



REDUCING
HOUSING
INEQUALITIES



Case study report: Barcelona

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Author(s)	Brian Rosa, UAB; Andréanne C. Breton-Carbonneau, UAB, Panagiota Kotsila, UAB; Isabelle Anguelovski, UAB; Jordi Villaró Rabadán, UAB; Lourenço Melo, UAB; Austin Gage Matheney (UAB)
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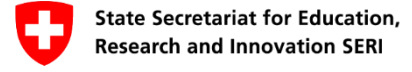


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1 Introduction

1.1 City profile, challenges around just (housing and ecological) transition

Barcelona, the capital of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia in Spain, constitutes a paradigmatic case for examining how ecological transition unfolds within a highly spatially constrained and commodified urban housing system. With approximately 1.7 million residents within the municipal boundary and a metropolitan region exceeding five million, Barcelona is among the most compact and densely populated cities in Europe. Its urban form is shaped by pronounced geographic constraints — the Collserola hills, the Llobregat and Besòs rivers, and the Mediterranean Sea — and its dense urbanization and topographical constraints leave little developable land within city limits (Busquets, 2005). The exceptions are key “major transformation areas,” which are predominantly reclaimed industrial and infrastructural land, a trend dating from the mid-20th century (see Figure 3). All major “hard” gentrification measures in Barcelona follow this model, as there is not more appropriate developable land in the city due to its density and topography. Aside from the area under study in this report — that of the district of Sants-Montjuïc — the city is taking such an approach in the area surrounding the new La Sagrera railway station under completion, involving the demolition of thirty warehouses to make way for mixed-use redevelopment including a mix of social and market-rate housing, to commence in 2027.

Outside the city limits, though less pronounced than in other Spanish metropolitan areas, the late-20th century phenomenon of low-density, automobile-dependent suburban housing development (sometimes called “España de las piscinas” [swimming pool Spain]), is notable in surrounding metropolitan municipalities in Vallès, Maresme, and Baix Llobregat (López, 2021). This is a physical manifestation of what has been referred to as the “ugly Spain”, in which the contemporary built environment is the result of **systematic political, economic, and cultural decisions that have prioritized short-term profit and spectacle over landscape quality, social cohesion, and long-term planning (Rubio, 2022). Debates framing residential density in Barcelona are focused on the metropolitan scale (Estela, 2025), as the urbanized metropolitan footprint has expanded in so-called suburban “urbanalization” (Muñoz, 2008) — a result of the legacy of highway building from the 1950s to the 1980s — while the city itself has maintained a relatively stable population.**

Barcelona’s contemporary housing and ecological challenges are inseparable from its historical development trajectory. The city expanded outward from the walled medieval core (Ciutat Vella) through the nineteenth-century Eixample [extension] plan of Ildefons Cerdà and the annexation of surrounding industrial and agricultural municipalities at the turn of the twentieth century, including the former industrial towns of Sants, Sant Martí, Sant Andreu, and Gràcia (Figures 1 and 2). **During the second half of the twentieth century, rapid industrialization and internal migration under the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975) drove the construction of mid-rise, working-class housing blocks, often characterized by deficient public infrastructure, proximity to noxious industries, and limited services. By the mid-1970s, industrial and infrastructural land became the sites of intense social**

contestation as newly-legalized neighborhood movements mobilized for the conversion of these spaces into public green areas and facilities [schools, libraries, health centers, civic centers, etc.], influencing the approach taken by the 1976 Pla General Metropolità (PGM). In the PGM, much of the city's industrial areas were rezoned to respond to these deficits (Solans Huguet, 2022) and industry was clustered in industrial parks on the city fringes or displaced outside the Catalan capital city. Barcelona still operates, through punctual modifications, of the PGM, while a new Metropolitan Urban Masterplan reaches completion. Currently, **Barcelona's population density—approximately 17,000 inhabitants per km² overall and exceeding 30,000 in urbanizable areas—reflects a compact urban form typical of Southern Europe, paired with the deindustrialization and urban restructuring since the 1979 democratic transition.**

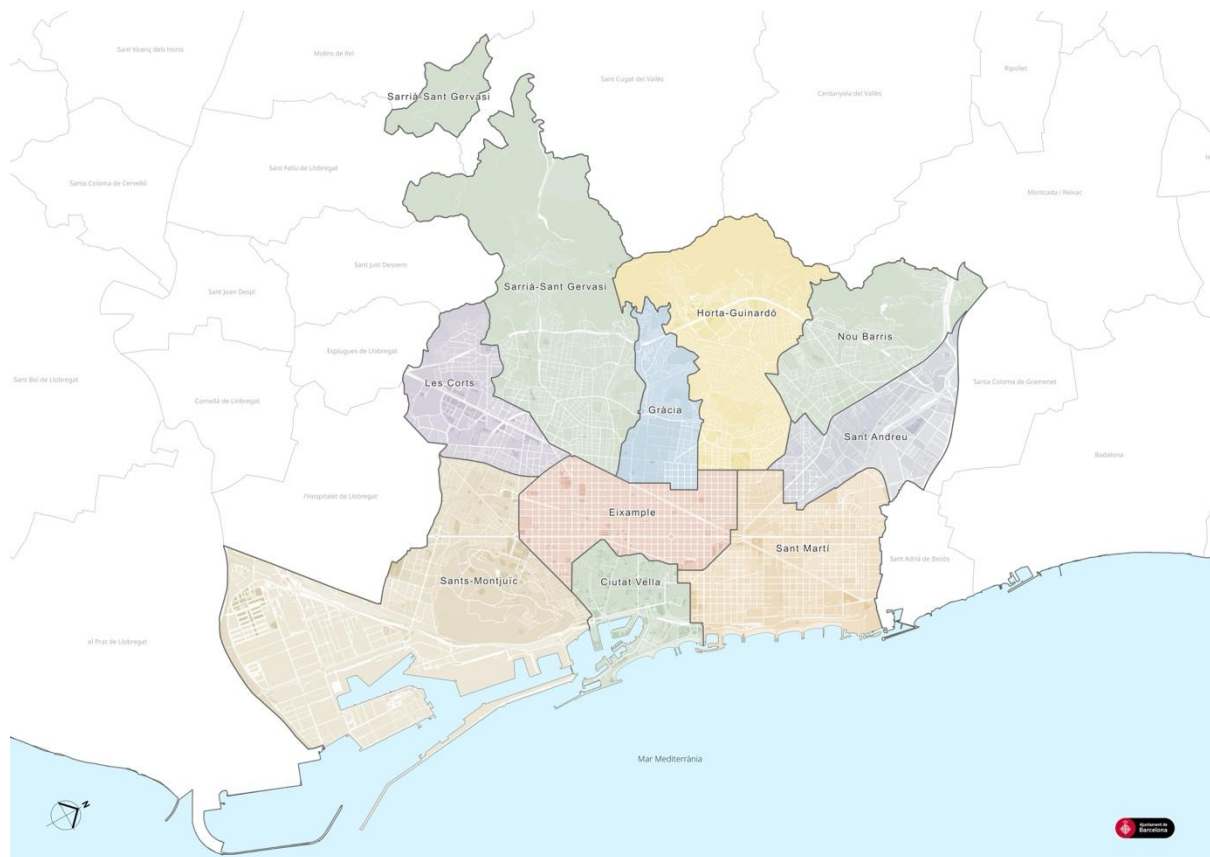


Figure 1: Districts of the City of Barcelona. Source: Barcelona City Hall

The legacy of this trajectory is a city with an **aging and poor quality housing stock** in which new-build residential densification — and the creation of new green spaces — is highly constrained. According to a Barcelona Metropolitan Housing Observatory report, **the city's energy simulation shows that about 81% of residential buildings in Barcelona would obtain an E energy rating or lower, indicating they are currently low-performing and would therefore need energy-efficiency retrofits to meet stringent EU 2030 performance standards (Alsina Maqueda et al., 2022),** while barely 8,700 homes will be renovated in the

city with EU Next Generation funds (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2025c). Such concerns take an additional precedence in the metropolitan policy realm because housing is formally understood not as a residual market outcome but as a contested social right based in the Spanish constitution whose fulfilment obliges public authorities to intervene in land, tenure, and housing markets to counteract structural inequality and commodification (Trilla, 2023).

The “reconstruction” of Barcelona (Bohigas, 1985) **creating a polycentric city through the creation of “new centralities” (Busquets, 2005), has been reframed through the language of climate urbanism in recent years. Former industrial sites on the fringes of the city have been targeted for shifts from automobile-oriented infrastructure toward active mobility and public transport, paired with interventions designed to address climate risks including drought, flooding, and extreme heat.** These efforts were central to urban policy under the left-municipalist Barcelona en Comú (BComú) administration of Ada Colau (2015–2023), which explicitly framed environmental and climate urbanism as inseparable from housing and social justice. The Colau administration introduced participatory budgeting processes (Decidim) and increased focus on community-based planning. **Globally influential urbanism initiatives such as “superblocks”, “green axes”, schoolyard greening, climate shelters, energy retrofits of public buildings, and neighbourhood-scale green interventions were justified as attempts to redistribute environmental benefits to historically underserved areas.** However, these initiatives unfolded within a city experiencing rapidly rising housing costs and tourism pressure, particularly in areas experiencing such green interventions, giving rise to **public debate around green gentrification** (Anguelovski et al., 2023). **Environmental and mobility interventions became increasingly politicized across the ideological spectrum.** Since 2023, the social-democratic PSC administration under Mayor Jaume Collboni has shifted urban greening investment away from the superblock and green-axis approach, returning to more incremental, investment-led, and smaller-scale public-space interventions reminiscent of 1980s and 1990s (Rosa and Panayotopoulos-Tsiros, 2024) with a renewed focus on large-scale infrastructures.

These policy trajectories are embedded within a **deeply commodified and highly financialized housing regime, with international and institutional investors becoming protagonists through their acquisition of distressed properties in the wake of the 2008 crisis.** Steps toward decommodification and renters’ rights taken in recent years at the level of the Spanish state have included the 2023 Spanish Right to Housing Law tenant protections such as rent control in “tense market areas” (Vidal et al., 2024), the 1.3 billion euro Strategic Project for the Recovery and Economic Transformation (PERTE 2025) for the Industrialization of Housing over ten years, the Catalan government’s commitment to create 50,000 new social housing units, and the creation of Casa 47, a state-led public housing entity to **manage and expand a permanent public rental housing stock.** Nevertheless, housing production and access in Barcelona continue to be governed overwhelmingly through market mechanisms and as of 2025, **fully public housing represented approximately 2% of the city’s housing stock**, in line with Spanish averages and among the lowest shares in Europe. Social housing in Spain has historically been produced through subsidized homeownership schemes (Viviendas de Protección Oficial, VPO) subject to time-limited protections (García-Lamarca, 2024). With many protections expired or imminently expiring, **nearly half of remaining VPO**

units in Barcelona are projected to lose protected status before 2068, with particularly high losses in Sants-Montjuïc (Marrani et al., 2025).

Increased migration has been the key driver of maintaining demographic balance in the city: the population born abroad in the city was 5% in 2000 and has risen to 31.1% in 2024, and Barcelona is the city with the highest migrant population in the city (Blanchar, 2026). However, as **the flow of migrants increasingly skews toward the highly-qualified and international teleworkers, this has also driven processes of transnational gentrification.** **Housing affordability pressures in Barcelona are acute.** Rents have nearly tripled since 2000, while nominal wages have largely stagnated in real (inflation-adjusted) terms. By 2025, approximately 74% of the average salary is required to cover rent, placing Barcelona as having the **second highest rent burden among the European cities** (European Commission, 2025). Over the same period, **homeownership rates have declined while the share of renter households has risen to roughly 40%, exposing a growing proportion of the population to market volatility and insecure tenure, particularly among migrants: 70% of migrants in Barcelona are renters (compared to 20% of autochthonous residents), who experience triple the risk of poverty** (Blanchar, 2026). The incoming flow of international migrants are more likely to be highly-qualified and from comparatively wealthy countries—often with greater spending power—placing additional strain on the housing market, **driving the phenomenon of transnational gentrification and contributing to a widespread shift of the rental housing market to unregulated, often fraudulent, seasonal leases** (1-11 months) (López-Gay et al., 2026). Nearly half of tenant households in Barcelona spend more than 30% of their income on housing, and displacement occurs not only through formal eviction but through denial of contract renewal, rent increases at the point of renewal, and exclusionary displacement.

To address these challenges, **Barcelona is increasingly taking a “public-private-community partnerships” approach financed by loans from the Catalan, Spanish, and EU public financial institutions, as well as EU Next Generation funding.** In 2022 the city hall received financing from of 140€ million from the ICO and ICF to build and/or rehabilitate 1,000 housing units to create public rental (60%) or cooperative cohousing (40%) (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022). In 2025, the City Council secured a €113 million loan from the European Investment Bank to finance the construction of nine public housing developments with 641 new energy-efficient social rental units between 2026 and 2030 (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2025b). **The main testing ground for the cooperative cohousing approach throughout Spain has been Can Batlló, one of the case study areas examined in this report.**

Housing conditions and planning initiatives shape how ecological transition is experienced. In addition to a general housing accessibility crisis, **Barcelona faces significant climate vulnerability, especially in relation to extreme heat. Barcelona is projected to have the highest absolute number of additional heat-related deaths by the end of the century** (Barnes et al., 2025) **and to experience the highest number of premature deaths due to climate change among European cities** (Masselot et al., 2025). 28% of housing units in the city are considered vulnerable to extreme heat (Moccia et al., 2025). These dynamics overlap with the phenomena of gentrification—including green gentrification—**those displaced from their homes are more likely to relocate to areas with limited access to green space** (Anguelovski et al., 2018), contributing to the creation of

“urban green sacrifice zones,” in which marginalized populations — especially migrants — are excluded from the benefits of environmental investment as greener and more climate-resilient neighbourhoods become inaccessible (Anguelovski and Connolly, 2024). As such, **housing conditions are central to this differentiated vulnerability**. Overcrowding, poor insulation, informal housing arrangements, and energy poverty are commonplace, as are illegally subdivided dwellings or of those that do not meeting formal standards (“infrahabitatge”). These conditions are chronically undercounted in official registers and heighten exposure to climate stressors.

Barcelona has embraced **nature-based solutions (NBS) and blue-green infrastructure** as central components of its climate adaptation strategy, integrated into comprehensive redevelopment. Funded through EU research programs, the European Regional Development Fund, and European Investment Bank loans, **these interventions incorporate new parks, climate shelters, Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) integrated into hybrid green–gray infrastructures aimed at groundwater reuse, mitigating flooding, reducing heat, and supporting biodiversity**. **These strategies intersect with residential densification on former industrial land**, as we see in our case study areas in the Sants-Montjuïc district (Figure 2): La Marina del Prat Vermell (LMPV) and Can Batlló. Though sharing commonalities and relative proximity, these two case study areas differ markedly in terms of planning histories, governance arrangements, socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities, connectivity with the city centre, intensity of gentrification, and relationships to surrounding neighbourhoods. Focusing on civic perceptions, governance processes, and socio-ecological impacts, the report analyses how green transition interventions intersect with housing inequalities along three analytical dimensions: distributional, procedural, and recognitional justice: Distributional justice concerns **who receives benefits and bears burdens**, procedural justice addresses **who participates and how decisions are made**, and recognitional justice focuses on **whose identities, needs, and experiences are acknowledged and respected** within governance processes (Schlosberg, 2007). What follows is a detailed analysis of local perceptions of the housing-green transition nexus through these cases.

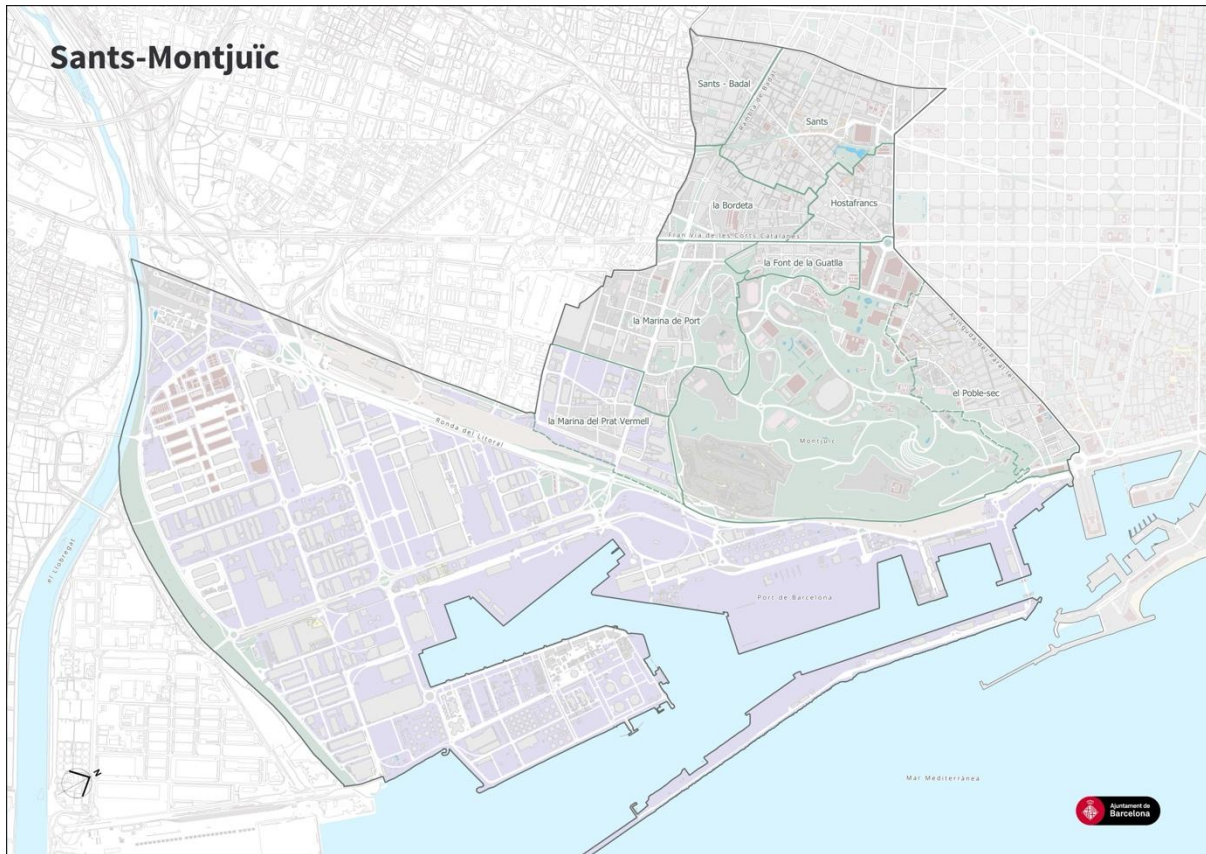


Figure 2: Neighborhoods of the District of Sants-Montjuïc. The area encircled in green is Montjuïc mountain. The large lilac and gray area across the Ronda del Litoral highway is the Zona Franca industrial area and Port of Barcelona. West of the Zona Franca is the Barcelona-El Prat International Airport and associated logistics activities. Source: Barcelona City Hall.

