Folkways	Knowledge
Literary Culture	Storytelling (Narrative-making)	Collective writing (Documented Narrative-making)
Material Culture	Place-making (Narrative-making + Form-making)	Participatory planning (Documented Narrative-making + Documented Form-making)

**Figure 3** Narrative and place making

Just as the previous schema gave rise to the concept of communicative place, this one makes it possible to put forward its counterpart within the sphere of identity reinterpretation, which we may term as *communicative place-making*. The conjugation of both charts should be the best way to show the correlation between the two concepts (see Fig. 4 below).



**Figure 4** Communicative place-making

Generally, what the figure schematizes is the cultural evolution of an environment, starting from a *pre-story* stage that is characterised by the lack of narrative, and the consequent identification of a non-informed *space* as its material aspect. Specifically, this schema may be understood as the genesis of a paradigmatic heritage park.

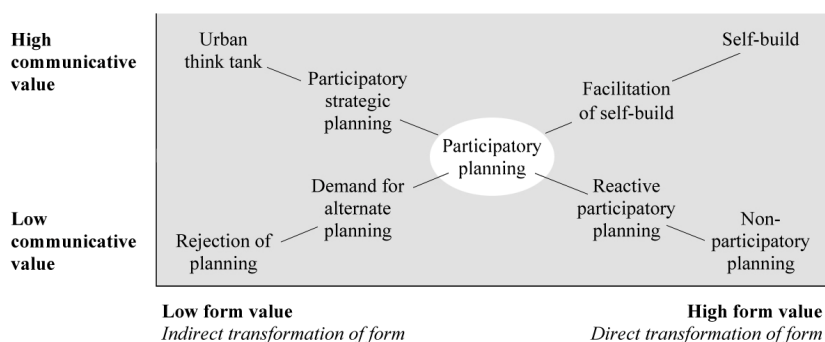
Now it is possible to take up again the three queries and respond to them from an endogenous viewpoint. To the first query – *who?* – we can answer that the ones who demand that a place be communicative are the grassroots community. In response to the second query – *when?* – we may say that that demand is related to current processes of reinterpretation of place identities. With regard to the third query – *how?* – we have discussed that the demand for place communicativeness goes together with, or even boosts, practices of collective writing of local history, and participatory planning. In this way, we have reached an understanding of the demand that is sufficient for our purpose. From this point, we shall analyse its growth.

### 3.3 Typology of communicative place-making processes

In discussing the growth in demand that places be communicative, first of all we need to acknowledge a recent increase in the number of heritage parks (Sabaté 2005b:20). Specialised literature also informs us of a growth in the existing types – industrial, mining, agricultural, river, war, archaeological, and others – (Sabaté 2004a:11-12), and in the geographical areas where they are planned – besides the USA, Europe, Latin America, Canada, Mexico, and, more frequently, China (Frenchman 2005:39). Even if some of these projects may not fulfil completely the model of interpretation that we have adopted and expanded, this data is undoubtedly evidence of an increase in the demand for place communicativeness. The same seems to apply to the increasing attention for another type of communicative place that the ILCL has studied, the so-called

*event place* (Sabaté 2004b:13).<sup>8</sup> Do these trends exhaust the growth in demand for place communicativeness?

In order to answer this question satisfactorily, we shall attempt to expand the model further. The reason is that testing the performance of the rules that sustain the typology in Fig. 2, at the construction of a typology of communicative place-making processes, may enable us to deduce the existence of other dynamics related to the growth of the demand for place communicativeness. Within the new typology, a process will be given a high communicative value when involving broad, proactive public participation, and a high formal value when entailing a direct transformation of the physical environment – regardless of its aesthetic and functional qualities. The result is reflected in Fig. 5.



**Figure 5** Typology of communicative place-making processes

Although it is concerned with all processes in the diagram, urban planning may be said to comprise only the three types that take up the lower right quadrant, the outer corner of which represents low communicative value and high form value. These types are: non-participatory planning, reactive participatory planning, and – the adjective *proactive* could precede it – participatory planning. As indicated by their names, the difference between them is the degree of participation that they involve. For the purpose of this argument, reactive participatory planning – where *reactive* suggests that participation is performed as a mere response to legal requirements, thus at the minimum level possible – may be equated to non-participatory planning. Since the role of participatory planning in the growth in demand for place communicativeness has already been recognised, the next task is to explore the potential of non-participatory-planning.