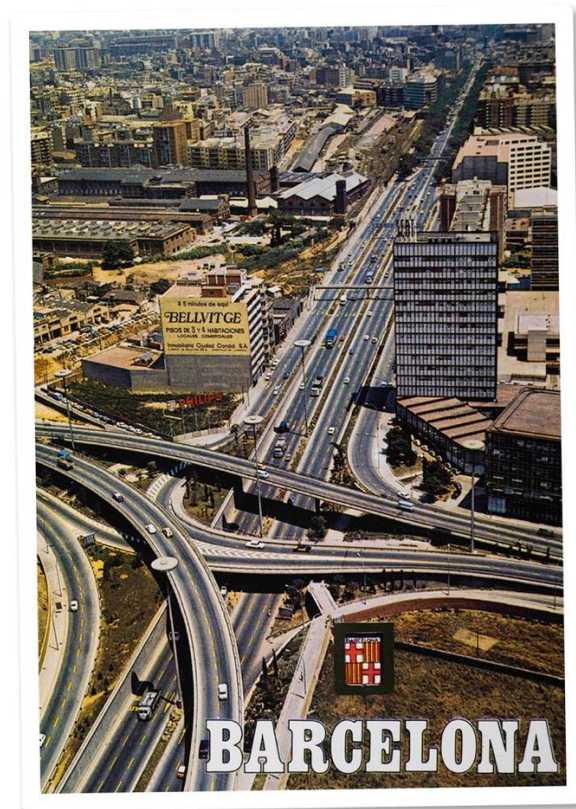


Figure 3: The foreground of this aerial photograph, from around 1970, is the Plaça de Ildefons Cerdà with its flyovers, now converted to a large roundabout with a pedestrian bridge and gardened elements in 1999. The major road is the Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes, the boundary between La Bordeta and La Marina del Port. Can Batlló is located to the upper left. To the right is an office tower of the automobile manufacturer Seat. The Gran Via has since been redesigned in various phases, introducing partially protected bicycle lanes, dedicated bus lanes, and crosswalks at grade. Source: unknown

1.2 Green Transition Interventions and Housing Context in Barcelona: La Marina del Prat Vermell and Can Batlló

The officially-designated neighborhoods of LMPV and La Bordeta (Figures 2 and 3) are located in areas classified as **highly vulnerable to climate change**, with La Bordeta bordering areas identified as the most vulnerable (Moccia et al., 2025). These assessments incorporate indicators related to urban form, building characteristics, and socio-demographic factors, situating both case study areas within broader patterns of climate exposure (Institut Metròpoli, 2025). As of 2019, neither La Marina del Port nor LMPV were yet identified as neighborhoods experiencing gentrification pressures (López-Gay et al., 2021) and both were classified as socioeconomically vulnerable, with LMPV identified as one of the city's most vulnerable and fastest-growing neighborhoods (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2025d). However, **by 2021, by measures developed by the Centre de Estudis Demogràfics, La Bordeta displayed moderate gentrification dynamics between 2011-2021 in comparison to the city as a whole, which is identified as having the strongest gentrifying trends in Spain** (Sanz-

Pérez et al., 2025). Such pressures had not arrived to such a great degree in La Marina, but available data precedes current redevelopment.

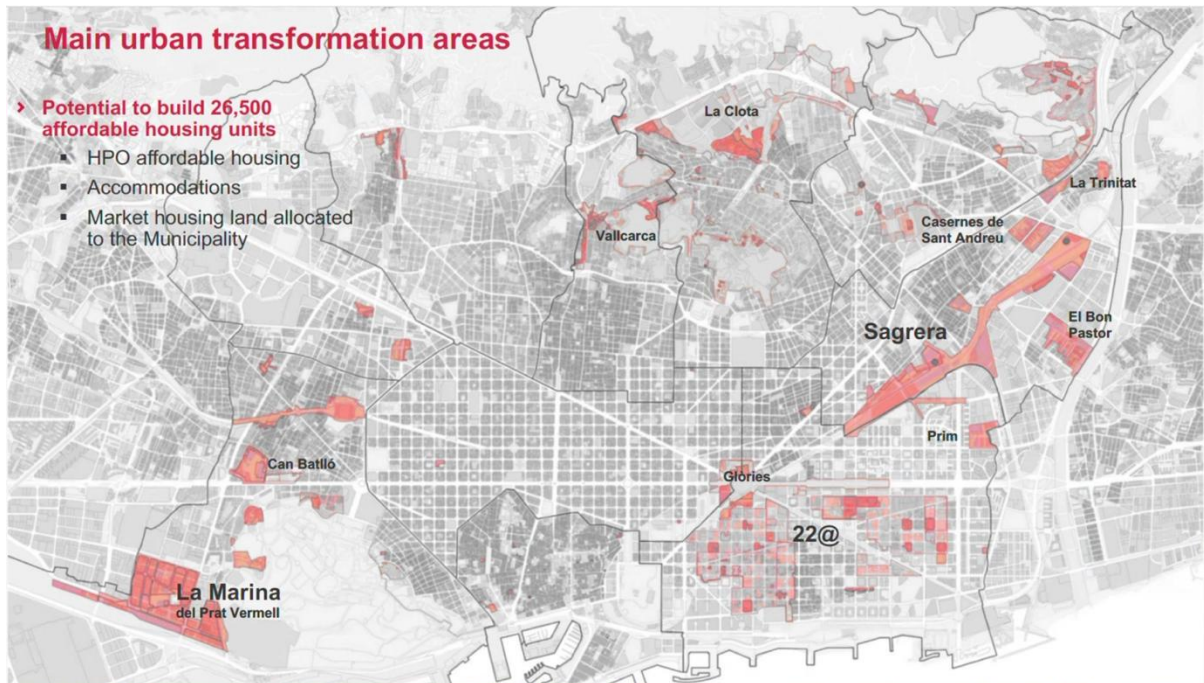


Figure 3: Prioritized major transformation areas for the city of Barcelona, illustrating LMPV and Can Batlló as the principal sites in western Barcelona. Image source: Ajuntament de Barcelona

1.2.1 La Marina del Prat Vermell

LMPV is the most extensive area of comprehensive residential development currently underway in Barcelona. **Rezoned from industrial to residential and mixed use in 2006**, at which time LMPV was first treated as a separate neighborhood from La Marina del Port, (LMP) the 75-hectare site was dominated by industrial and logistics usage associated with the Zona Franca industrial district. Until the 1980s, the area comprising LMPV and LMP were known as the neighborhood of Zona Franca. LMPV the **neighborhood with the second highest rate of social vulnerability in Barcelona (out of 73) in 2006**, is currently under wholesale transformation to accommodate around 30,000 new residents over the coming decade. In LMPV and LMP, have been various municipal housing initiatives throughout the 20th century to rehouse the tens of thousands of people living in informal settlements on the Montjuïc mountainside, which defines the core of the housing legacy of the area.

Prior to rezoning, LMPV was sparsely populated, with most residents concentrated in the 340-unit Eduard Aunòs public housing estate surrounding Plaça Falset, built on a portion of the site of the demolished cluster of 533 publicly developed, low-rise workers' housing from 1929. Another social housing experiment in the area was Can Tunis, where the city built a housing complex for former shackdwellers in the late 1970s. The isolated neighborhood became a drug distribution center and severe social exclusion — particularly among the Gitano (Spanish Roma) community — and was demolished in the early 2000s as part of port and infrastructure

expansion. Its removal set the stage for the current redevelopment strategy aimed at avoiding the social failures associated with the former settlement and fear of ghettoization.

The redevelopment of LMPV is coordinated by the Municipal Institute of Urbanism (MIU) through the Office of La Marina, a municipal office established through the Pla de Barris: Over the past decade this program has included targeted regeneration in **LMP** and the comprehensive transformation of LMPV, aiming to improve urban quality, public space and social infrastructure alongside new housing delivery. More recently, authorities have formalized the **Pla Singular La Marina 2025–2035** to coordinate educational, economic and community investments with its urban expansion. The MIU oversees targeted neighborhood programs, mainly implemented on privately owned land through negotiated planning agreements. **Municipal planners frame LMPV as a corrective to earlier large-scale redevelopment models based on industrial district rezoning and as an anti-gentrification measure, with more robust commitments to social and protected housing. The 2006 redevelopment plan established that approximately 50% of housing in LMPV is to be public or subsidized—a commitment that has been upheld and progressively supplemented by planning objectives related to energy-efficient construction, district heating and cooling systems, and the integration of green and blue infrastructure.** The affordable housing in the area is equally divided between subsidized private rental developments and new public housing complexes. LMPV's peripheral and physically constrained location — bordered by Montjuïc mountain, port infrastructure, coastal highways, and industrial areas — shapes perceptions of connectivity, integration, and future affordability. These characteristics make LMPV a key case for examining how **large-scale densification and integrated green infrastructure intersect with housing inequality under conditions of anticipatory governance and deferred impacts.**

1.2.2 La Bordeta-Can Batlló

Can Batlló is a **9-hectare former textile mill complex established** in 1878, located in the La Bordeta neighborhood adjacent to the Plaça d'Ildefons Cerdà (Figure 3) at the border of the municipality L'Hospitalet de Llobregat. More so than a plaza, Ildefons Cerdà is a highway interchange and strategic metropolitan node of western Barcelona designated as a mixed-use urban center in the 1980s and 1990s (Busquets, 2005). Though formally separate neighborhoods, civic life La Bordeta, Sants, Hostafrancs and Sants-Badal have been considered under the umbrella term of "Sants". **Neighborhood activists in greater Sants had been pushing for Can Batlló to be converted to public spaces and facilities since 1972** (Martí Gómez and Marcé i Fort, 1996), **and city plans officially designated to site for such uses in the 1976. The conversion of large factory complexes into parks, public facilities, and housing in Sants has occurred since the 1980s, while La Bordeta lagged behind.** Following the closure of the textile mill in 1964, the complex was converted into a light industrial "City of Trades," subdivided into factories, workshops, warehouses, and slaughterhouses employing over 4,000 people. **Housing conditions were historically precarious in La Bordeta:** in 1964, 80.8% of homes were rentals and only 3% were equipped with water, gas, electricity, bathroom, and heating, creating a situation through which, by the late 1970s, "renovation [was] so profound that it affect[ed] almost all [Sants] neighborhoods equally" (Carreras i Verdaguer, 1980: 137). **The City of Trades continued operating until**

preparations for redevelopment led to the often-involuntary displacement of industrial tenants during the 2000s—generating the first protests against housing development-induced displacement there—with businesses relocating to the Zona Franca or outside city limits.

Can Batlló has been the site of struggles around public green space going back to 1961, when residents of the recently-built cooperative housing blocks associated with the Sant Medir Church parish on current-day Carrer de Mossèn Amadeu Oller fought the cosmetics company Margaret Astor—which operated within the Can Batlló Complex—from expanding its warehouse over public land created by the removal of a piece of industrial canal. Residents successfully fought for the site to instead be used for small gardens and a playground, considered one of the few neighborhood victories during the height of Francoism, when neighborhood organizations were not legal.

After the 2008 financial crisis stalled redevelopment and left the complex closed off to the neighborhood for years, community mobilization reshaped its trajectory. In 2011, to avoid threatened occupation by neighbors organized as *Can Batlló és pel Barri* (Can Batlló is for the Neighborhood), authorities and the landowner granted neighborhood activists access to the building Block 11, initiating a process of self-managed adaptive reuse gradually expanding within the complex. A 2011 report from the Federation of Neighborhood Associations identified Can Batlló as both the **privy solution to — and the key bottleneck in prohibiting — the neighborhood’s intertwined housing, environmental, and social deficits, characterizing La Bordeta as “the cul-de-sac of Barcelona”** (Castaño Marcos et al., 2011).

Demolitions on the **Can Batlló** site began in **2013**, when the **Ajuntament** initiated clearance of derelict industrial structures as part of urban transformation including public housing, facilities, and park spaces, while the **factory’s landowners were given development rights for private housing on, and next to, the Can Batlló site in exchange for contributions to infrastructure works and the park.** This required the demolition of one of the city’s last remaining older, self-built shanty towns — Camí de la Cadena — the rehousing of its residents (primarily into the newly built public housing on the Can Batlló perimeter), and the relocation of a highly used mosque elsewhere in La Bordeta. **The evictions and demolitions made way for the construction of Be-Corp, a 420-unit gated rental community, the largest of its type in Spain.**

The resumption of redevelopment has coincided with sharp housing market shifts and new residential construction in the past decade. **By 2025, La Bordeta recorded the second-highest population growth among already dense areas in Barcelona (4.1%)** (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2025). Rental pressures have become especially pronounced, with La Bordeta registering **the highest rents for new contracts among Barcelona’s 73 neighborhoods in 2023** (Cambra de la Propietat Urbana de Barcelona, 2023), and being identified as the **third-most expensive neighborhood to rent in Barcelona (sixth in Spain)** in 2025, with journalists noting a supply of **new luxury housing aimed at “expats” within, and next to, the old factory site** (Casals Torres, 2025).

Meanwhile, **several historic factory buildings and a community garden remain self-managed by neighbors through the ECVA Can Batlló, creating a unique environment where the uses of a complex is are principally co-managed between a neighborhood platform built on anarchist principles and the city government, along with other levels of government and private owners. As such, Can Batlló is a case where green transition interventions and densification are embedded in a longer history of civic struggle, negotiated governance, and already-felt housing market impacts, generating ambivalence about the neighborhood’s newfound attractiveness.** New housing construction was, are various points, planned to be between 30 and 50% “affordable” — public rentals, cooperative, or through subsidized ownership — , and since the area is classified as a Major Transformation Area (triggering 40% VPO requirements), the end results of such claims will be addressed later in this report.

Can Batlló must also be understood as a hub for cooperatives and social enterprises: emerging from social movements and a cooperative trajectory in Sants — revived from traditions predating the Franco dictatorship — the city acquired the building Block 4 from the Generalitat and converted it to Bloc4, a cooperative and social-economy hub, funded as a public-cooperative project by the City Council and the Generalitat (7.4€ million) with Next Generation support. It was completed in 2024 (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2023) and is the largest such facility in Europe. A variety of cooperative entities working around housing and green transition activities that operate from Bloc4 also receive NextGen funds (see Table 1). More than simply a neighborhood space, **both the ECVA and Bloc4 spaces serve as key meeting points for social movements and public initiatives for a much broader geography than La Bordeta or Sants. Can Batlló serves as a key symbolic space for the political left where clashes between anti-authoritarian movements and institutional reformers are common.** Through the Bordeta Energy Community, set up in Can Batlló and the surrounding area in 2022, the neighborhood also has a consumers’ cooperative that provides energy services (principally through rooftop solar panels) and is promoted by various social economy and solidarity initiatives to manage the production, distribution and use of clean energy.

For the purposes of the report, the main activity at Can Batlló, is the creation of the new Parc de Can Batlló and its relation to housing tensions. **The inauguration of the Can Batlló playground — among the city’s largest — was in 2023, and the first phase of the Parc de Can Batlló in November 2024 marking a milestone in the transformation of La Bordeta**¹. Before the years-long transformation of the site, much of the complex had already

¹ Corresponding with residential redevelopment associated with the Can Batlló planning process, more than 725 housing units were completed between 2018 and 2023, including 175 market-rate units for sale along Gran Via, 130 *concertada* units on Carrer de Parcerisa, and a 420-unit gated rental complex, all constructed with energy efficiency A ratings. This market-led production has substantially outpaced the delivery of decommodified housing: in the same period, only 54 public housing units were completed

been appropriated by neighborhood residents through the creation of a community garden, dog park, basketball courts, and other elements including parking lots, most of which were later relocated and included in the site design. **The new park covers 26,000 m² and incorporates extensive green-blue infrastructure with SUDS rain gardens and an underground groundwater reservoir and irrigation system** that is part of a distributive model to reduce municipal potable water use by 15%. Currently water is collected from the park's deposits by truck and used for watering garden areas elsewhere as the infrastructure is completed. **The park, delayed by 21 months and overrunning its 12.6€ million budget due to various archaeological finds uncovered in preparatory works**, exemplifies the victories of community activism, and also the ambivalence of green transition activities in a context of an acute housing crisis.

Other projects at Can Batlló remain pending: the completion of the second phase of the park and renovation of buildings committed to the ECVA have generated a highly-visible conflict between the Ajuntament and the ECVA. The conversion of an abandoned building into a school and the construction of another aside it has been pending for years. Lastly, the rehabilitation of Block 8 — a building of approximately 30,649 m² of floor area — to consolidate and house the Municipal Archives—was design and presented by the Ajuntament in 2018, but is currently **shelved**.

Can Batlló is at once celebrated as a long-overdue environmental and social gain, but since it coincides with intensified revalorization in a historically working-class neighborhood, changes are not necessarily perceived as primarily benefitting long-time residents. **As the city paid industrialists and residents and acquire 5,000 square meters of residential land through developers' contributions of 10€ million—allowing for luxury private development, some on land initially planned for public use (López, 2012)—the park's creation and**

and 144 cooperative units were built or underway, suggesting that approximately 27% of housing produced can be considered decommodified—well below the original target of 50% protected housing (or 45% if *concertada* units are included). In parallel, the first phase of the Parc de Can Batlló was inaugurated in November 2024 at a cost of €21 million. Covering 26,000 m², the park integrates extensive green-blue infrastructure, including 485 trees, 48,000 bushes, and groundwater reservoirs connected to a broader distribution network serving Montjuïc-adjacent green spaces, reducing potable water use by an estimated 15%. Conceived as both a “green lung” and a climate adaptation measure, the park incorporates rehabilitated industrial buildings for public facilities, a self-managed community garden, recreational areas, and a mix of public, cooperative, and private housing, reflecting long-standing neighborhood demands and municipal climate objectives. A second phase—currently pending—foresees additional play areas, cultural infrastructure, ornamental water features, and the installation of 3,500 meters of solar panels, alongside the future development of public facilities including a school complex and the adaptive reuse of the site's central warehouse as a consolidated municipal archive.

rising housing costs cannot be analyzed as separate processes. In what follows we will focus on the dynamics and tensions around this exemplary site.

2 Methods

This case study — focused on two areas in the Sants-Montjuïc district of Barcelona, draws on qualitative research conducted between late 2024 and late 2025, combining semi-structured interviews, participant observation, documentary analysis, and ethnographic engagement. The methodological approach was designed to capture civic and institutional perceptions of green transition initiatives and their relationship to housing inequalities in Barcelona, with particular attention to governance processes and neighborhood-scale impacts.

In total, 19 interviews were conducted with 22 participants, including five interviews addressing cross-cutting themes across both case study areas. Interviewees included municipal and district-level policymakers and technical staff, representatives of housing cooperatives and private developers, neighborhood association members, activists, and residents. Interviews were conducted in Catalan, Spanish, or English.

Sampling of policymakers and technical staff drew on contacts established during the preparation and participation in the ReHousIn Policy Lab (March 2025) and through researchers' participation in workshops and public events related to housing and green transition initiatives organized by public, cooperative, and non-profit institutions. Additional participants were recruited through snowball sampling.

Community organization representatives and neighborhood activists were identified through their public engagement in media, participation in civic initiatives, or involvement in neighborhood assemblies and campaigns related to housing, urban redevelopment, and environmental issues. Initial contact was made through institutional email addresses associated with their organizations or, when requested by participants, via WhatsApp. Further participants were recruited through snowball sampling, including through local social networks connected to the lead author's civic engagement in Sants-Montjuïc, notably via the Student-Family Association of a public primary school attended by students from La Bordeta, La Marina and surrounding neighborhoods in Sants-Montjuïc.

Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed in their original language. Audio transcription was carried out using an offline version of the AI-based software Whisper for English and Spanish. Spanish-language interviews, with personal identifiers removed, were then translated using an offline version of DeepL and subsequently reviewed, corrected, and cleaned by the research team. Catalan interviews were transcribed directly by the researchers, translated using the SoftCatalà platform with personal information removed, and subsequently cleaned. Transcript verification was conducted while listening to original audio recordings to ensure accuracy.

Analysis and coding were completed in English, for later comparability with other case European case studies, using the software Atlas.ti following a shared codebook developed by the Autonomous University of Barcelona ReHousIn team (Appendix 3). Coding focused on recurring themes related to housing access and affordability, perceptions of green transition

initiatives, participation and governance processes, distribution of benefits and harms, and neighborhood identity and recognition.

Additional data collection included participant observation and ethnographic engagement at neighborhood assemblies, public consultations, hearings, and workshops organized by public authorities, civic associations, and other actors affected by the redevelopment processes under analysis. These activities provided contextual insight into participation dynamics, institutional narratives, and informal interactions shaping civic perceptions.

Documentary analysis included municipal and district planning documents, policy reports, technical studies, academic literature, and grey literature produced by neighborhood associations, advocacy organizations, and media outlets. These materials were used to identify interviewees, contextualize findings, and triangulate claims.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. While the interview sample includes a diverse range of institutional and civic actors, it does not fully capture the perspectives of all resident groups affected by redevelopment, particularly more precarious populations with limited organizational representation or those who do not identify with dominant civic/social movements in Sants. The rapidly evolving nature of the redevelopment projects examined means that findings reflect perceptions and expectations of *ongoing processes* rather than fully realized outcomes.

Table 1. Key data on two case study areas in Barcelona (see Appendices 1 and 3)

	Can Batlló (CB)- La Bordeta	La Marina del Prat Vermell (LMPV)
Neighborhood characteristics (general social type, economic activities, density etc)	<p>Densely built low to mid-rise workers' housing from 1880s-1920s and mid- to high-rise buildings from the 1950s-70s (the latter 60% of total).</p> <p>Population: 19,567 (as of 2019, since increased.)²</p> <p>2019 population density: 32,100 per km², or 37.850 excluding Can Batlló (similar to Sants and Hostafrancs). Density has since increased.</p>	<p>Sparse population preceding redevelopment: 1,137 in 2015, 2,800 in 2025; projected at 6,000 in 2027, 28,000 in mid-2030s.</p> <p>2015 population density: 3,100 per km²</p> <p>Projected density: 37,000 per km²</p> <p>Socio-economically vulnerable area, residents more likely to have been born in Spain than average. Low income and high</p>

² This is calculated by taking the last official figure and accounting for an increase of 4.1% as reported by the city in December, 2025.

² The rent-burden estimate is based on the most recent available per-capita income data for La Bordeta (2022), which was multiplied by the average household size for Barcelona (approximately 2.3 persons) to approximate median household income in the absence of published neighborhood-level household income figures for 2025. This estimated monthly household income was then compared to the 2025 median rent to calculate rent as a percentage of income, following standard housing-affordability methodology.

	<p>2025 household rent burden: 38%³</p> <p>Mixed age, mixed tenure, family oriented, diverse country of origin, strong neighborhood social fabric, working to middle class with new, wealthier enclaves.</p> <p>Well-connected to city center by metro (L1, L5), intercity rail and airport, and highways</p>	<p>unemployment rates with new economically and ethnically diverse enclaves.</p> <p>Isolated location with poor transport connections to city center, well connected to airport, industrial parks, highways</p>
Duration	<p>Strategy: 1976 (PGM) to present</p> <p>First Modification of PGM: 1999-2005. Second: 2017. Third: 2024 (MPGM Can Batlló-Magòria)</p> <p>Implementation: 2008ish-present.</p> <p><i>See timeline in Appendix 2</i></p>	<p>Strategy: 2006 (MPGM) to present</p> <p>Implementation: 2014 to present</p> <p><i>See timeline in Appendix 2</i></p>
Institutional funding (counting right-of-use of public land, see glossary in Appendix 1)	<p>Ajuntament (park, land in form of right-of-use (see Glossary, Appendix 1), with 10€ developer contribution for infrastructural works and park).</p> <p>EU Next Generation funding of cooperative housing development (Empriu 4€ million), cooperative legal services at Bloc4 (AMURA), cooperatives associated with ECVA (food cooperative, cooperative local food café, etc.) and cooperative housing foundation (La Dínamo). Eu funding for Bloc4 through BIMSA.</p> <p>Council of Europe Development Bank €31 million financing package to Sostre Cívic</p>	<p>Barcelona City Hall, City, regional, national, and EU funds for social housing, Generalitat (police station, projected schools and health center), Consorci de la Zona Franca,</p> <p>Barcelona Urban Management (municipal company)</p>
Actor constellation (in addition to "Institutional funding")	<p>Generalitat</p> <p>Grup Gaudir (primary landowner)</p> <p>BeCorp and Via Célere (developers)</p> <p>LaCol, Sostre Cívic, Fundació La Dínamo (cooperative architectural firms, developers, and foundations), Housing Coops (La Borda, Sotrac, Empriu)</p> <p>Bloc4BCN Association</p> <p>Centre Social de Sants</p> <p>EVCA Can Batlló</p>	<p>Culmia and AQ Acentur (developers)</p> <p>La Chalmeta (housing cooperative)</p> <p>Eduard Aunós Residents Association Unió d'Entitats de la Marina, Associació de Comerciants de La Marina</p>

	<p>Associació del Veïnat de Mossèn Amadeu Oller</p> <p>CaixaBank (owner and current occupant of office building)</p>	
Aims and objectives	Conversion of former cotton mill complex to new public space and facilities, development of public, cooperative, and market-rate private housing through participatory planning process	Rezoning and preparation of a predominantly industrial area to accommodate 12,000 homes, with significant proportion of new protected housing (50%) and NBS elements
Specific physical measures	Demolition of walls, buildings, homes. Road extension and reconfiguration. Adaptive reuse or structural work on industrial buildings and structures, excavation to create the water reservoir, archaeology and soil remediation, creation of SUDS, construction of office building with supermarket and gym, and housing. All works toward creation of park.	Demolition of variety of industrial structures Creation of SUDS, new large park and smaller green spaces. Installation of district energy system. Planning commitments include allocation of over 13 hectares to green spaces and promenades.
Accompanying housing policy/regulatory measures (see Glossary in Appendix 1)	Public housing construction, mostly utilized to relocate residents affected by the associated development through demolitions. Testing ground for right-of-use programs for social housing in the form of cohousing cooperatives.	Testing ground for right-of-use programs. Wide variety of public and private actors building interspersed public, subsidized, and market-rate housing for sale and rental. Approximately 50% protected housing. 30% of public housing designated for La Marina residents.
Key social tensions or/and benefits between greening and housing	New-build gentrification in dense housing around perimeter of site, which is not perceived to be integrated into, or for, the neighborhood	<p>Prioritized access of local residents to public or subsidized housing, issues of accessibility and transparency.</p> <p>Concerns about internal segregation and disconnection between Prat Vermell and the rest of La Marina.</p>

3 Civic Perceptions of Green Initiatives in Case Study Areas: La Marina del Prat Vermell

3.1 Precedents and implementation



Figure 4: Spanish President Pedro Sánchez, Barcelona Mayor Jaume Collboni, and Spanish Minister of Housing and the Urban Agenda Rodríguez visiting new social housing in LMPV in September, 2024. The Spanish government finances 16% of the LMPV redevelopment. Image source: Ajuntament de Barcelona

Interviewees consistently situate the redevelopment of LMPV within a long history of planning interventions, infrastructural impositions, evolving social housing approaches, and environmental justice struggles predating the 2006 rezoning of the predominantly industrial area, along with disappointment with the city's inability to deliver promised improvements to La Marina's main avenue, the Passeig de la Zona Franca.

Civic perceptions of the current transformation are shaped less by the formal objectives of the LMPV plan than by accumulated experiences of marginalization, delayed investment, the feeling of being ignored by municipal authorities, and resentment at being the recipient of unwanted land uses over decades. Several interviewees note that the implications of the LMPV plans were not widely understood among residents until at least 2010, reinforcing perceptions of a top-down process whose foundational decisions were taken with minimal local democratic input.

Local actors describe the broader La Marina area as an historically peripheral, marginalized, and “sacrificed” territory used to absorb land uses serving the functional needs of the city as a whole — heavy industry, logistics, port-related activities, transport infrastructure, and isolated social housing — while receiving limited public investment and services. Interviewees frequently refer to past mobilizations against landfills on Montjuïc, demonstrations to close freight rail traffic carrying hazardous materials, and fights against proposals for incineration facilities as emblematic of this role. **Improvements in living conditions, including the creation of public spaces and the removal of noxious land uses, are recalled** as the result of sustained mobilization rather than proactive municipal intervention. The wider area of La Marina, historically known as the Zona Franca, with its proximity to the Seat automobile plant (opened 1955) and concentration of its workers, is famed for its role in clandestine labor activism under the Franco regime, leading to occupations and deadly battles. This historical memory conditions how green transition initiatives are interpreted and contextualized and shapes ideas around solidarity and class-consciousness, though its neighborhoods are not currently as organized or militant as others in Sants-Montjuïc. **Due to the area’s relative isolation and legacy of automobility, there is also a commonly-held perspective that car ownership is important for residents, owing in large part to the perception that public transit options remain substandard.**

The entities in La Marina are most active at social level. It is true that they have historically played a very strong social role and led struggles, because **everything in the neighbourhood had to be fought for**. When there was running water in other parts of Barcelona, there was none here. Neighbourhood associations had to fight to get water, to have housing, for everything. It hasn't even been ten years since we've had a subway stop. In the social struggle, organizations here are very important. Now life is not so tough here as it was, but we are starting to say “well, we have come this far!”. [Director of federation of neighborhood organizations of La Marina]

Interviewees frame La Marina’s historical role as that of an out of sight, out of mind “receptacle” gradually carved up for the undesirable land uses on side of Montjuïc mountain opposite from the city center. It is bitterly noted by several interviewees that La Marina residents used to be able to walk down the Passeig de la Zona Franca to the sea before it was blocked off by motorway and port expansion, cutting off an area with centuries of maritime activity from its seafront. This history of marginalization and peripheralization underpin what still remains **cautious optimism that the redevelopment underway *could* improve the area’s symbolic and physical positioning within the city.**

Along with new housing, plans have been approved to connect the LMPV area to the center through new bicycle lanes on a narrow stretch between Montjuïc and the waterfront, requiring the reconfiguration of infrastructure around the Ronda Litoral highway and Port. The city has further committed to extending a direct metro line to the neighborhood in coming decades: while a metro link to LMPV and La Marina del Port

arrived with the phased opening of Line 10S (2018-2020) running beneath the Passeig de la Zona Franca, this connection still requires traveling out of the city entirely and a transfer in order to travel to the rest of Barcelona. This leads to a heavy reliance on bus services to access the city center.

The designation of LMPV as a “new neighborhood” rather than part of a broader La Marina — an area referred to as the “Zona Franca” (Free Trade Zone) neighborhood from the 1930s until the 1980s — is perceived negatively by nearly all interviewees and a matter of civic concern and resentment. Municipal technicians and property developers deploy “new neighborhood” rhetoric to emphasize opportunity, scale, and coherence, but civic actors and some public officials stress that LMPV should be understood as an extension of the physical and social fabric of La Marina. Concerns about “new neighborhood” framing, beyond the symbolic, focus on the implications for socio-spatial fragmentation and the prioritization of new residents over unmet needs of existing communities. Addressing these concerns, LMPV and LMP are now officially treated by the City of Barcelona as a *singular territory in transformation*, where housing pressures, governance complexity, and social tensions are shaped by a prolonged “meanwhile” period between planning intent and lived reality (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2025d).

These tensions are amplified by the scale of redevelopment, having few 21st century precedents in Barcelona, while civic and institutional actors agree that conditions enabling such large-scale planning initiatives are rare. LMPV is treated as an opportunity to address housing provision, environmental upgrading, economic activity, and infrastructural modernization simultaneously. Perceptions arising from local community activists reflect a dual reading: the project is recognized as incorporating objectives that could benefit La Marina and address longstanding deficits while producing protected housing and green infrastructure, but the initiative is perceived as predefined and opaque, leaving limited scope for negotiation, with civic input perceived as exerting greater influence over mitigation, minor adjustments, and symbolic elements (naming of parks, etc.) than overall strategy.

A recurring point of concern relates to the redesign of the Passeig de la Zona Franca. Despite an extended participatory process under the Colau administration—including a monitoring commission and public meetings facilitated through the 2023 Decidim participatory budgeting process—interviewees express uncertainty about whether, and when, the redesign will be implemented. Several attribute this uncertainty to shifting political priorities rather than technical constraints, notwithstanding Mayor Collboni’s announcement of “New Montjuïc” plan funding commitments incorporating the initiative (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2025a). Such doubts in the city’s desire or capacity to appropriately acknowledge citizens’ demands occur in a neighborhood with voting patterns that continue to support the governing PSC party, despite low turnouts: in elections from 2019-2023, LMPV had the lowest voter turnout of anywhere in Barcelona (González, 2023).

3.2 Participation and governance

Besides record levels of voting abstention among residents of LMPV, civic perceptions of participation and governance are closely linked to highly technocratic arrangements to manage

the long-term, large-scale redevelopment process, with gradual increases in social outreach. Interviewees refer to the *Pla de Barris* framework and the designation of both La Marina neighborhoods in a joint *Pla Singular* — as a municipal acknowledgment of the scale, duration, and complexity of redevelopment that requires targeted governance mechanisms and concerns about the socio-spatial fragmentation.

The presence of the dedicated municipal Office of La Marina is perceived as a positive institutional innovation by civic actors and public technicians alike. Physical proximity to municipal representatives is described as facilitating information-sharing, coordination, and responsiveness to day-to-day issues arising during the prolonged “meanwhile” period of LMPV development, in contrast with earlier phases when decisions were experienced as comparatively distant and imposed. Interviewees express doubts, however, regarding the depth and effectiveness of participation. Meetings, workshops, and consultations are acknowledged, but described as operating at the level of information-sharing and consultation rather than the sort of participatory planning that occurred in nearby La Bordeta. For example, several interviewees emphasize that most key elements of land use, density, height parameters, and sequencing were defined before participatory processes.

In the wider La Marina area, The *Unió d’Entitats de La Marina* occupies a complex intermediary role, functioning as a liaison between the municipality and a diverse civic network and as watchdogs capable of adopting confrontational positions reflecting community concerns. This dual role generates both recognition and confusion regarding the respective responsibilities of this coordinating body and the Office of La Marina.

Procedural governance is frequently characterized as fragmented, though neighborhood organization activities themselves are described as fragmented and based on older, distinct sub-neighborhoods (barriades). Meanwhile, decision-making responsibilities regarding comprehensive redevelopment are distributed across several municipal departments, city-owned companies, private developers, the Generalitat and the Spanish state, creating uncertainty about where and how decisions are made and how grievances can be addressed. This institutional complexity is seen as undermining confidence in participatory channels, especially when outcomes related to housing allocation, public facilities, or public-space design appear weakly reflective of earlier consultations.

Concerns surrounding housing allocation processes for public and subsidized housing emerge as the focal point for procedural tensions. Civic actors highlight anxieties related to transparency, prioritization criteria for local and Barcelona residents, and the role of private developers in managing access to subsidized units. Such themes are particularly sensitive in the context of an increasingly inaccessible local housing market and expectations that redevelopment should predominantly prioritize existing residents of La Marina. Such concerns also arise for the allocation of public housing being constructed:

The neighbours have their doubts, and that makes people suspicious and creates bad vibes.... These allocation processes make them uncomfortable... 30% have to go to people in the neighbourhood, right? Well, then where are the 1,600 houses for our children? My older children had to leave Barcelona. I don't like these comments, but people say they're only giving the flats to Moroccans. [Resident of Eduard Aunòs houses]

From the perspective of technicians and developers, municipal mixed-tenure and mixed-income requirements introduce significant governance and design challenges while responding to legacies of concentrated poverty in the area and a professed need for an economically and socially diverse, modern neighborhood. Integrating protected and market-rate housing within the same buildings is described as novel in Barcelona and framed in the language of social integration. However, complex legal and financial arrangements to manage shared spaces and costs consistently raise fears that new forms of internal segregations and tensions will arise between residents of subsidized and market-rate units, since those living in subsidized units will not have access to some facilities such as gyms and swimming pools, and will have separate entrances. Such arrangements also pose practical challenges for developers partnering with the city to deliver housing contained mandatory subsidized units:

We had always built private and subsidized housing in different buildings. There are the common areas, and a person who buys a private home can afford a swimming pool, a gym, a tennis court... These things generate expenses at the community level, so it was decided to build different stairwells and clearly delimit the common areas. You don't know if it will be accepted by the people who buy the homes or how the public would respond. [property developer]

In relation to housing, what has been considered the key local victory has been **advocacy pushing public bodies to introduce quotas reserving 30% of protected housing for neighborhood residents and their children, seen as a partial corrective to first-come, first-served allocation and confusing lotteries.**

We insisted to [the city’s Housing Office] that there had to be some scales, a percentage of protected housing allocated for neighbourhood people. Not that people from outside shouldn’t come, but it can’t be that someone from [the city of] Lleida has preference over our neighbours, right? Besides, it's not transparent, you give power to the company. It was proposed in the [Sants-Montjuïc] Plenary and accepted, now we are following up on it so that when there are lottery drawings there are percentages for people with disabilities, those experiencing social problems, and a quota for people from the neighbourhood. [Director of federation of neighborhood organizations of La Marina]

Participation fatigue is a recurring theme: long time window of redevelopment, combined with consultations whose outcomes are slow to materialize or indefinitely shelved, contribute to **skepticism regarding civic engagement and public consultation processes. This is compounded by perceptions that political shifts at the municipal level stall or reverse previous participatory initiatives**, particularly in relation to the pacification and greening of the Passeig de la Zona Franca.

Local media associated with civic organizations, active in shaping and airing local public opinion, have raised concerns that the the 2025–2035 Pla Singular places **less emphasis and fewer resources on social and community-oriented projects** (such as community support, education, cultural activities, and services for older adults) **than the previous Pla de Barris did, despite maintaining commitments to urban and public-space investments** (La Marina, 2025). Community organizations involved in the process have specifically **noted a reduction in social ambition and a lack of concrete plans and funding for the social-community axis**. This reinforces interviewees’ perceptions that **procedural inclusion may be narrowing as physical transformation accelerates and the city’s concerns are more technical and operational at the expense of social integration and transformation**.

In terms of local self-determination and a feeling of being overshadowed by other Sants-Montjuïc neighborhoods, multiple interviewees suggest that, considering the growth of LMPV by 30,000 residents, its large area and its relationship to the port and Zona Franca, the neighborhoods of La Marina should be jointly upgraded to the status of a new city District, offering greater decision-making power.

3.3 Concerns over unequal distribution of benefits

Distributional equity emerges as a central concern in civic perceptions of the redevelopment of LMPV in relation to housing access, relocation, public facilities, and the overall benefits associated with large-scale urban transformation. **Interviewees frame equity around the question of whether, and how, the preexisting local community benefits from new housing production through the creation of complexes with private amenities and large corporate commercial tenants, while the creation of comparable public amenities**

(swimming pools, sports centers, etc.) and the opening of independent, smaller businesses lag.

The relatively high proportion of protected and subsidized housing planned for LMPV is acknowledged by civic actors as positive. In a working-class neighborhood which nevertheless has high levels of homeownership, there is less agreement of the impacts of new rent control protections, with some seeing this as state overreach and an assertion that the state should focus on creating public housing and leave the private market to its own devices.

Though sometimes describing LMPV in the language of “real estate speculation”, as has been common in discussion in redevelopment in Barcelona for decades, **interviewees distinguish LMPV from projects perceived as straightforwardly market-driven, emphasizing that commitments to various forms of protected housing. Notwithstanding, there is also a widely held perception that new subsidized rental housing is within the price range of local residents, raising the question of how “affordability” is calculated.** Civic actors routinely stress that protected housing does not, within itself, generate locally equitable outcomes, while **questions persist regarding eligibility criteria, multiple lotteries, heavily bureaucratic processes requiring specialist knowledge, and allocation mechanisms perceived as opaque. Subsidized housing is frequently described as priced above what is accessible for existing residents of La Marina, or attractive mainly to younger people whose parents can help pay.** Interviewees note that these dynamics intersect with narratives around migration and belonging, some noting a rise in suspicion and resentment that is fomented by an emerging far-right party that is heavily recruiting in the area.

Anticipated population growth is expected to place additional pressure on already strained public services such as schools, healthcare facilities, and social services. Interviewees note that responsibility for many of these services and facilities lie with the Generalitat, complicating accountability in a planning process orchestrated by the Ajuntament and calling into question the possibilities for timely provision. It is sometimes pointed to with frustration that **a migrant internment center (2006), a police station (2007), and a new prison (2022) have been completed in La Marina and Zona Franca area—but not many other promised public facilities—as part of the legacy of the area as a “sacrifice zone.”**

Housing displacement emerges as a salient distributional issue in specific cases, most notably Colònia Bausili, a small historic settlement in LMPV originally built for textile factory workers and consisting of low-rise houses with a distinctive architectural character and a lauded community fabric. A street of two-story houses hidden behind a gas station on the Passeig de la Zona Franca, its site was purchased by investors and residents were immediately pressured to leave, house-by-house. Planning initiatives, including the 2025 Pla Singular, discount its future for residential use and most residents have already been displaced. **Currently, the ground floors are considered uninhabitable due to flood risk, and most homes have been condemned with residents being rehoused nearby, but some long-time tenants continue to live there as of January, 2026. Some residents have been excluded from**

rehousing options based on eligibility criteria, feeding perceptions of involuntary expulsion.