### 3.4 Demand for communicativeness of indistinct places

Non-participatory planning is characterised by excluding the grassroots from decision making. Therefore, a process of reinterpretation of place identity based on non-participatory planning will also exclude them. If, as we have discussed, residents are essential to document local narratives, such a process of reinterpretation will leave out narratives together with the residents. If we were to illustrate it through a schema similar to the one in Fig. 4, the inclusion of non-participatory planning instead of participatory planning would thus result into empty boxes within the *literary culture* row to the right of *folkways*. The material outcome of it all could just be called a *non-communicative place*.

On the one hand, this shows that there is no direct link between non-participatory planning and the growth of the demand for place communicativeness. On the other hand, it raises a potentially relevant realisation: while the richness of the set of processes that lead to the development of a heritage park limits its spread beyond a certain threshold,<sup>9</sup> the simplicity of the set that brings about the transformation of a place into a non-communicative place appears to make it easily reproducible. The reason is that the objects of the former set are environments that stand out for the importance of their material heritage, whereas the latter set may affect any type of places, especially indistinct ones. So the two sets of processes involve values the combination of which would bring us closer to the answer to our question – connection with the growth in

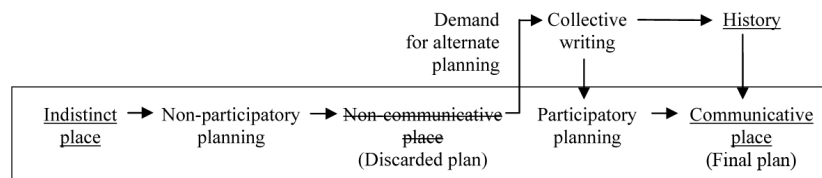
<sup>8</sup> An event place is a place characterised by an intimate relationship between a festive activity and spaces that makes them memorable (Sabaté 2004b:10).

<sup>9</sup> Designation of cultural landscapes itself must be limited not to be debased.

the demand for place communicativeness, and spreadability – but so far they seem to involve them separately.

At this point we may undertake the last stage of the extension of our theoretical model, aiming to establish whether there may be a bridge between the two observed values or not. In the effort to, we shall consider the role of the diagonal lines that connect the types in Fig. 5. Do they inform us, as the ones within Fig. 2 did, of increasing connections between the correspondent processes in cities? And, should the type placed at their intersection be understood as the matrix for their interconnection and organisation?

Let us assume that both the answers are affirmative. Let us suppose, too, that these relations sustain a new chain of processes that results from a cross between the two previous sets. In other words, let us test the capacity of participatory planning to join the two processes that are confronted within the typology and within reality – non-participatory planning, and the demand for alternate planning – and thus give rise to a set of processes to which even an indistinct place may be the object of the demand for place communicativeness. The overall result seems ready to be represented without its framework, as in Fig. 6.



**Figure 6** Demand for communicativeness of indistinct places

The model of understanding thus suggests that a relevant manifestation of the growth of the endogenous demand for place communicativeness is the extension of the claim for public participation in planning; and that it is so to the extent of which the replacement of non-participatory plans by participatory plans, in response to that claim, entails an increase of the communicativeness of the resulting schemes.

#### 4 CASE STUDIES

The model has been tested in Barcelona, where a number of processes of urban renewal have been highly influenced by local demand for alternate planning in recent years. The redevelopments of Trinitat Nova, the Parc Central de Poblenou Area, and Lesseps Square have been chosen as case studies. Some of the reasons behind the choice have been their contemporary nature, their potential link with the phenomena described by the model, their representativeness, and the fact that they share enough common features to be able to be analysed by the same method, and at the same time possess specific qualities that add value to multiplicity. Although the records of each case go back in time, the time spans that are considered relevant for each analysis begin between the summer of 1999 and the winter of 2000-2001. Trinitat Nova is a suburban housing neighbourhood, Parc Central Area is a former industrial area reallocated to knowledge-based business activities, and Lesseps Square is a central public space

In the case of Trinitat Nova, the detection of a well-spread, structural building pathology during the 1990s was addressed by the municipality with the organisation of a top-down competition for the redevelopment of a large part of the neighbourhood. The award-winning project was fully based on functional and optimising criteria, and regarded the whole area as a *tabula rasa*. Residents rejected it and arranged what they called “their own ideas competition” (Velázquez 2000; tentative translation), which was actually an EASW<sup>10</sup> participatory workshop. Having its focus on the construction of a shared vision for the neighbourhood, the main outcome of the workshop was an agreement on building the future upon local history, with the aim to become “the water neighbourhood” (AVTN and PCTN 1999:13; tentative translation). This objective was related to the fact that, though bad-quality housing was developed within Trinitat Nova from the 1950s, the area had previously been the site of an impressive set of water supply facilities for the city, a part of which still exist. With the course of time, neighbours managed to convince the municipality to

<sup>10</sup> *European Awareness Scenario Workshop* initiative was launched by the European Commission DG XIII D in 1994.