A new neighbourhood is built from nothing, and, wall-to-wall, another disappears. This example of industrial and working-class heritage, Colònia Bausili, it's dead because a vulture fund arrived, the City Hall turned a blind eye. Time goes by and you know what vulture funds do. While you are waiting, they are buying. One hundred years of history gone in 10 months. It's shocking.... There was no neighbourhood meeting to tell [Colonia Bausili residents] what was happening, they went one by one. They divide and conquer. [Professor of Journalism on housing inequalities, lifelong La Marina resident]

Market-rate housing is perceived as aimed toward non-Spaniard individuals and couples who are comparatively wealthy, without children or roots in the neighborhood, raising concerns for weakening social ties. Several interviewees noted the near absence of new residents in La Marina civic life, suggesting that they are commuters or remote workers living in private enclaves. Broadly, many civic actors perceive that incomers fitting such a profile structurally favored over autochthonous tenants, lower-income households, families with children, and the elderly. As the neighborhood was traditionally populated by internal migrants from rural Spain and the use of the Spanish language remains common in the area, a rise in Catalan speakers is also perceived as a symbol of a new, incoming population.

According to a developer working in in LMPV, among their 600 market-rate units sold in LMPV, around 70% of purchasers Spanish citizens, mainly Catalans but not necessarily from Barcelona, around 80% of homes are purchased as primary residences, and more than 50% of purchasers are under 45. There is a wide array of nationalities among purchasers, including Venezuelans, Ukrainians, Italians, Dutch, Poles, Chinese, Colombians, Russians, Germans, Swedes, Irish, Hondurans, Iranians, Moroccans, Armenians, Bangladeshis and Indians, without a strongly dominant incoming profile.

It's very fragmented...It's very scattered. We wonder about whether we are attracting a specific profile, but in the end, you take whoever comes and that's it. [representative of developer]

Notwithstanding concerns about affordability, access, and belonging, several interviewees emphasize that they see the LMPV development as a potential opportunity for themselves, their family or friends to remain living in a neighborhood where market pressures have already pushed many out of La Marina, and, typically, out of the city entirely.

While there is a notable “green” emphasis on the development of the new neighborhood through district heating and cooling infrastructure, ecological construction techniques and high-

efficiency buildings, new parks and active mobility infrastructure (Ajuntament de Barcelona, IMUB, 2024), in La Marina, nature-based solutions and residential densification are not perceived through the lens of environmental sustainability, but rather as elements integral to an overall development approach: as integrated infrastructural components. Greening itself, in a neighborhood that already has relatively high levels of green space compared to neighborhoods like La Bordeta (albeit of varying levels of maintenance), the integration of green elements are not perceived *within themselves* as drivers of inequality, but as part of the protocol of an overarching, government-driven project. Nevertheless, questions are often raised about who benefits from such improved environmental quality, whether improvements will occur at the expense of already-existing green spaces, and what spillover effects the overall development will have on local housing costs.

3.4 Political mobilization

Civic perceptions of political mobilization in La Marina are deeply shaped by a long history of collective struggle in neighborhood and labor movements. **Interviewees describe mobilization not as episodic or reactive, but as a constitutive feature of local political life, forged through earlier struggles for basic services, environmental health, and recognition within the city.** However, there is also a **sense of a weakening fabric, heightened by concerns regarding the lack of civic involvement of newcomers.**

Neighborhood organizations in La Marina are recognized for their capacity to mobilize across a broad range of issues, including housing access, public services, and urban infrastructure. **This capacity is understood as cumulative, drawing on organizational memory, long-standing networks, and shared repertoires developed over decades.** These histories shape expectations regarding engagement with public authorities and perceived legitimacy of collective claims, but **the aging of activists and the challenges of recruiting younger activists and new residents are perceived as a challenge.**

The residents organize on their own, and that scares any public organization.... In the end **we're going to the roots of what these neighbourhoods are: the struggle against power.** A good part of the old neighbourhoods are of self-construction. You didn't ask for permission to build a house when you've just arrived and you have nowhere to go. People took bricks and built little houses out of necessity. You always do that against established power.... **We know that city councils follow the lead of private companies. The real dissidence is through alternative media and organizing, which are more and more persecuted.** But we are asleep because we live well compared to 100 years ago. [Professor of Journalism on housing inequalities, lifelong La Marina resident]

The large-scale redevelopment project of LMPV has significantly altered the terrain of mobilization, as the complexity of planning processes, multiplicity of actors involved, and technical language of complex urbanization create barriers to broad participation. Mobilization increasingly requires specialized knowledge, sustained engagement, and volunteered time, limiting who feel that they can meaningfully participate, heightened by concerns that

participation predominantly implies consultation as a “box-ticking” exercise rather than shared agency. The Cases Barates constitute the only long-established residential nucleus within LMPV itself, and since civic activity remains strongly rooted in older *barriades* as it has over the past century, sustained and unified mobilization focused on the new development area is a continuous challenge. Political mobilization is described as operating across multiple registers ranging from institutional participation to more confrontational practices, including media interventions and public statements. Civic actors are described as moving strategically between modes depending on the issue at stake, perceived institutional openness, and urgency.

Uneven mobilization capacity emerges as a recurring concern. Longstanding residents—typically older homeowners—are generally seen as better positioned and more able to engage with planning processes than newer residents, precarious households, or individuals with limited time and resources. Elderly activists note that there are generational differences in relation to activism and organizing, and that younger residents who might be involved have been priced out of the neighborhood, creating a sense of urgency for recruitment.

We really need more young people to get involved, especially in organizations and associations. Any type of association needs new blood with new ideas. People always say, “No, it’s full of old people.” Sorry! But most of the older people who were, or are, in these organizations, when you join, they’ll tell you, “We do *this, this, and this*, and we do it *this way*, what do you think?” But in the second year [newcomers] will say, ‘Hey, what if we do it *like this*?’ Okay, fine, we’ll start putting your ideas into practice. After all, we’re also bribing you so that you you’ll be my replacement later on [laughs]. [Neighbourhood activist]

Mobilization is also shaped by shifting political dynamics at the municipal level. Several interviewees note a shift in tone and responsiveness following changes in city government, with some participatory spaces associated with the Colau administration becoming less active, discontinued, or ignored. This has prompted a recalibration of strategies, with some civic actors emphasizing renewed autonomous organizing alongside more selective institutional engagement, while others continue to see participation and advocacy through formal channels as a pragmatic approach.

Despite fatigue, generational turnover, distrust in formal participatory and consultory processes, and impatience, interviewees stress that mobilization remains a critical tool for shaping outcomes. Perceived successes—such as securing quotas for neighborhood residents in protected housing or influencing the location of public facilities—are cited as evidence that collective action still yields tangible results.

3.5 Positive socio-ecological impacts

Perceptions of positive socio-ecological impacts in La Marina related to LMPV are closely linked to shared experiences of environmental neglect and territorial stigmatization. In a broader sense in relation to La Marina, **interviewees frame recent and planned green transition interventions as overdue improvements in an area historically characterized by industrial land uses, infrastructural burdens, and limited environmental quality.** They also consistently emphasize that **La Marina has long possessed environmental assets, namely its proximity to Montjuïc and neighborhood parks won by earlier social struggles, but that access, connectivity, and investment remain uneven,** maintaining a fragmented civic fabric. Recent interventions, including new parks, tree-lined streets, stormwater management systems, and reductions in asphalted surfaces, are widely perceived as improving thermal comfort, walkability, and visual quality, associated with a greater sense of calm, dignity, and livability contrasted with the area’s industrial past. New green amenities with LMPV are welcomed, assuming the “new neighborhood” feels inviting, but there is also a **widely held perception that La Marina residents will stick to their own areas and that new facilities like the new Parc de Tretze Roses (inaugurated 2024), between new housing and Eduard Aunós-Cases Barates, is underutilized.**

The new park gives [Eduard Aunós residents] peace and quiet, space. Then there's everything that goes with the flower beds, rainwater drainage. All that is obviously very good, but it needs maintenance, otherwise it turns into a dump. It's a very good idea, walking down the street and seeing clean green spaces, it gives you quality of life because you don't have asphalt. But sometimes it seems that we don't value that, incivility a pending issue. [Resident of Eduard Aunós houses]

Green transition interventions are interpreted through a lens, though not the language, of recognitional justice: visible improvements in public space and the insertion of bicycle lanes and new pedestrian and garden drainage infrastructure are generally understood to signal that, while La Marina remains *peripheral*, it is becoming less *marginal*, and is deemed worthy of environmental investment. Interviewees frequently describe greening as a long-awaited acknowledgment, particularly when interventions directly affect daily routines. These positive impacts are rarely framed as exceptional or excessive. Green spaces, climate-adapted housing, and pedestrian-friendly streets are consistently described as minimum standards for a dignified neighborhood rather than amenities, though some interviewees express concern that “green” approaches (building materials, energy efficiency standards, green infrastructure) contribute to prohibitively high prices. Thus, while their arrival is generally welcomed, green interventions are interpreted as belated and unequally beneficial.

3.6 Negative socio-ecological impacts

Green transition interventions are understood as enhancing quality of life and environmental conditions, while remaining embedded within broader concerns on negative socio-ecological

impacts. Beyond housing, a central concern relates to heat exposure and the lack of shade in key public spaces. Interviewees note that, despite overarching commitments to greening, heavily used areas remain dominated by hard surfaces with limited vegetation or protection from extreme temperatures. This is perceived as problematic for children, older residents, and those with health vulnerabilities, cited as evidence that climate adaptation goals are not consistently translated into everyday spatial design.

As such, negative socio-ecological impacts tend to be framed through embodied, everyday experiences. Heat stress, air pollution, noise, and safety risks linked to heavy traffic are described as *compounding existing social vulnerabilities*, especially in a context of rapid population growth, increasing housing burdens, and intensified mobility demands. Interviewees emphasize that La Marina is highly impacted by through-traffic serving broader citywide functions (the port, industrial parks, the Fira conference center, stadium traffic, etc.) at the expense of local environmental quality and safety. Traffic-calming and cycling interventions have been introduced here, but interviewees express skepticism about their safety and effectiveness. The bicycle lane along the thoroughfare (2021) is described as chronically underused due to inadequate separation from heavy bus and freight traffic, especially around a large home improvement and DIY retail chain. The continued prioritization of logistics and passenger vehicle flows is seen as contradicting stated goals of pollution reduction, active mobility, and neighborhood connectivity.

“They always say ‘there’s no money,’ but we are fighting for playgrounds to be covered. In the summer, the kids can’t even play. It is a minimum. All of Barcelona should have playgrounds and squares covered. **The Plaça de La Marina is a neuralgic, central square. People faint there. It’s cement, there’s nothing but sun.** I would like to have even more green, but what space do you have? **One demand is to green the Passeig de la Marina, to have shade, reduce pollution, and to pacify it. We wanted to cut it from traffic on Sundays, just as in Sants. They do not let us because we are the exit of Barcelona.** So think about the mobility of gathering 30,000 new people!”
 [Director of federation of neighborhood organizations of La Marina]

Temporal unevenness is another recurring theme. Existing residents bear the costs of prolonged construction through noise, dust, disrupted mobility, and uncertainty. Though parks and green-blue infrastructure were completed before buildings were constructed, social benefits — particularly in the form of subsidized and public housing and public facilities such as schools, health centers, and sports centers — remain future-oriented.

Maintenance deficits feature prominently in civic perceptions. Interviewees stress that green infrastructure requires sustained care to deliver environmental and social benefits. Where maintenance is insufficient, green spaces are described as deteriorating, underused, or generating problems with rat infestations, weakening their intended contribution to

neighborhood well-being. There is a broader concern that investment in LMPV may have the effect of further disinvestment and lack of maintenance in older green spaces.

Limited shade, insufficient facilities, traffic pressure, and delayed services are perceived as interacting with demographic growth to generate new forms of environmental stress. Negative socio-ecological impacts are largely understood as the result of misalignment between planning ambitions and lived experience, underscoring the importance of integrating climate adaptation with everyday usability, mobility management, and social infrastructure provision, moving beyond symbolic achievements and benchmarks toward noticeable improvements to everyday life.

3.7 Tensions and power dynamics between stakeholders/actors

Perceptions of the redevelopment of LMPV highlight tensions and power asymmetries among the actors involved, including municipal authorities, private developers, cooperative housing initiatives, and neighborhood organizations, tempered by widespread acknowledgment that the municipally-led integrative approach is superior to more neoliberal modes of redevelopment. Nevertheless, civic actors frame these dynamics in terms of unequal access to decision-making power, information, and resources.

More so than in La Bordeta, tensions emerge in relation to cooperative housing and social economy initiatives. While cooperatives are often supported in principle as alternatives to speculative development, interviewees express ambivalence when such publicly-subsidized projects are perceived as insufficiently embedded in the local social fabric or benefiting from privileged access to land and institutional support. These perceptions do not amount to a rejection of cooperative models but reflect unmet expectations regarding their potential role as bridges between long-standing residents and new populations. For example, the organic food store and community space Keras Buti, located on the ground floor of the Chalmeta housing cooperative, is perceived by some as not providing for the needs of local neighbors.

There are all sorts, but they don't seem to be people who are closely linked to the neighbourhood. A cooperative has to be an engine for dynamism. If these people do not dynamize and do not integrate, they are not a driving force. So what's the point? As the blocks arrive, or more cooperatives, people from many countries are coming: how cool, but if they do not integrate, then what are they doing here?
 [Director of federation of neighborhood organizations of La Marina]

These concerns point to broader anxieties that alternative housing models may inadvertently reproduce forms of social closure or symbolic distinction if neighborhood integration is not actively cultivated. Interviewees stress that legitimacy, in this context, is not derived solely from tenure form, but from ongoing engagement, accessibility, and responsiveness to local needs.

Informational power asymmetries constitute another key dimension of perceived imbalance. Access to technical knowledge, planning documents, and institutional language is seen as exclusionary, privileging actors with professional expertise or sustained engagement capacity. Even within participatory settings, this contributes to perceptions that some stakeholders are structurally better positioned. Taken together, **civic perceptions of tensions and power dynamics emphasize that redevelopment in LMPV is understood as a negotiated terrain marked by unequal power relations and contested expectations.**

3.8 Innovative governance mechanisms

Perceptions of innovative governance in LMPV focus on institutional arrangements designed to manage the social impacts of long-term, large-scale redevelopment. Interviewees most frequently reference the Pla de Barris framework—and specifically the designation of LMPV as a Pla Singular—as an attempt to adapt governance tools to the exceptional scale, duration, and complexity of the transformation underway.

Interviewees highlight the integration of social policies alongside physical redevelopment as an important, if uneven, innovation. Efforts to coordinate housing provision with employment programs, community activities, and social services are seen as attempts to mitigate disruption and support social cohesion during demographic change. However, several civic actors note that recent iterations of the Pla Singular allocate fewer resources to social and community initiatives than earlier phases, generating concern that governance innovation is increasingly weighted toward managing physical transformation rather than strengthening social infrastructure.

LMPV is perceived simultaneously as an object of governance and as a governing mechanism. The high proportion of social and subsidized housing is welcomed, with disputes centered on questions of prioritization and access. In this context, **the Tanteig i Retracte mechanism that has been applied in some cases in LMPV — in which public bodies have first refusal for any property being sold, including newly-built developments, to convert to protected housing — is viewed by planners and housing experts as a promising tool for expanding public housing stock. However, this tool and its potential benefits remains poorly understood among residents.**

Residents of La Marina observe that the neighborhood’s rapid transformation—driven by a surge in private developments and rising property values—is reshaping both the social composition and access to public housing. One resident highlights the disparity:

No one wanted to come here, but now it is a very expensive area: there is a lot of private development and the people aren’t from the neighbourhood. It will become a bedroom community.... LMPV is not for us, it's for Barcelona to look good, and because it was the only place to build. People here cannot afford 400,000 or 500,000 euro flats, or even the [subsidized units]. In the pre-school where I work, many children leave, their families can no longer keep their lives in Barcelona... They do the Parc de les Tretze Roses, the green, to sweeten the deal and we bought it. In a ‘neighbourhood of neighbourhoods’, this will be the rich one, and if there are racialized people it’s because they have gotten access to new public housing, which is like winning the Christmas lottery. (Local schoolteacher)

Municipal actors, however, frame their approach as a deliberate effort to **expand and integrate the existing neighborhoods of La Marina, and to find a balance between the provision of social housing without ghettoization or creating isolated bedroom communities, noting important changes over time**. A local politician from BComú explains:

We started with a project that was, in [Mayor Xavier] Trias’ time, a private luxury development facing the highway, like those being built on the outskirts of Madrid with gated communities accessed by car with a swimming pool, gym, and all private services. The approach [the District of Sants-Montjuïc under Comuns leadership] took was that it's *not* about building a new neighbourhood but expanding the existing neighbourhood. **And that it wouldn't be good, given the stigma the neighbourhood, to have 100% social housing—at least, that's what we thought at the time, now it might be debatable.** (Lawyer and politician)

Together, these perspectives underscore the tensions between **market-driven redevelopment, social inclusion and integration, and neighborhood identities**, highlighting the governance challenges in attempting to orchestrate equitable urban transformation.

3.9 Tourism and market pressures

Civic perceptions of tourism and market pressures in LMPV reflect an acute awareness of the neighborhood’s changing position within the urban economy. Conventional mass tourism is not currently a feature in comparison to the central city, though La Marina houses many workers in tourism and related service economies. The upper part of LMPV borders the convention center Fira, the main hub for business tourism straddling Barcelona and

L'Hospitalet de Llobregat. The conference center is perceived to have a neutral to negative impact in the neighborhood — it may generate some extra business activity such as cafes, but at prices that are much higher than traditional establishments in La Marina, while some argue that trade shows and convention center hotels become hotbeds of prostitution and public inebriation which have negative impacts on the surrounding area.

Interviewees describe LMPV as being at an **early stage of market transformation, in which pressures are monitored and anticipated rather than fully consolidated**. Several interviewees emphasize that the scale of housing production in LMPV generates speculative expectations among property owners and investors and question to what degree this can be mitigated by new social and subsidized housing. **Anticipated amenities, improved environmental quality, and future connectivity are perceived as driving investment well in advance of project completion, though the extent is largely unknown.**

People, even if they are forty years old, cannot leave their parents' home because the prices are exorbitant. And young people don't have the downpayment to buy these flats. Neither the 'social', 200,000-something, which is not cheap either. [LMPV] will be a neighbourhood where we will go for a walk and say 'look, the rich people', with their pools, with padel courts, another level. And the difference is noticeable. You go to the market and you start to see the type of population that already exists, mixed with those from the Cases Barates. (Local schoolteacher)

Tourism is most often discussed indirectly, particularly through concerns about the expansion of medium-term and flexible rental formats, a dynamic at the tourism-housing nexus. Interviewees express apprehension that, as LMPV attracts more higher-income residents and international workers, regulatory gaps or weak enforcement will allow short-term or quasi-touristic rentals to proliferate. These concerns are framed through comparison with other parts of the city, where such dynamics have contributed to rapid rent inflation and displacement.

3.10 Gaps in Perceptions Between Civic Groups and Public Agencies

Civic and institutional actors in LMPV share a broad acknowledgment that green transition and large-scale redevelopment are necessary, but they diverge significantly in how they interpret causes, responsibilities, and likely outcomes. These perceptual gaps are not framed as outright conflict, but as differences rooted in institutional position, temporal horizon, and lived experience (Villaró Rabadán, 2025).

Public officials and municipal technicians emphasize structural constraints and opportunities shaping the LMPV project, including legal frameworks, market conditions, intergovernmental competencies, and the technical complexity of coordinating housing, infrastructure, and environmental systems at scale. From this perspective, outcomes are shaped less by political choice than by feasibility, sequencing, and instruments, sometimes generating unfortunate but unavoidable externalities. Officials frame LMPV as a pre-emptive intervention within an

anticipatory and redistributive approach designed to avoid the speculative dynamics observed in earlier projects such as 22@ in the District of Sant Martí. Reflecting on that earlier experience, the director of the Office of La Marina notes:

“At that time [with 22@] we did not think ‘damn, many foreigners are going to come here to work in these office buildings’. That’s the reality. Does this produce gentrification? Surely... It happens in some areas but what is very important is the issue of protected housing.”
(Head of Office of La Marina del Prat Vermell)

Civic actors, by contrast, interpret the same conditions as reflecting an underuse of institutional power. Acknowledging legal and economic constraints, interviewees question whether municipal authorities exhaust available tools to prioritize affordability, regulate market pressures, or strengthen guarantees for existing residents. This divergence is particularly evident in debates over what constitutes “affordable housing.” Civic actors stress how the aggregation of different subsidy and public housing regimes under the banner of “50% protected housing” obscures meaningful differences in accessibility. Privately promoted HPO units—typically priced around 25% below market value—are perceived as remaining out of reach for many La Marina residents, particularly renters and lower-income households, driving skepticism about redistributive effects.

Mixed-tenure development further illustrates this perceptual gap. Municipal actors emphasize spatial integration as a *corrective to segregation*, arguing that co-locating market-rate and subsidized units within the same buildings prevents stigmatization. Civic actors, however, focus on everyday inequalities that arise within these arrangements, including differentiated access to amenities, unequal community fees, and the social implications of “poor doors” as new forms of insidious *micro-segregation*, raising doubts about whether “social mix” translates into equity.

Temporal framing also differs markedly. Public officials consistently situate LMPV within a long-term horizon, emphasizing that benefits related to facilities, connectivity, and environmental quality will materialize gradually. Civic actors tend to foreground short- and medium-term impacts, including delays in schools and healthcare provision, prolonged construction disruption, and fears that the symbolic prominence of the “new neighborhood” may overshadow unresolved deficits.

Divergent interpretations emerge around the role of green transition itself. While public agencies frame green infrastructure and high-performance buildings as beneficial components of redevelopment, civic actors remain cautious about their revalorizing effects of a new, green development in a strained housing market. Environmental improvement is therefore evaluated by civic actors less in technical terms or climate concerns than through its interaction with affordability, accessibility, and belonging. These gaps reflect distinct but overlapping rationalities rather than irreconcilable positions. Institutional actors prioritize coherence,

to the Batlló industrial fortune and skepticism regarding the city’s capacity, or willingness, to deliver promised public goods. The site’s prolonged enclosure, occupying nearly one-fifth of La Bordeta, is remembered as a physical and symbolic barrier, though many also had social links with workers that brought them into the private complex. In 2000, Can Batlló was treated not only as a public space and facilities problem but as “an antiquated and anachronistic obstacle that confines and prevents the reorganization of the streets of La Bordeta” (Vivanco, 2000: 222)

With the real estate crash, no one would invest five cents in brick and mortar, and without bricks [construction], there are no green areas or anything else. “Yes, yes” [city representatives] said to us in 2009. So that we would leave, they told us, “look, by early 2011, the cranes and excavators will be working in Can Batlló.” So we said, “okay, we’ll even give you until spring 2011. If Can Batlló is not under construction and open to the neighbourhood by then, the residents of Sants and La Bordeta will occupy it”. Laughter, you see, because my comrades were grandparents, and we said we were going to occupy it. (Co-founder of architecture cooperative)

The opening of the community-managed building Bloc 11 in 2011 is framed as a key turning point. Interviewees emphasize that the initial access granted to neighborhood groups was not the result of benevolent institutional planning, but of sustained mobilization and the credible threat of politicized squatting. This moment is described as a precedent-setting assertion of collective rights and a testament to the legitimacy of self-management practices (*autogestió*). Later governance struggles, though requiring more institutional collaboration with the Ajuntament, are seen as arising from this history of struggle. Can Batlló is described as a as a laboratory in grassroots urbanism and collaboration by activists and architects, particularly through the architecture cooperative LaCol (see Aiguasol et al., 2021). In order to complete formal agreements with the City Hall regarding the management of the spaces of the complex, activists formed a legal non-profit entity, the Self-managed Community and Neighborhood Space [ECVA] of Can Batlló, in 2018.

“Can Batlló” can refer to the whole space including the park and other spaces, but we are trying to distinguish ourselves as the *Self-managed Community and Neighbourhood Space of Can Batlló*. It’s hard because we keep just saying “Can Batlló”, which is easier, but no, the part that we manage is the *ECVA Can Batlló*: we are somewhat responsible for the existence of everything else, but that’s a heavy weight on our shoulders. several realities have coexisted in Can Batlló, and the current reality is that the management of the playground, the park, all that depends directly on the City Hall. [Representative of ECVA Can Batlló]

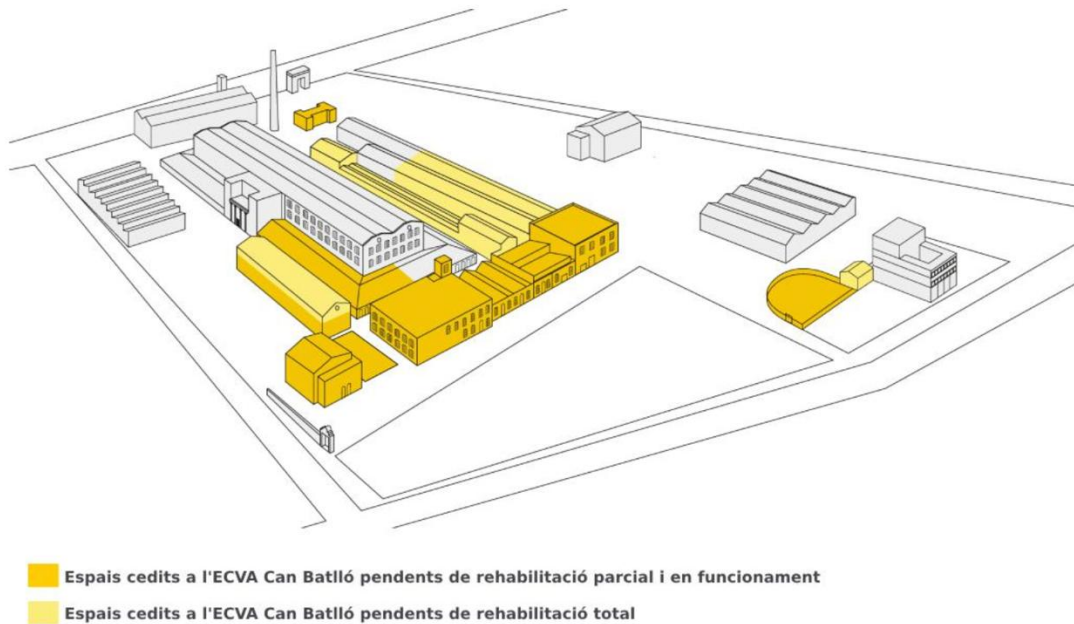


Figure 6: Map illustrating which spaces of the Can Batlló complex have been ceded to the ECVA, with those in use but needing partial rehabilitation in dark yellow, and those awaiting rehabilitation for use by the ECVA in light yellow. The remaining buildings in the image are/will be managed by various public bodies and/or cooperatives. Image source: ECVA (2024)

Over time, like in LMPV, the city shifted its discourse regarding the attributes and the values of the park, explicitly framing it as part of Barcelona’s climate adaptation strategy (heat mitigation, drought resilience, etc.): this impacted not only policy language and stated goals, but also integral elements of the design of the park itself, in which gardens became treated as amenities but also as core infrastructural features through the implementation of SUDS. It also gradually framed the park more as a reclaimed space for the entire city, not only La Bordeta. Meanwhile, arising from participatory planning exercises led by neighborhood activists and the architectural cooperative Lacol in 2017 and 2018 involving hundreds of residents, more emphasis was gradually placed on historical memory and industrial heritage in the park’s design. Principally, this led to the maintenance of factory facades as enclosures for a sports area, the playground, and the new Bloc4 building, as well as the adaptive reuse of several buildings for public facilities.

Implementation of housing development, parks, and public facilities is perceived as hybrid and uneven. **Interviewees recognize the gradual materialization of long-demanded public facilities, cooperative housing, and green space as significant achievements, while they stress that implementation has proceeded asymmetrically, with market-rate residential**

development advancing more rapidly than public facilities consolidated community uses. This sequencing is interpreted as reflecting power imbalances between private capital and activist demands. There is also an acknowledgment that the park, perceived as a *city* project, was not a sufficient subject of involvement and oversight by the ECVA assembly.

Overall, perceptions of precedents and implementation frame the Can Batlló redevelopment as an **ongoing negotiation shaped by historical delay, collective action, and contested priorities, and the site is understood less as a finished project than as a terrain where past struggles continue to condition present expectations** regarding housing justice, governance, and the social meaning of green transition.

They asked me on the news, "Do you like the park?" I said "Yes. Of course. Bear in mind that this used to be a factory. When they tore it down, it was all ruins. Anything you put on top of it will look much better. The only thing is, this park was born 46 years too late" [laughs]. Many of the residents who lived in buildings around the park sold them because there was going to be a big park here and, in the meantime, their children have grown up. My sons are 44 and 41 and now they are finally seeing it. The second phase is at a standstill and it has a problem—not so much financial—but because the second phase requires demolishing or repairing parts of buildings that are *ours*. (Co-founder of architecture cooperative)

4.2 Participation and governance

Perceptions of participation and governance focus less on formal planning process and more on how decision-making, representation, and responsibility have been restructured over time and the importance of neighborhood self-management. Interviewees describe governance in Can Batlló as an evolving arrangement, shaped by the tension between radical self-management practices and gradual institutional formalization.

Our point of view we very much about trying to take advantage of the impasse of the crisis, of the restructuring of capital, to generate other ways to do urbanism, other ways of building a city, other ways of building another a neighbourhood otherwise, with relationships that could capitalism, patriarchy, fascism, etc. [Anthropologist, neighbourhood activist]

The 2024 Annual Report of the ECVA Can Batlló reflects these tensions, emphasizing the challenges of and semi-institutionalized *autogestió*, but also the legacy of social struggle that led to legal agreements around management of collectively-run spaces during the Colau administration.

We cannot forget that before being a legally constituted association, Can Batlló was a neighborhood and social movement with more than thirty years of history and constant struggle. A collective effort that has demonstrated that the management of material, human, symbolic resources, etc. does not have to be the exclusive work of State institutions or private companies, but can be a task that organized society can carry out in an effective and sustainable way. [ECVA 2024, p. 5, translation the authors”]

Interviews concur with academic and policy literature identifying Can Batlló as an innovative social laboratory, particularly in relation to community self-management, cooperative housing, and hybrid arrangements between public institutions and civic organizations. Such literature, much written by local action-researchers, explore Can Batlló in relation to new models of governance against, and with, the state (Dalmau i Torvà, 2014; De La Peña, 2020; Martí-Costa and Dalmau i Torvà, n.d.), as a paradigm-changing model of public-commons partnership under the municipalist BComú party (Bianchi, 2025). Within the project, the La Borda housing cooperative — emerging from these movements and constructed on the Can Batlló site as a pioneering right-of-use development in collaboration with the Ajuntament — is an internationally recognized and award-winning testing ground for cooperative cohousing (Cabré and Andrés, 2018; Costa Gómez and Garcia i Mateu, 2015; Del Río, 2025) and is highlighted in international discussions on socio-ecologically responsible housing (Hill and Mazzucato, 2025; Pareja-Eastaway, 2025).

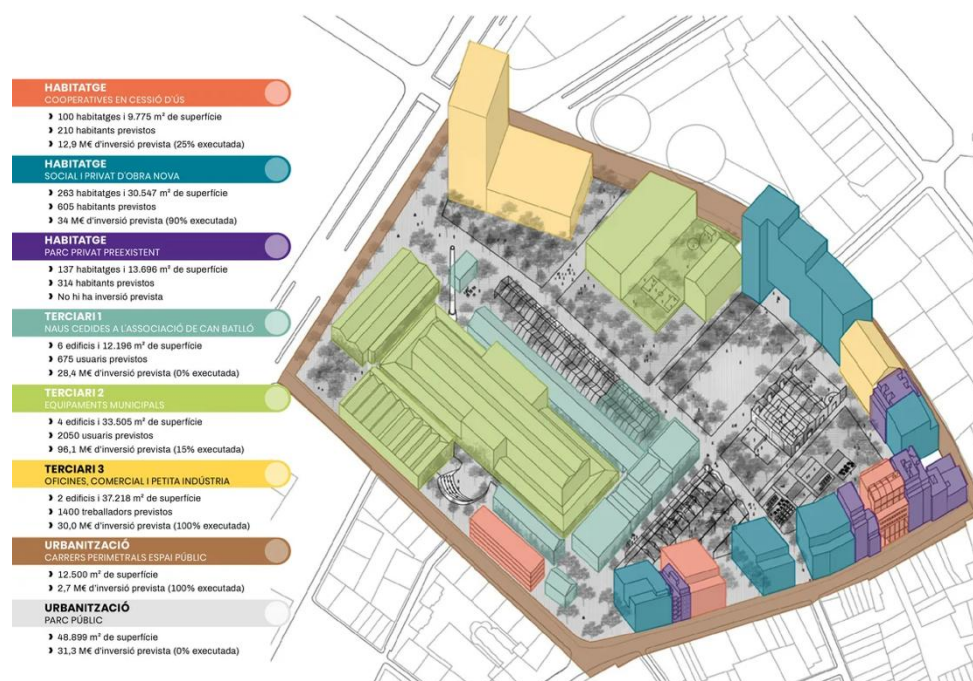


Figure 7: Can Batlló as conceived in the year 2021 in the Lab Batlló project, led by the La Col architectural cooperative. The area in grey constitutes Can Batlló Park <https://lacol.coop/es/projectes/labbatll%C3%B3/>

Participation is understood as central to the legitimacy of Can Batlló, but place-based activists emphasize that the form and effectiveness of participation have changed significantly across phases. The assemblies and working groups that emerged during the early phases of civic activism continue to play a central role, but interviewees note that their **capacity to influence outcomes has become more uneven as governance and large-scale redevelopment have become more complex and institutionalized. Decision-making is described as dispersed across multiple institutional arenas, including district administrations, technical departments, and project-specific processes, rather than concentrated within neighborhood assemblies exclusively.** The redevelopment is also evolving in terms of partnerships and actors involved:

The first year of the agreement went well for us because it was hard fought until one person, a neighbor new to Sants, who was working with [BComú] in participation, came up with the idea of saying, **“if we do everything in Barcelona by public-private partnerships, why not a public-community partnership?”** The concept of ‘community’ that is going to be implemented by the Comuns is good, we come from more or less the same ideology, but there isn't a very clear definition of community. (Co-founder of architecture cooperative)

A key procedural concern relates to the bureaucratization of governance and the city's technocratic approach. Like in La Marina, **interviewees highlight that engagement requires familiarity with planning documentation, regulatory frameworks, budgeting processes, and administrative timelines. This shift is perceived as raising the threshold for meaningful participation and contributing to a concentration of influence** among a smaller number of highly committed, technically knowledgeable actors. As a result, broader civic involvement is difficult to sustain.

On the other hand, *autogestió* is perceived as rewarding but internally demanding for the ECVA and other civic organizations practicing functioning as assemblies. Ongoing challenges around representation, accountability, and organizational fatigue emerge within the main associations involved in Can Batlló, the ECVA and the older, umbrella neighborhood organization the Centre Social de Sants. **Assemblies remain central sources of neighborhood legitimacy but are described as time-intensive, difficult to maintain at scale, and exclusionary to vulnerable people, parents, and non-Catalan speakers,** as the range of issues under discussion expands beyond immediate mobilization to include long-term management and compliance.

Another central issue in civic perceptions of procedural justice concerns the differentiation of governance responsibilities across the site. Interviewees emphasize **that the park, public spaces, and certain facilities are managed by municipal authorities, while other buildings and activities remain under community stewardship. This division generates ambiguity and tensions for users and for civic actors, regarding who is responsible for maintenance, decision-making, and accountability in a “peoples’ park”.** The ECVA seeks to balance perceived community ownership of the whole site while acknowledging its limited

capacities. Such ambiguity is perceived as problematic as the site becomes more visible and attracts users beyond Sants: Bloc11 is a city-wide hub for cultural and activist events around anti-capitalist, feminist, queer, anti-racist themes broadly construed as “alternative” and “anti-repression”, increasing Can Batlló’s visibility beyond the presence of a new park.

Many people in the [ECVA] were involved with the monitoring and follow-up [of the park]. When the first sessions were held when it was going to be built, there were participatory sessions, some were held here in our auditorium. But from then on, I don’t think many people got involved in the process. Some associations did from other spaces, because the City Council was holding sessions, so then it was like “well, it seems we fell asleep”. Maybe if we had been more attentive, we could have had more influence. The assemblies were saying ‘*they* are doing this’ and nobody bothered to go to those meetings to follow up. You know, people have enough meetings and the design aspects were a little bit hard to understand. [Representative of ECVA Can Batlló]

Neighborhood activists are divided on whether public sector involvement is inherently negative, creating rifts in *autogestió* and anarchist praxis. It is acknowledged that there has been in-kind support from the City Hall for community-run spaces from the beginning, whether or not this is considered to compromise the social project. Interviewees acknowledge formal agreements, legal recognition through the Patrimoni Ciutadà framework, and public investment have been essential to securing long-term stability of the activist project. Current procedural tensions are described as arising from the challenge of preserving *autogestió* and influence in negotiations within institutionalized governance frameworks, rather than from opposition to public authority per se. Still, the negotiation-driven relationship between the ECVA and the city is perceived by some as eroding popular power through cooptation.

Civic perceptions of participation and governance in Can Batlló highlight a procedural context and agonistic approach alternating contestation, negotiation, adaptation, and constraint. Participation is experienced not as a fixed set of mechanisms, but as a shifting practice whose effectiveness depends on time, capacity, and the ability to navigate institutional complexity.

4.3 Concerns over unequal distribution of benefits

Perceptions of distributional equity center on how material benefits and burdens of redevelopment are distributed across social groups, housing tenures, and surrounding neighborhoods. Interviewees frame distributional questions in terms of housing outcomes,

access to public space and facilities, and the symbolic value generated by the transformation of the former industrial site in the wider area.

Here in Sants we have been seeing a process of gentrification for several years, because expats are arriving, people with higher purchasing power, and what we are finding is that residents do not have their contracts renewed and leave, while a few — for the magnitude of what is happening — stand up and come to the Sants Housing Group assembly. We have work to do, **around Sants there is a lot of construction and renovation, which means that neighbours have already left.** (Spokesperson of neighborhood housing movement and renters' union)

The previous quote emphasizes that the sacks of construction waste left in the streets of La Bordeta are perceived as symbolically synonymous with displacement—though an aging population suggests these may simply be signs of residential succession, activists point to regular intimidation of tenants to leave their homes to allow for renovation aimed at newcomers.

In both renovations and new construction, housing is the clearest distributional concern. **The creation of a new model of right-of-use cooperative housing is widely regarded as a landmark achievement and directly emerging from neighborhood struggles at Can Batlló and impacting innovative housing policies throughout Catalonia (and, to an extent, Spain), while interviewees emphasize that its scale remains limited relative, since no further cooperative project has emerged or been supported.** Cooperative housing is described as deeply democratic and participatory, accessible primarily to households with sufficient organizational capacity, time, and economic stability to navigate complex and laborious processes. **Even as cooperatives are celebrated as key decommodified alternatives, they are not perceived as a scalable solution for addressing housing needs among the most precarious residents of La Bordeta and surrounding neighborhoods without additional subsidies,** and cooperativists emphasize that such a strategy does not replace the necessity for conventional public housing and protections against renovictions, and that cooperatives may symbolically attract gentrifiers, even those with good intentions and desire to be civically involved.