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accept their arguments and to elaborate a completely new plan that was based on their vision. Today, while the materialisation of the new housing is still under way – with special regard to the water-cycle design – the refurbished, century-old water facilities have already become a part of a metropolitan landscape interpretive net.

In the case of Parc Central de Poblenou Area, the plan for its transformation into a business estate was related to the *22@bcn* project for the renewal of the whole industrial quarter of Poblenou. Although the scheme was sensitive to the unusual, qualifying manner in which the antique industrial buildings within it were combined with medium-sized exterior areas, it involved the replacement of most of the former with new office blocks. However, an increasing civic awareness about the relevance of the local industrial heritage triggered a campaign for the preservation of the whole complex. The slogan of the campaign, “*Salvem Can Ricart*”,<sup>11</sup> referred to the fact that the seemingly independent buildings within the site were originally parts of a single, truly outstanding 19<sup>th</sup> century factory that was named after the owner’s family – the Ricarts. This fact, which not even the current users of the complex – most of them industrial workers – were aware (Marrero 2008:63), became broadly accepted through the “research-action” that the campaign involved (Tatjer 2008; tentative translation). A process of negotiation between the municipality and civic representatives finally led to the approval of a new scheme that implied the preservation of 100% of the premises and 67% of the original buildings, as well as the documentation and communication of the history of the factory both *in situ* and within a larger interpretive system.

In the case of Lesseps Square, refurbishment was a part of the electoral programme of the governing party at the municipal level. The area had been one of the city’s hot spots since the 1970s, when the urbanisation of the first city bypass entailed the implementation of an intricate, car-centred plan that made it extremely difficult for pedestrians to either cross the *square* or stay within it. After a quarter-century the municipality finally organised an international competition. The award-winning proposal was swiftly developed into a detailed project, and contractual requirements for its materialisation started being fulfilled. However, when the project was presented to the residents as one ready to be built, their initial astonishment soon became rejection. The reason being that the main issue they expected the plan to address – the restitution of the area’s original topography, highly altered by the bypass’ section – had been disregarded. The neighbours’ claim led the municipality to discard the project and set up a mixed commission in which representatives of both parties joined the architects and a group of independent technicians to follow the development of a new proposal. Once a pre-agreement about its essential objectives was reached, it was presented to the residents during a three-day participatory process, with the aim of taking their feedback into consideration before further elaborating the scheme. As a result, a narrative of the square as a “place for the encounter” of the people and the neighbourhoods that share it (González 2004:177; tentative translation), – which was very much related to the history of the square – was adopted. The final project was based on this and was finally approved with the agreement of the vast majority of residents. Today, the recently inaugurated square includes devices that communicate aspects of its antique history, but also the names of neighbours that took active part in its construction are engraved in paving stones.

## 5 FINAL REMARKS

Sense of place is a delicate dimension. Its relationship with place communicativeness is delicate, too. The number of places that convey messages is indeed increasing within cities in the information age. However, many of them do not match the concept of communicative place as it has been defined here. The reason is that the choice of the message matters. While a good message can encourage environmentally responsible behaviours, a bad message may result in the degradation of both human behaviour and the urban environment, which is why the processes that inform decision making are so important here. Depending on their performance, we may find ourselves addressing alienation instead of sense when dealing with a given place, no matter how many translation and communication devices may be found within it.

In this context, focus on the endogenous facet of the demand for place communicativeness may be more than just a feature of this research. It may be a key issue to prevent alienation from gaining ground. Today, cities like Barcelona are welcoming millions of visitors every year. Tourist buses – the users of which not

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<sup>11</sup> “Let us save Can Ricart”, which was also the name of the civic platform that upheld it.

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only travel from one mediated place to another, but receive information about the city through headphones on the way – are more frequent than regular ones in some areas. On the other hand, manifestations of local demand for place communicativeness are still largely regarded as expensive whims.

Nevertheless, debate is already on the streets. We may agree in interpreting it as part of a larger debate: the debate about the need of our information society to become an actual knowledge society. If we do so, we may also come to adapt a famous dictum, and start regarding participatory planning as *the worst form of planning, except for all those other forms that have been tried*.

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