I'm in a housing cooperative that we are constructing here. I am very critical within the cooperative movement of Sants because, unfortunately, the cooperativism being practiced has been successful because it has been popular among the progressive petty bourgeoisie. It is not really a cooperativism helping the working classes. It has been very hard for me to stay involved because everything is about money. Linking that with the gentrification processes, I think that it plays a part even if you don't want it to. Proposals that are supposed to fight gentrification attract attention from capital. In the end you are beckoning a middle class that feels comfortable in comfortable alternative spaces, like living in your own little utopia. [Representative of ECVA Can Batlló]

Notwithstanding these self-critiques of cooperativists, **market-rate housing developed adjacent to the Can Batlló site are perceived as the primary driver of distributional imbalance.** Interviewees link the construction of new, energy-efficient residential towers and gated rental complexes around the site's perimeters to rising rents in La Bordeta. Like in La Marina, **this new housing is perceived to be predominantly targeted toward comparatively wealthy international newcomers, reinforcing a perception that the material gains of redevelopment are unevenly distributed.**

Distributional concerns extend to public space. **The Parc de Can Batlló is widely celebrated as a long-awaited “green lung”.** It is a highly valued and intensively used space, with especially notable use by children and elderly people during daytime hours and socializing, predominantly among people with migrant backgrounds, at night. However, interviewees note that its benefits are not evenly experienced. **Longstanding residents describe bearing the costs of delays, prolonged construction noise, dust, and disrupted mobility, along with long delays caused by excavations for NBS infrastructure that uncovered archaeological remains, causing further delays.** This temporal asymmetry, like in La Marina, is a recurring theme in civic accounts of injustice. **The park is perceived to attract new users from beyond the neighborhood during the day — a dynamic whose benefit is a matter of disagreement — and have problems with noise and antisocial behavior at night.** Though not highly supported, a proposal was put forward in the Digidim participatory budgeting process in 2025 to gate off the park at night, with fears that this is a more likely outcome as buildings under construction further limit the site's permeability.

Interviewees emphasize symbolic dimensions of distribution. **The transformation of Can Batlló increased the visibility and prestige of Sants-La Bordeta, a recognition is perceived as troublesome, in that it responds to decades of neglect while it contributes to revalorization processes placing pressure on existing residents, particularly renters.** Environmental improvements are thus understood as producing both collective goods and stimulating exclusionary effects.

Civic actors highlight that community-managed spaces rely heavily on unpaid labor and sustained volunteer engagement, creating uneven burdens within the ECVA itself. **Those most involved in self-management shoulder disproportionate responsibility for maintaining spaces that increasingly serve a broader public, while the city is perceived as neglecting its responsibilities for the continued physical transformation of the site, which had been framed in agreements as an acknowledgement of the public benefits such volunteerism offers to the city.**

Many stress that, **while Can Batlló represents an exceptional case of civic influence and long-expected improvement, it still operates within a housing market and broader neighborhood context characterized by intense speculative pressure and limited public capacity to counteract rising land values.** From this perspective, distributional inequalities are not attributed solely to local governance choices, but to structural constraints that limit the redistributive reach of redevelopment projects.

Civic perceptions of distributional equity in Can Batlló reflect a nuanced assessment in which **achievements in decommodification and public space coexist with persistent concerns about scale, accessibility, and indirect displacement**. While the site is widely recognized as an alternative to purely market-led redevelopment, interviewees remain attentive to how its benefits are socially differentiated and to the limits of local innovation in the face of broader housing market dynamics.

4.4 Political mobilization

Civic perceptions of political mobilization in Can Batlló are inseparable from the site’s long history of collective action and its symbolic status within Barcelona’s urban social movements. **Interviewees consistently describe mobilization not as a reactive response to redevelopment, but as the constitutive force that enabled the transformation of the site in the first place**. From this perspective, **Can Batlló is widely understood as a “won space” with a strong sense of community ownership, whose current configuration is the outcome of sustained neighborhood pressure rather than institutional initiative**.

Interviewees emphasize that contemporary activism builds on decades of labor, neighborhood, and housing struggles in La Bordeta and Sants, with Can Batlló representing the crystallization of these trajectories. This history continues to shape expectations regarding the legitimacy of confrontation, negotiation, and direct action as political tools.

In Sants we had a Neighbourhood Assembly that was not legalized. **Our activity was to always be within the law, but with one foot in *alegality*, to force situations**. We organized street parties so the “knock knock Can Batlló” campaign spread like wildfire. Someone from the State Attorney’s Office representing the [landowners] took out the map of Can Batlló and made us a proposal: the property would become city-owned and the City Hall would give access to the residents. There were 250 of us by then, so we brought it to the assembly the next day. **We discussed it and decided to accept [the city and landowners’ proposal], but as a *Trojan horse***. (Co-founder of architecture cooperative)

Political mobilization is also shaped by the growing institutionalization of Can Batlló. Formal agreements, legal recognition through the Patrimoni Ciutadà framework, and ongoing negotiations with municipal authorities are seen as both gains and constraints. While these arrangements provide stability and protect community uses from eviction or reversal, they are also perceived as channeling mobilization into bureaucratic processes that can dilute oppositional capacity. Some interviewees describe this dynamic as a tension between maintaining insurgent potential, keeping pressure on the city and maintaining a sense of institutional legitimacy, and managing the responsibilities of long-term stewardship.

This dynamic could be found in the increasing accommodation of activists' demands under the Colau administration, which was perceived as widely sympathetic but an institutionalizing force. A long-term neighborhood activist sheds light on the complicated balance between oppositional neighborhood politics and institutional legitimization:

The PSUC [Catalan Communist Party] was influential [in the 1970s], but little by little, people drifted away when they entered the Transition. Many switched to the PSC. People in the PSUC said “comrades, now there's no point in you being in the neighbourhood association, the good guys are in the government” [laughs]. That was a mistake. And when Ada Colau came to tell us that she was running for mayor, I remember saying “You're free to do what you want, it's great, but bear in mind that if you become mayor, you'll have power and we'll be in the street. And if you do something right, great. But if something goes wrong, we'll be the first to say so.” (Co-founder of architecture cooperative)

Despite these challenges, interviewees consistently emphasize that mobilization remains central to shaping outcomes. **Past successes — such as securing community management, influencing the allocation of space, and advancing cooperative housing — are cited as evidence that collective action retains leverage, even within constrained institutional contexts.** Mobilization is thus understood as an ongoing practice rather than a completed chapter, requiring continual recalibration in response to changing political, legal, and spatial conditions.

4.5 Positive socio-ecological impacts

Civic perceptions of positive socio-ecological impacts in Can Batlló are closely tied to the transformation of a long-inaccessible industrial site into a multifunctional public space combining green infrastructure and community facilities. **Interviewees frame these impacts not as isolated environmental improvements, but as the materialization of long-standing neighborhood claims to collective well-being.**

The creation of the Parc de Can Batlló is widely perceived as a major environmental gain for La Bordeta and surrounding neighborhoods, given historical deficits in green space and public amenities. Interviewees emphasize improvements in thermal comfort, air quality, and everyday usability, especially during heatwaves. The presence of trees, shaded areas, permeable surfaces, and water-sensitive design elements is described as significantly enhancing the habitability of the area, both for nearby residents and for users from other parts of the city.

The most celebrated element of the park is likely the first part that opened, the large playground built within the shell of factory walls along Carrer de Constitució.

When they opened this playground—it's been open for a year now—I really liked it. And the thing is, since they opened it, it's been packed every day. At the end of the school year, entire schools come here. **When we had small children, we sometimes had to go all the way to Sant Andreu.** (Co-founder of architecture cooperative)

Positive socio-ecological impacts are also associated with the environmentally sensitive adaptive reuse of industrial buildings for community facilities, cultural activities, and social infrastructure. Interviewees stress that these uses contribute to a form of environmental regeneration that preserves industrial heritage while reducing resource consumption through rehabilitation rather than demolition. This approach is perceived as aligning ecological objectives with collective memory and neighborhood identity, reinforcing a sense of continuity rather than rupture.

Housing-related environmental improvements are highlighted in relation to energy-efficient cooperative cohousing housing projects developed on the site's perimeter. Interviewees point to improved energy performance, reduced energy poverty, and collective approaches to sustainability as concrete benefits that distinguish these projects from conventional market-led development. In this sense, socio-ecological impacts are understood not only in spatial terms, but also through everyday practices of collective living and resource sharing.

Recognition emerges as a key dimension of perceived positive impact. Interviewees frequently frame greening and environmental investment at Can Batlló as a form of symbolic reparation for decades of neglect. Like in La Marina, the visibility of public investment and the quality of design are interpreted as signals that La Bordeta is no longer treated as a marginal or disposable space within the city. This sense of recognition is often contrasted with earlier periods in which environmental burdens were concentrated in the area without corresponding benefits.

At the same time, interviewees emphasize that these positive impacts are inseparable from the role of civic mobilization. Environmental improvements are not perceived as gifts from the municipality, but as outcomes secured through sustained collective action. This framing reinforces the view that socio-ecological benefits are contingent and politically produced, rather than automatic consequences of redevelopment.

Spaces like the Parc de Can Batlló are very necessary. When I see the Moroccan mothers behind La Borda with their kids, of course they're here because they must live in tiny apartments which are hot as hell now, they need this space to live better. **I think that the fact that this space has been made in this way improves the lives of many people who live in a very dense and confined way. A lot of the apartments in Sants are quite terrible, with rooms without ventilation. I think it is a neighbourhood that needs these escape valves for people to live.** (Co-founder of architecture cooperative)

This view is complemented by reflections on the integration of green spaces with urban infrastructure, despite challenges associated with revalorization and reported nuisances associated with the new park:

Of course green spaces generate revalorization. In the same way that if you have a place with good access to transportation. If you're on top of the metro tunnel, no, because it will shake you (laughs). Same with parks. In other words, **there are values that you have in a place and they have their advantages and disadvantages. It's both, but it doesn't have to be counterproductive, green spaces and pacification are now essential in cities.** (Community activist with CSS)

Overall, civic perceptions of positive socio-ecological impacts in Can Batlló highlight the potential for green transition interventions to contribute meaningfully to environmental quality, social use, and neighborhood recognition when they are embedded in collective governance and oriented toward everyday needs. These positive assessments coexist, however, with concerns about uneven access, housing pressure, and long-term sustainability.

4.6 Negative socio-ecological impacts

Civic perceptions of Can Batlló also—albeit carefully—articulate a set of negative or ambivalent impacts linked to housing pressure, uneven accessibility, and the unintended consequences of increased visibility and attractiveness. **These critiques do not reject the ecological transformation of the site, but question how its benefits are distributed and sustained in a context of market pressure and institutional constraint.**

A central concern relates to the relationship between environmental improvement and rising housing costs in the surrounding areas—not only on the direct perimeter of Can Batlló, but in La Bordeta, Hostafrancs, and Sants. **Interviewees consistently associate the opening of green spaces, public facilities, and rehabilitated buildings with processes of revalorization extending beyond the site and green gentrification — whether or not framed as such — is a phenomenon that residents have become acutely aware.** The park and public amenities are celebrated but are also perceived as contributing — symbolically and materially—to the repositioning of La Bordeta within the housing market. **This dynamic is framed as particularly problematic given the limited pace and volume of decommodified housing delivery relative to market-rate construction in the vicinity.**

Several interviewees point to a perceived mismatch between environmental investment and housing protection. **While Can Batlló is often presented as an exemplar of socially oriented redevelopment, civic actors emphasize that ecological improvements risk benefiting higher-income newcomers disproportionately if not accompanied by stronger safeguards for tenants in the existing housing stock,** itself a theme going well beyond the planning of the site to city, regional, and national policy. In this sense, **green**

transition interventions are understood as potentially amplifying exclusionary dynamics when embedded in a broader context of rent increases, speculative demand, and weak tenant security.

It is really painful, you know, as we've lived here in the neighbourhood for several years. If they had asked me back in 2018, whether Can Batlló was going to become the number one selling point by real estate agents when they show you around, I would have laughed. But unfortunately, that's what it's become. I bought an apartment with my [lesbian partner] last year, we didn't want to leave the neighbourhood. We started the apartment hunt around two and a half years ago. It was during the process of the big renovations. It was the number one thing that *every* real estate agent would ask us, "do you know about Can Batlló"? It's not even *one* of the selling points, it's *the* selling point. (Housing economist)

Concerns are also raised about uneven accessibility and use of green space. As Can Batlló has become a destination for visitors from across the city, **interviewees describe tensions between its function as, at once, a neighborhood, citywide, and metropolitan resource. Increased footfall is associated with pressure on facilities, noise, and maintenance demands, raising questions about who the park is primarily for and who bears the costs of its success.**

Key critiques of the park itself is that it has more and wider paths than desired (leading dangerous situations between cyclists and electric scooter riders taking shortcuts through the site as well as service vehicles), that there are no areas where it is permitted to sit on or engage directly with plant life (the central lawn was fenced off after the park's inauguration in November 2024 and has remained inexplicably closed as of February 2026), and that the "canal" integrated into the design—a historical reference to the Canal de la Infanta that passed through the area—is diminutive and lacking planned water features. **With gardens (sometimes referred to as part of an 'urban forest') fenced off to protect their infrastructural role as SUDS rain gardens, there is a common sentiment of a "look but don't touch" approach to urban nature.**

From an ecological perspective, interviewees note concerns related to maintenance and long-term stewardship of the park. **While the design of the park and rehabilitated spaces is cautiously praised by some, doubts are expressed about the municipality's capacity to maintain standards over time and complete pledged works, given fiscal constraints and competing priorities.** At the same time, **there is widespread critique of increased policing and signs threatening high fines for "uncivic behavior" such as walking on plantings,** associated with the city's "Plan Endreça", which seeks to address civility and tidiness but is wrapped in punitive logic and regular sweeps of cleaning crews and police officers to break down settlements of unhoused people. Such questions of civility and security are viewed ambivalently, with a corresponding perspective that, where maintenance lags, environmental benefits are perceived as fragile and undermine trust in public institutions.

Civic perceptions of negative socio-ecological impacts in Can Batlló highlight the conditional nature of environmental gains in a commodified housing context. **While green transition interventions have delivered tangible improvements, their capacity to contribute to long-term environmental and housing justice remains contested, hinging on governance choices, housing policy alignment, and the ability to prevent ecological benefits from becoming drivers of exclusion** in a context of limited protected housing and gentrification.

4.7 Tensions and power dynamics between stakeholders/actors

Civic perceptions of the transformation of the Can Batlló site are marked by shifting power relations between neighborhood organizations, municipal institutions, developers, and cooperative housing actors. Interviewees describe it as **a space where power is neither centralized nor stable, but continuously renegotiated through conflict, compromise, institutionalization, and resistance**. These dynamics are understood as intrinsic to the project’s hybrid nature.

When Can Batlló was legalized, we began to suffer the *bullshit of legality*, with all of these so-called ‘technical’ tools that are political, but they call ‘technical’ to subvert things. [Anthropologist, neighbourhood activist]

A recurring tension concerns power dynamics between local activists’ moral and symbolic legitimacy—derived from decades of mobilization—and the formal and growing authority held by municipal institutions and private actors. While neighborhood organizations are recognized as the driving force behind the opening and early transformation of Can Batlló, interviewees stress that decision-making power has shifted toward technicians, legal frameworks, and contractual arrangements. This shift is perceived as narrowing the space for *autogestió*, especially under the current PSC (socialist) administration. However, the creep of institutionalization is typically, and ambivalently, associated with the former Colau administration.

With [BComú] they started to say “well, it may be an alternative space, but we still have to redirect it so it meets regulations.” With the current government the same thing is happening. As the rehabilitation of the park progresses, the control will be stricter. We are starting to have problems with uses and schedules, paperwork, everything, and when they make the second part of the park everything will change.... Certain uses, especially outdoors, will change. **Many of the activities that [the ECVA] does in the open air will be harder, you’ll need to process permits. It’s complicated because the City Hall’s argument is “well, it’s a park!”. It’s complicated because, underneath it all, we fought to have a park** [laughs]!. [Representative of ECVA Can Batlló]

Relations between the ECVA and the municipality are described as both cooperative and conflictual. Civic actors acknowledge that without public ownership and investment, Can Batlló may not have survived speculative redevelopment. At the same time, institutional actors are perceived as prioritizing risk management, legal certainty, and administrative order over the more experimental and political dimensions of community self-management, including the public and green areas. This generates friction around programming, access, security, and the limits of acceptable uses within publicly owned space.

At points in the creation of the park, frustrations arose among longstanding activists that newcomer “gentrifiers” were derailing the work they had done to create a new park with a vision represented expressed community needs, accusing newcomers as seeking a more manicured, quiet, and contemplative green space rather than a multifunctional social space with ecological elements.

I remember the third or fourth meeting of the participatory process for the park, when suddenly 30 residents from the new “Transatlántico” building showed up, and then I realized ‘uh oh, this is gentrification’. They started to question the whole idea of the park that we were building, saying, ‘No! But you’re going to have barbecues. And what about the dogs here?’, starting a whole conflict, boycotting the entire meeting. We were the same people as always, and suddenly there were 30 new neighbours, ‘damn it!’.... When I say “us,” I mean the whole neighbourhood. People criticize me for that, they say ‘and who are *you all?*’ Well, the people who have been here for 30 years, working our fingers to the bone! The park, as it’s built, is a bit of blackmail — you choose planned degradation or gentrification. It’s a park, and that’s much better than a wasteland, but is it what we wanted to build? No, not at all. [Anthropologist, neighbourhood activist]

Finally, market actors are perceived as structurally powerful even when their influence is not visibly present. Developers operating on adjacent plots are understood as shaping land values, expectations, and housing affordability beyond the boundaries of Can Batlló. Activists and architects working with the ECVA stress that their capacity to influence broader dynamics

remains limited, reinforcing a sense that gains achieved within the site coexist with ongoing vulnerability in the surrounding housing market. A resident of La Borda who works for the Lacol architecture coop and was involved with the ECVA argues, in relation to the payment from developers to the city in the development permitting process, that:

The system in Spain is very perverse—and this is part of why housing is expensive—because *housing pays for everything else*. It's not taxes that pay for the park. Land acquisition is paid for by housing development, and these are unequal negotiations, because landowners that have a lot of power and the best lawyers. The law is made to protect them more than the general interest. In theory, the City Council can force the private [party] to act according to the general interest, but [the city's] excuse for not questioning the [park] design too much was a deadline; if it wasn't done before a set date, they'd lose the money that the private party had to contribute. (Co-founder of architecture cooperative)

Such a perspective is echoed from the perspective of a retired city official charged with the oversight of the project:

The Muñoz Ramonet family [owners of Can Batlló land] had to contribute an urban development fee of around 10 million Euros, making a significant investment in clearing the entire Can Batlló complex and the activities going on there, sometimes in a mafia style. **The urban development fee [they paid] somehow fulfilled their obligations as owners to complete the final urban development of the new streets, so it was not a speculative operation without any counterpoints.** The City Hall knew that what was going to happen. It was made possible because we had done the dirty work, clearing the Camí de la Cadena [shanty town].... **I would like the administration's urban development operations to be 100% clean, but we started from a notorious inability to carry out operations of this type, and it was necessary for the private sector to also be involved.... I think it was smart, in this sense, for [the City Hall] to *sell its soul to the devil*, if only in part, to get the best result.** I do not know if it is unjust. (Retired director of IMUB)

4.8 Innovative governance mechanisms

Civic perceptions of innovative governance in Can Batlló center on its role as an experimental assemblage of public, communal, and cooperative arrangements rather than on the introduction of entirely new institutional forms, in contrast to municipal emphasis on the creation of innovative legal mechanisms and land exchanges. Interviewees frame governance innovation as cumulative and negotiated, emerging from long-term struggle and iterative adaptation.

We had so much power in the neighbourhood, so much legitimacy, that we were able to do almost whatever we wanted. *Almost*, right? Because we didn't prevent the 1,500 [market-price] apartments from being built, but we did tell the City Council, 'we want this here, we want this there', and this is the result of accumulated power, this ability to combine repertoires of protest and actions that are different and differential, but complementary. When CiU [right wing independent party in power until 2016] were in power some people made arguments like "[The ECVA] is doing the neoliberal City Council's work for them." No! We self-manage the territorial needs of the people who live here, which is to have a green area with facilities. Period. That's when, curiously, BComú [2016-2023] arrives, as an expression of a whole series of discontentment, and these formulas crystallized policies unlike other cities—there's more plurality, but a lot of us viewed it with suspicion, we know how administrations work. [Anthropologist, neighbourhood activist]

The most frequently mentioned governance innovation involving the state was the recognition of community self-management through agreements between the municipality and activists via the Patrimoni Ciutadà framework. This mechanism is perceived as a crucial safeguard, enabling civic actors to maintain a degree of autonomy while securing legal recognition, public ownership, and protection. Interviewees emphasize that such arrangements represented a departure from earlier precarious occupations, translating insurgent practices into stabilized, though constrained, institutional forms.

With the presence of a quote-unquote "friendly" city hall something very important was achieved, the Patrimoni Ciutadà agreement that legally protected the experience, but it was becoming clear that the legal system always lags behind transformative practice. It can perhaps maintain the legality of the space, but I don't know if it can maintain this transformative and mobilizing force.... (Anthropologist, neighbourhood activist)

Innovation is also associated with hybrid governance within Can Batlló, combining municipally managed spaces—such as the park and certain facilities—with areas under community stewardship, including cultural, social, and productive spaces coordinated by ECVA commissions. Interviewees describe this hybridity as both enabling and limiting, allowing for differentiated management models tailored to specific uses while generating ambiguity regarding responsibilities, decision-making authority, and long-term accountability.

Cooperative housing through right-of-use arrangements is framed as another governance innovation, pioneered by La Borda's cooperative model of collective ownership, codesign, and non-speculative tenure and subsequent replication on other sites at Can Batlló. **Neighborhood activists describe cooperatives as extending the governance ethos of**

autogestió from politicized squatting into the formal residential realm, embedding housing within broader logics of commoning. At the same time, interviewees caution that cooperative cohousing requires significant institutional support, technical expertise, and financial capacity, raising concerns about accessibility beyond politically mobilized groups. It is widely questioned whether the current Mayor Collboni (2023-) socialist administration seeks to continue this third-way approach, which is associated with Colau and BComú.

The issue of cooperatives continues by inertia, but not with the same enthusiasm or desire. With self-management, or everything related to the cultural and the social, there has been a deeper change. The [BComú] government had given value to these things, and **the current government gives more value to everything that comes from the business world and the cultural industries. ‘It’s okay that it’s self-managed, but we want this to make money and generate jobs’.** (Co-founder of architecture cooperative)

Interviewees highlight that governance innovation lies less in formal structures than in process: counter-planning, prolonged negotiation, conflict resolution, and adaptability. This includes mechanisms for dispute mediation, rotating responsibilities, and continuous revision of internal norms. Such practices are valued for sustaining legitimacy and responsiveness, but also labor-intensive and vulnerable to burnout. Rather than offering a replicable blueprint, the case of the ECVA Can Batlló and its relation with the Ajuntament demonstrates both the possibilities and limits of embedding commons-oriented governance within a public, property-based urban system. Innovation, in this sense, is relational and contingent, shaped by context, power asymmetries, and the capacity to sustain collective action over time.

4.9 Tourism and market pressures

Perceptions of tourism and market pressures in Can Batlló are articulated less in relation to mass tourism—which has more impact than in La Marina but considerably less than in more central areas—than to broader processes of real-estate revalorization, symbolic upgrading, and transnational demand affecting the surrounding neighborhoods. Interviewees stress that while Can Batlló itself is not experienced as a tourist enclave, its transformation contributes to market dynamics reshaping housing affordability and neighborhood composition. Interviewees report that **the cooperative housing model cannot and does not play a crucial role in providing or guaranteeing large-scale affordability:**

When I came here 12 or 13 years ago [from Mexico] this neighbourhood was much cheaper. I am not sure that housing cooperatives are managing to stop that. On the contrary **we are collaborating, in the sense that housing cooperatives are being built on public land. I think there is a dilemma of whether it would have been better to build public housing instead. Cooperative housing, although not speculative, privatizes the public in a way. The biggest contribution that this middle-class cooperative housing movement could make would be not so much to fight for the public sector as to fight against the private sector.** [Representative of ECVA Can Batlló]

Interviewees frequently see the site's growing visibility—through alternative cultural programming, urban design recognition, and the new park—as coinciding rising interest from higher-income international residents seeking “authenticity” and “diversity” and investors and a romanticization of neighborhood traditions of solidarity, a dynamic seen with some irony. However, this is contrasted with a general perception that those living in new, exclusive housing directly bordering the park do not use the space intensively.

There is, indeed, a niche form of tourism that has been observed to be increasing around the anti-authoritarian, utopian aura of Can Batlló:

Capital has the capacity to convert your good intention into something beneficial for itself. And that is happening. Can Batlló, in the end, attracts a lot of attention. There are even people that offer tours: “we are not going to take you to the *conventional* Barcelona, we are going to take you to the *alternative* Barcelona” [Representative of ECVA Can Batlló]

Like in La Marina, discussions around presumably wealthier newcomers are often reduced to elements of xenophobia, and potentially ethnonationalism, despite being dominated by the political left. In some activist circles associated with Can Batlló, emphasis has been placed on the physiognomy of the new residents, presenting “vulture funds” [international private equity firms] and “expats” as dual foreign threats representing the same dynamic, a perspective reflected in one of the few journalistic inquiries into the new BCorp development (Cobo, 2023) and a subsequent neighborhood assembly on the subject. Notwithstanding concerns about reductive narratives of transnational gentrification, **the arrival of higher-income, internationally mobile residents—somewhere between tourists and residents—clearly coincides with upward pressure on rents and accelerating competition for housing in La Bordeta and nearby neighborhoods.**

Tourism, enters narratives around housing primarily through concern about secondary effects rather than direct presence, which has increased since Covid but remains less noticeable than in the central city. **Monthly rentals, flexible housing formats, new co-living developments with private co-working spaces and private student housing, and the broader**

financialization of housing are viewed as mechanisms through which touristification logics affect La Bordeta. Enforcement of short-term rental regulations (less than one month) is perceived as relatively strong, but interviewees express concern that regulatory slippage and seasonal rental loopholes (1-11 months) diminish housing accessibility for locals and those seeking to put roots.

Market pressure is thus framed as spatially uneven and relational. Local activists strongly emphasize that **displacement pressures materialize not within Can Batlló's self-managed or cooperative spaces, but in the surrounding private rental market, where long-term residents face rent increases, non-renewals, and exclusionary displacement. Like in LMPV, these pressures are intensified by the arrival of higher-income households, including internationally mobile professionals, whose housing choices are perceived as reshaping rental prices in historically working-class areas and diluting community cohesion.**

Local activists largely reject narratives that frame Can Batlló's transformation into a community-run social center and park itself as the cause of market pressure. Instead, they situate rising rents within processes of speculative urbanism, financialization, and uneven development, with Can Batlló nevertheless entangled and employed in these dynamics. Local civic perceptions frame tourism and market pressures as diffuse, anticipatory, and structurally driven rather than site-specific, with Can Batlló seen as simultaneously a partial buffer against, and a symbolic catalyst for, revalorization processes.

La Bordeta is one of the neighborhoods where the rental prices have risen most. [Can Batlló] has a direct consequence. It's great, there are improvements, but if speculation goes up from it, it is a direct gentrifying agent. It is a pity that some people do not want improvements because of the consequences it will have. If, by law, people could continue living here it would be great, but they have to leave and others with higher purchasing power come. The contradiction is that they sell it to you as an improvement and everybody says "yes, yes, yes". Then the whole market goes to seasonal apartments, after 11 months they can throw you out and raise rent again. These are prices that are unaffordable for many, perhaps except for expats. (GHAS)

4.10 Gaps in Perceptions Between Civic Groups and Public Agencies

Neighborhood activists' and public agency representatives' perceptions are structured less around outright contradiction than around divergent understandings of legitimacy, responsibility, and the meaning of success. Both civic actors and municipal authorities articulate overlapping objectives — social inclusion, environmental quality, and housing affordability — their interpretations of how these goals should be pursued, and who should control decision-making, differ.

From the perspective of municipal actors, Can Batlló is an exceptional case of redevelopment and improved environmental quality that exceeds conventional standards of participatory governance and social innovation. Public officials emphasize the legal recognition of community management, the allocation of public land and resources, and the integration of cooperative housing and public facilities as milestones in a progressive institutional approach. Constraints are understood as legal, fiscal, or administrative, rather than political, and the institutionalization of governance arrangements is presented as necessary to ensure durability, safety, and accountability.

The retired head of the IMU reflects upon the process they coordinated at Can Batlló:

Never again have I experienced this feeling of the City Hall working side-by-side, united — neighbors, property owners, everyone — through formulas and decision-making structures. **All the decisions were made by the neighbours, with the City Hall trailing behind, complaining 'now we have to do this, now they're asking for that' (laughs). Problems arise when you don't discuss things on equal terms, and you want to impose a project that, based on your vision of responsibility to the entire city, you believe you know better. There were many municipal concessions to the neighborhood movement and it was a magnificent operation.** (Retired director of IMUB)

Local activists assess outcomes in relational and historical terms, measuring institutional action against the depth of earlier commitments, the intensity of past struggles, and expectations of transformative change. Institutionalization is perceived as diluting the radical potential of the project, narrowing the scope of collective decision-making, and shifting power away from assemblies toward technical and bureaucratic arenas. These dynamics are not seen as neutral processes of normalization, but as forms of depoliticization and compromise that risk undermining the ethos of *autogestió* that legitimized the project.

Like in La Marina, a central perceptual gap concerns the role of time. Municipal actors emphasize long-term stability, phased delivery, and procedural compliance, while civic actors foreground urgency, accumulated delays, the lived costs of waiting for housing provision and public facilities, and the time dedication of generations of activists. This temporal disjuncture shapes mutual frustration: civic actors interpret slowness as a failure of political will and an

exhausting civic commitment for neighbors, while institutions view demands for acceleration as willfully naïve regarding regulatory complexities.

Differences emerge around the meaning of equity. Public agencies highlight the symbolic and distributive achievements of Can Batlló at the city scale, while civic actors focus on localized impacts and unresolved inequalities. From the civic perspective, the success of self-managed spaces and cooperative housing do not fully offset the impotence of public policy in containing rent escalation and displacement in La Bordeta and adjacent neighborhoods.

These perceptual gaps do not always translate to conflict, but rather a relationship characterized by punctual negotiation and sustained civic pressure on the local government. This may manifest in public criticism and cordial negotiations behind closed doors. Civic actors continue to engage with institutions while maintaining autonomous spaces of critique and mobilization and protesting those same institutions. Municipal actors increasingly recognize the limits of institutional capacity to deliver housing justice within a commodified urban system.

As argued by a former City Councilman from Sants-Montjuïc associated with BComú:

So long as we live in a capitalist system and private land exists and the mechanisms to control it are what they are, any improvement will be used for speculation. The answer to this doesn't have to be 'let's not improve neighbourhoods,' because if we don't there will be a problem of reproducing inequalities. What needs to be done is to plan ahead so that where you do urban improvement, there is also public and affordable housing. We have a serious problem with real estate speculation that we will not solve by stopping investment in neighbourhoods. We will solve it by prohibiting speculation and purchases by 'vulture funds', taxing the accumulation of housing, and looking for other mechanisms. (Lawyer and politician)

Taken together, civic perceptions of these gaps highlight that Can Batlló functions not only as a redevelopment project, but as a contested political arena and a new large-scale, mixed, experimental development space in which different visions of justice, governance, and the right to the city coexist without full convergence.

5 Critical Analysis: Barcelona

Barcelona is becoming a dystopia, a Barcelona without Barcelonians. **To find Barcelonians you will have to go to Cornellà or Mataró.** (Professor of Journalism on housing inequalities, lifelong La Marina resident)

The Barcelona ReHousIn cases illustrate how green transition interventions unfold within a housing system that remains structurally commodified, financially pressured, and institutionally

constrained. **Neither LMPV nor Can Batlló can be understood as isolated, green, brownfield redevelopment projects; rather, they are embedded in a broader urban political ecology shaped by long-standing speculative dynamics, uneven public capacity, historic distributional inequalities, and intensified demographic pressures.** Across both cases, green transition measures — while recognized as necessary and socially legitimate—are perceived as interacting ambivalently with housing inequalities rather than resolving them.

Neither LMPV or Can Batlló is seen by local activists in these neighborhoods primarily as a climate project; instead, activists—along with city planners with longer historical memory — see them as examples of housing and public space development on former industrial sites in which NBS interventions were added later, welcomed but slowed the overall delivery of the park. This contrasts with municipal accounts increasingly framing the projects as ecological as nature.

From a distributional justice perspective, both cases underscore the limits of greening and residential densification in the absence of sufficient decommodified housing and renter protections. **Despite projections of high levels of protected housing in both cases, civic actors distinguish between “truly” social housing and privately promoted subsidized units priced beyond the reach of many existing residents.**

Procedural justice emerges as a second critical axis. Both cases feature innovative governance arrangements intended to manage long-term redevelopment—such as the Pla Singular in LMPV and Patrimoni Ciutadà agreements in Can Batlló—yet **interviewees, to various degrees depending on the neighborhood and the strength of its activist fabric, describe participation as occurring within the logic of consultation rather than participatory planning.** In both cases, **local activists conditionally acknowledge improvements in institutional presence, coordination, and transparency at various historical moments, but highlight persistent asymmetries in expertise, timing, and agenda-setting power.** In LMPV, participation is perceived as consultative rather than community-driven, particularly regarding density, land use, and phasing. In Can Batlló, governance has shifted from insurgent mobilization toward negotiated institutionalization, generating concerns about bureaucratization, participation fatigue, and uneven representativeness.

It is from the standpoint of recognitional justice that green transition interventions are predominantly understood as symbolically significant. In both cases, environmental investment is framed as a long-overdue acknowledgment of historically working-class, industrial areas bearing disproportionate infrastructural and environmental burdens. New parks, green-blue infrastructure, and climate-adapted buildings are perceived to signal institutional recognition, but this is perceived as contingent and unevenly distributed, especially where green amenities appear to prioritize future residents or external users over long-standing communities.

Across the case study areas, a shared pattern emerges: **typology and housing regimes shapes how new housing inequalities unfold and may play a mitigating role, but not whether they occur in a heavily market-driven context.** LMPV’s large-scale, ex ante

integration of green densification reflects an anticipatory governance model, while Can Batlló's incremental, conflict-driven transformation foregrounds civic capacity and negotiated outcomes. **Both remain vulnerable to rent escalation, symbolic upgrading, and demographic recomposition driven by broader citywide and transnational dynamics, and a lack of sufficient existing or new public or social housing for different income brackets.**

Taken together, the Barcelona cases demonstrate that **green transition initiatives cannot be assessed solely on technical, environmental grounds, or on the initial visions and goals they articulate. Their justice implications depend on governance arrangements, tenure structures, the temporal sequencing of housing and environmental interventions, and parallel processes of neighborhood change and redevelopment that revalorize and change the neighborhood identity.** Without sustained expansion of decommodified housing, stronger tenant protections, and participatory mechanisms capable of influencing core planning decisions, **green transition risks reinforcing—rather than redressing — existing housing inequalities, even where intentions are explicitly redistributive.**

The greening-housing nexus in Sants-Montjuïc is most visible in the rising levels of unhoused people's settlements in parks and other public spaces, harkening to the living memory of 30,000+ people living in informal settlements in the city well into the 20th century, principally on Montjuïc mountain itself.

According to **Fundació Arrels**, as of late 2025 the number of people sleeping on the streets in Barcelona has reached an **all-time high**, with nearly **2,000 individuals recorded**, and the district of **Sants-Montjuïc** showing the **highest concentration of unhoused people** in the city, as can be readily observed in the winter of 2025-2026 at Can Batlló and in areas surrounding LMPV. Homelessness in Catalonia is predominantly driven by housing insecurity and loss of housing, according to a December 2025 analysis released by the Generalitat of Catalonia's Department of Social Rights, which found that the leading causes of people experiencing homelessness in the region—when understood in terms of both rough sleeping and broader housing exclusion—were loss of housing due to eviction (32 %), termination of rental contracts (16 %) and inability to afford rent (14 %), together accounting for the majority of cases directly linked to housing instability before other factors such as employment loss or health issues:

Poor people living in the street have reappeared, it didn't used to happen [in La Marina]. We have seen it a lot in the last two years, it's people who have a lot of problems in accessing housing. Along the coastal highway, next to the cemetery, there are a lot of people sleeping in tents, on Montjuïc too.
(Director of federation of neighborhood organizations of La Marina)

Across both cases, stressors operate cumulatively. Tourism, short and medium-term rentals, and newly developed coliving and student housing function as reinforcing pressures, even where they are not yet dominant. Similarly, climate adaptation measures—such as new parks, shaded spaces, and blue-green infrastructure — are valued for their environmental benefits but are simultaneously perceived as contributing to revalorization when not paired with strong housing safeguards, and thus as risks of mid-term displacement.

Both cases reveal the limits of participation under conditions of scale, complexity, and temporal extension. Innovative governance mechanisms — Pla Singular arrangements in LMPV and public-commons partnerships in Can Batlló — improve coordination and continuity but do not fundamentally redistribute decision-making power. Civic influence remains strongest at the level of mitigation, negotiation, and symbolic recognition, rather than in shaping core parameters such as density, tenure mix, or development pacing.

This comparison illustrates that green transition interventions are neither inherently just nor unjust. Their effects depend on how intervention typology interacts with existing housing systems, governance capacity, and neighborhood histories. In Barcelona, the persistence of housing commodification and low percentage of protected housing (under 2%) constrains the redistributive potential of greening, producing differentiated but convergent forms of inequality in both anticipatory and incremental redevelopment settings.

Nevertheless, LMPV and Can Batlló point to a limited but consequential set of policy inflection points through which green transition objectives could be more effectively aligned with housing justice in similar dense European cities under strong housing market pressure. These do not lie primarily in the refinement of green technologies or design standards, but in the governance of land use, housing tenure, and sequencing.

The durability and depth of decommodification emerges as a decisive factor. Both cases demonstrate that high proportions of protected housing, while necessary, are insufficient when protections are time-limited, affordability thresholds exceed local income profiles, and when new-build housing revalorizes entire districts. In LMPV, the aggregation of diverse subsidy regimes under the headline figure of “50% protected housing” obscures significant variation in accessibility, particularly for renters and lower-income households. And it cannot fully compensate for the fact that prior or existing protected housing units have or will expire. In Can Batlló, cooperative and public housing has delivered meaningful decommodified space, but its scale and positive social impacts has been outpaced by expensive, market-rate construction. Strengthening housing justice under green transition therefore requires not only increasing protected housing shares, but prioritizing tenure forms with permanent affordability, including lifelong public rental housing and expanding cooperative models that can also be insulated from future market conversion (Marrani et al., 2025).

Sequencing and pacing constitute an underappreciated dimension of justice. In both cases, interviewees emphasize that negative impacts — construction disruption, service strain, rent inflation — are experienced in anticipation and in the short to medium term, while benefits such as facilities, schools, and mature green spaces are deferred, sometimes to future generations or newcomers. Policy frameworks rarely account for this temporal asymmetry. A more just approach would require binding commitments to the early delivery of social infrastructure and

tenant protections prior to, or at least alongside, major residential densification and greening interventions.

Allocation mechanisms and procedural transparency are critical. Civic skepticism in LMPV centers less on the principle of protected housing than on uncertainty surrounding eligibility criteria, prioritization of local residents, and the role of private developers in allocation processes. Mechanisms such as neighborhood quotas have been successfully secured through local activism, improving perceptions of fairness and protection from displacement. Scaling such measures — and embedding them as standard practice rather than negotiated exceptions — represents a concrete approach to enhance procedural and recognitional justice.

The Barcelona cases highlight the need to decouple environmental upgrading from symbolic revalorization. While green-blue infrastructure and visible amenities are essential for climate adaptation and public recreation, they are also readily instrumentalized as marketable assets. Less visible interventions—such as sustainable urban drainage systems, groundwater reuse, and energy retrofits for existing buildings — as well as small-scale, more informal resident owned or managed green spaces are perceived as less directly implicated in displacement dynamics, while potentially having significant ecological impact. Along these same lines, policy frameworks that prioritize retrofitting and upgrading existing housing stock, particularly in energy-poor buildings, may therefore deliver climate benefits with lower gentrification risk, provided robust anti-displacement safeguards are enforced.

The Pla Singular model in LMPV and the public-commons partnership in Can Batlló improve continuity and legitimacy, but civic actors consistently describe participation as occurring within predefined limits. Expanding the scope of meaningful co-decision — particularly over land use, tenure mix, and phasing — remains politically challenging but central to aligning ecological transition with democratic accountability and social justice ambitions.

Overall, the Barcelona case studies underscore a central insight for the ReHousIn analytical framework: intervention typology alone does not determine housing justice outcomes. Rather, outcomes emerge from the interaction between typology, governance capacity, market pressure, neighborhood histories and community organization, and temporal sequencing. Even in one city district, LMPV and Can Batlló combine hard residential densification with nature-based solutions on former industrial land, yet appear to be producing markedly different configurations of risk, opportunity, and civic response.

In LMPV, large-scale, *ex ante* planning enables the systematic integration of green infrastructure, energy systems, and protected housing. This corresponds to ReHousIn clusters characterized by anticipatory governance and deferred impacts. Justice concerns here are primarily prospective: anticipated rent inflation, service strain, and socio-spatial fragmentation are read through experiences elsewhere in the city rather than through fully realized displacement. Governance is institutionally visible and relatively well-resourced, yet heavily top-down, producing a situation in which distributive ambitions coexist with procedural constraint. The scale of the project amplifies uncertainty: while regulatory frameworks may mitigate future harm, their effectiveness depends on political continuity, enforcement, and adaptation to emerging inequalities.

By contrast, Can Batlló reflects a configuration in which hard densification, greening, and social regeneration unfold through prolonged civic contestation and bottom-up governance. This aligns with ReHousIn typologies combining densification with strong civic embeddedness and partial decommodification. Here, housing justice dynamics are already experienced. Rising rents, demographic change, and revalorization pressures are widely perceived as linked to new-build housing and, secondarily, to symbolic upgrading associated with the park and surrounding development. Robust neighborhood activism has enabled the production of cooperative housing, public–commons partnerships, and collective management that partially buffer displacement and sustain political agency, even as they do not neutralize market forces.

Across both cases, green transition interventions generally amplify existing housing dynamics rather than overriding them, except for the limited number of residents who are housed in cooperative housing or in the protected units. In areas with weak housing protection or high market exposure, environmental upgrading accelerates revalorization; where decommodified housing and civic capacity are stronger, its effects appear more mediated but not eliminated. This reinforces the argument that green gentrification, new-build gentrification, and transnational gentrification in historically working-class, industrial neighborhoods should be understood not as mutually exclusive processes in Barcelona, but as overlapping and cumulative.

Barcelona’s recent experience illustrates a core dilemma for just transition policy in dense European cities: environmental investment is increasingly pursued through redevelopment and densification, yet these same processes operate within housing systems that remain largely commodified and vulnerable to revalorization dynamics, where longstanding residents often feel threat of direct, symbolic, or exclusionary displacement. The two cases show that green transition interventions are not experienced simply as climate policy, particularly in the case of densification. They are interpreted by civic actors as multi-scalar and multi-sectoral interventions into the distribution of land, housing access, neighborhood identity, and political voice—much as neighborhood and housing movements has historically functioned—where the cities’ institutional tools remain partial and contested.

Barcelona’s policy discourse sometimes risks overstating the compatibility of greening and equity without sufficiently grappling with the mechanisms through which environmental upgrading becomes translated into market value. Official framings that have rejected a “false dilemma” between ecological and social objectives emphasize that greening is a matter of public health and urban rights, compromised by external forces of speculation (Sanz, 2023). The Barcelona cases under consideration support a more precise interpretation: greening is rarely the sole driver of displacement but nevertheless functions as a catalyst in already stressed housing markets, particularly when environmental improvements are highly visible.

Drawing on Anguelovski et al (2022), the Can Batlló context aligns with ‘integrated green gentrification’, while LMPV aligns with ‘subsidiary green gentrification’, where green space plays a role but is less impactful than other built environment changes. It also emphasizes that, more than green gentrification per se, Can Batlló is implicated in new-build gentrification tied to expensive housing produced through planning concessions to cross-subsidize the park and to the lag of public or cooperative housing delivery relative to private construction, falling well below the 50% affordable levels promoted in the 2006 MPGM. Importantly, large portions of

public housing units were allocated to residents relocated from demolished buildings, reducing net new affordable units created.

As a result of the planning related to Can Batlló — including the Magòria site, part of the same MPGM—a total of 985 housing units were produced, while approximately 41 households were affected by demolition of low-rise housing, meaning a net increase of 944 housing units. If we count the UP3 (“Transatlántico”) and UP6 buildings as decommodified due to their VPO protections, the final result would be that 36% of housing units constructed were decommodified. However, the UP3 building is set to have its affordability protections expire, potentially bringing units to the open market. If this is to happen, the total amount of “affordable” (public, cooperative VPO, VPO by ownership) housing units created by Can Batlló would be reduced to 20% before the park has been completed, while new-build housing is widely perceived to have stimulated rising housing prices in a much broader area.

Such concerns around the expiration of VPO protections have become central in policy debates around housing in Catalonia and elsewhere in Spain, and is a matter of considerable critique among civil servants themselves. As the director of the Office of La Marina argues:

All the [protected] housing we produced in the 90's is now free, isn't it? Surely people here, whose apartments are now market rate, will soon begin to negotiate. Of course they will increase in value. That is to say, in the end, sometimes it's not only the developers that speculate, but also the residents themselves.” [Head of Office of La Marina del Prat Vermell]

The cases in Sants-Montjuïc also highlight that the city’s most tangible justice gains have been achieved where housing instruments and lasting civic pressure converge. In LMPV, redistribution is most credible where protected housing is matched with allocation mechanisms perceived as fair, such as neighborhood-based quotas. In Can Batlló, governance innovation and partial decommodification have been possible because civic mobilization created sustained input over municipal decision-making and land-use outcomes. These observations imply that a just transition cannot be treated as a program of environmental delivery alone; it requires political capacity and institutional willingness to confront housing financialization and prioritize long-term affordability. As one journalist and La Marina resident professes:

For me, the perspective is that the housing issue at the neighbourhood level is going to get worse. The issue is going to be when, how, or if, we reproduce these spaces of organization and struggle. [Representative of ECVA Can Batlló]

From a cultural and racial standpoint, the Barcelona case suggests that just transition debates are increasingly entangled with questions of belonging, migration, and recognition. Rising

xenophobia — expressed across ideological lines and often mediated through socio-economic assumptions encoded in the terms “migrants” versus “expats” — appears alongside the fact that Barcelona’s urbanization has historically been driven by migration. This tension is sharpened by current inflows which include more highly qualified international residents, reversing earlier patterns in which migrants were more likely to arrive from lower income and educational profiles. In the case of La Bordeta, the largest migrant groups as of 2019 were Italian, Pakistani, and Chinese, with Latin American and European migrants on the rise in recent years. These dynamics do not negate the real pressure placed on housing markets by the growth of internationally mobile, higher-income demand, but underscore that housing justice framings can become politically volatile and multi-layered when distributional anxieties are narrated through racialized and stereotyped categories rather than through political economic analysis.

Finally, Barcelona’s experience reinforces that multiple gentrification dynamics can be simultaneously operative. In the same district, interviewees describe overlapping processes of new-build revalorization, amenity-driven upgrading, and forms of transnational gentrification, even where tourism is not the dominant stressor. This coexistence challenges policy approaches that treat displacement as a singular, centralized phenomenon concentrated on the historic core and overlapping with touristification. Instead, it suggests the need for a metropolitan-scale lens attentive to how environmental investment, densification, and housing market pressures increasingly diffuse into historically working-class areas, as well as the spillover effects on the destination of those displaced.

In sum, the Barcelona cases imply that the credibility of just transition agendas will depend on whether climate adaptation and environmental upgrading are institutionally coupled to ambitious and lasting housing justice strategies that also require the intervention of the Catalan and Madrid government, together recognition strategies that avoid scapegoating mobile populations while still addressing the distributive realities of housing accessibility. The city’s challenge is therefore not only technical or fiscal, but political: aligning ecological ambitions with housing justice in ways that remain democratically legitimate under conditions of market pressure and social polarization.

For ReHousIn, Barcelona thus underscores the need to move beyond typology-driven assessments toward analyses that foreground temporality, governance, and power. Housing justice in the context of green transition depends less on the presence of NBS or densification per se than on who controls land, how benefits are allocated, and whose claims are recognized as legitimate over the long term.

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7 Appendix 1 – Glossary

Abbreviations

22@	Barcelona’s innovation district, created by the city council to transform former industrial land into a hub for technology, knowledge, and creative industries.
AMB	Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona (Barcelona Metropolitan Area) - public body Barcelona en Comú
BComú	A municipal political platform focused on social justice, participatory democracy, and public-interest urban policies, which led the city council between 2015 and 2023, through its mayor Ada Colau
BCorp	
Bloc Onze	The first factory building in the Can Batlló complex to be managed by the PCBPB/ECVA, 2011-present- managed by committees of independent community organization within land belonging to Barcelona City Hall
Bloc4BCN	Publicly owned building with cluster of co-working spaces for cooperatives and social enterprises located within Can Batlló complex - public-commons partnership
	Convergència i Unió
CiU	The former Catalan centre-right political coalition that promoted Catalan nationalism and governed at both regional and local levels for several decades
CSA	Centre Social Autogestionat (Self-Managed Social Center, typically squatted)
CSS	Centre Social de Sants (Sants Social Center, neighborhood association founded in 1970s)
CZFB	Consorci de la Zona Franca de Barcelona (Zona Franca Consortium of Barcelona) - public-private partnership
Decidim	Decidim means “We decide” in Catalan and is a municipal digital platform for participatory democracy, created to enable citizen participation in public decision-making

DIBA	Diputació de Barcelona (Provincial Council of Barcelona) Espai Comunitari i Veïnal Autogestionat de Can Batlló
ECVA	(Self-Governed Community and Neighborhood Space of Can Batlló) - independent community organization managed by commissions and assemblies
EU	European Union
Generalitat	Government of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia - public body
GHAS	Grup d'Habitatge de Sants (Sants Housing Group): local tenants' union and activist platform Institut Català de Finances
ICF	Catalonia's public development bank providing financing to companies and public entities. Instituto de Crédito Oficial
ICO	Spain's state-owned development bank that supports public policy financing and business investment
IDRA	Institut de Recerca Urbana de Barcelona (Barcelona Urban Research Institute) Institut Municipal de l'Habitatge i Rehabilitació de Barcelona
IMHAB	(Municipal Housing and Rehabilitation Institute of Barcelona) - body of Barcelona City Hall
IMUB	Institut Municipal d'Urbanisme de Barcelona (Municipal Urbanism Institute of Barcelona)- body of Barcelona City Hall
LMPV	La Marina del Prat Vermell (neighborhood)
MIU	Municipal Institute of Urbanism The city-level public body responsible for urban planning and development.
MPGM	Modificació del Pla General Metropolità

Refers to an amendment to the Metropolitan General Plan that regulates urban planning

NBS Nature-based Solutions

PCBPB Plataforma Vecinal Can Batlló és pel barri
(Can Batlló is for the neighborhood Platform, predecessor to ECVA)

Proyecto Estratégico para la Recuperación y Transformación Económica

PERTE Strategic Project for the Recovery and Economic Transformation

A Spanish public-private initiative to drive economic recovery and strategic sector transformation

PEUAT Pla Especial Urbanístic d'Allotjaments Turístics
(Special Tourist Accommodation Plan)

PGM Pla General Metropolità
(Metropolitan General Plan)- public land use plan at metropolitan scale

Pla de Barris Municipal program to improve disadvantaged neighborhoods

PSC Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya
Socialist Party of Catalonia, local branch of the national PSOE party

PSUC Partido Socialista Unificado de Catalunya
The Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia was a communist political party active in Catalonia between 1936 and 1997. It was the Catalan branch of the Communist Party of Spain and the only party not from a sovereign state to be a full member of the Third International.

SUDS Sistemes de Drenatge Urbà Sostenible
(Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, program of Barcelona City Hall)

Unió d'Entitats de Marina Federation of neighborhood and civic organizations representing the La Marina area

VPO Vivienda de Protección Oficial
Publicly regulated housing offered at below-market prices to ensure affordable access

Terms and Concepts

Autogestió: Practice in which a group or community independently organizes and manages its own activities, resources, or projects without relying on external authorities.

Cession-of-use housing: In Barcelona, *cessió d'ús* refers to a long-term arrangement in which the City grants housing cooperatives the right to use publicly owned land—typically through 75- or 99-year leaseholds—so the cooperative can develop and manage non-speculative, permanently affordable housing. This is translated by the City as “cession-of-use housing”. This may alternatively be called the “use-rights model,” “grant-of-use tenure,” “right-of-use cooperative housing,” and, more broadly, “limited-equity/cohousing models on public land.”

Citizen Heritage: The *patrimoni ciutadà* program is the framework through which Barcelona City Council recognizes, consolidates, and promotes citizen-led initiatives for the community use and management of municipal public heritage.

Right to first refusal: Under *Tanteig i Retraete* in Catalonia, public authorities are legally allowed to acquire properties before private buyers, ensuring they are repurposed for social housing.

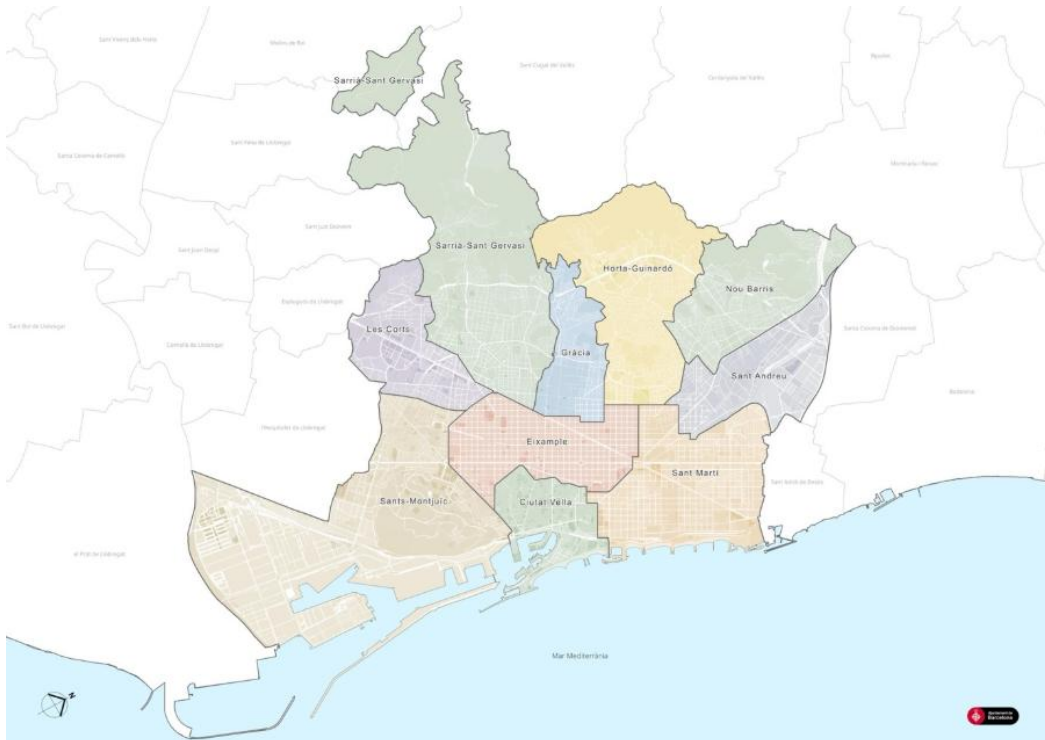
Tense housing market zones: Areas designated by Autonomous Communities (including Catalonia), in alignment with the Spanish Right to Housing Law, in which rent caps and increased tenant protections are put into place. In these areas, new (long-term) contracts cannot exceed the price of the last contract in force for the previous five years after the annual update (3% as of 2024).

8 Appendix 2 – Key interview data and transcripts

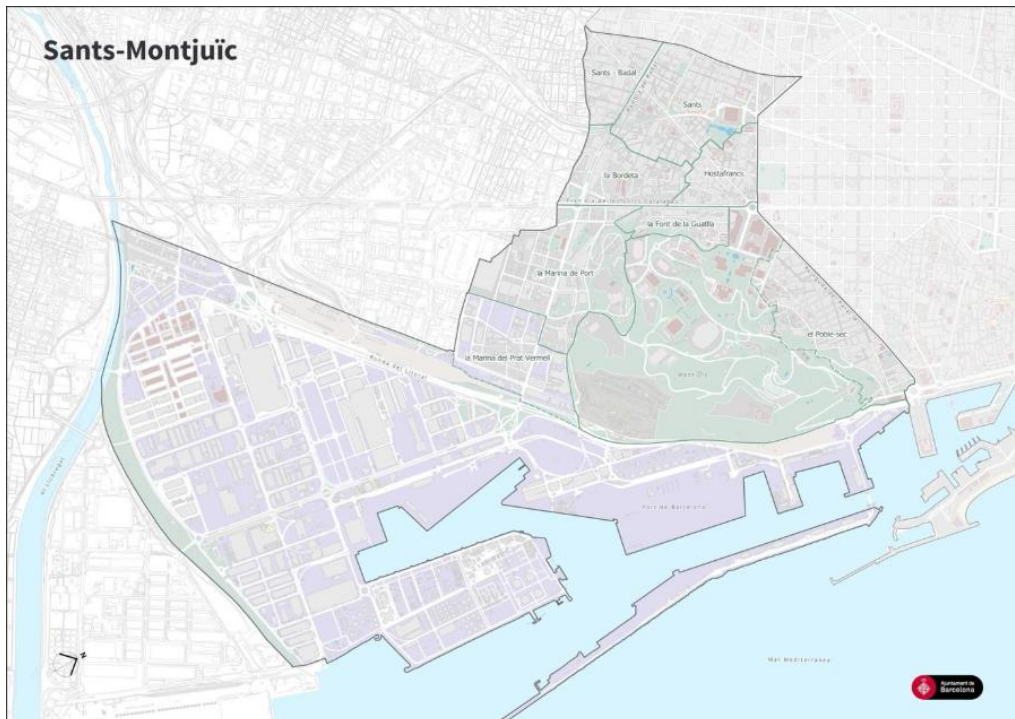
#	Pseudonym & Position of Interviewee	Sector/Organization	Date	Modality
1	Housing policy consultant and political scientist	Public/Barcelona City Hall Cooperative/Celobert Cooperative	11/4/2025	Online
2	Housing economist, program manager, Built Environment for Spain, local resident (Sants), former research officer for United Cities and Local Governments	NGO/ Institute for Human Rights and Business	19/05/2025	In-person
3	Urban planner and lawyer, housing policy analyst	NGO(public and private funders)/Pla Estratègic Metropolità de <i>Barcelona</i>	26/05/2025	In-person
4	Lawyer and politician (En Comú Podem), Deputy Area Chairman for Climate Action and Energy Transition, Deputy Councilor for Civic Participation, Provincial Council of Barcelona; former president of Sants-Montjuïc District of Barcelona	Public/Provincial Council of Barcelona NGO/Executive Board of Climate Alliance	04/06/2025	In-person
5	Professor of Journalism, author of books on housing inequalities and the La Marina neighborhood, lifelong La Marina resident	Public/Autonomous University of Barcelona	12/06/2025	In-person
6	Head of Office of La Marina del Prat Vermell and director of IMUB 2- Architect specializing in urban design of La Marina del Prat Vermell	Public/IMUB, Barcelona City Hall	16/06/2025	In-person
7	Spokesperson of neighborhood housing movement and renters' union in Sants-Montjuïc; ECVA Can Batlló	Other (activist platform)/GHAS NGO: ECVA Can Batlló	01/07/2025	In-person
8	Director of federation of neighborhood organizations of La Marina	NGO (public and private funders)/ <i>Unió d'Entitats de la Marina</i>	02/07/2025	In-person
9	Architect, co-founder of architecture cooperative La Col, resident of La Borda cooperative, longtime involvement with PCBPB and ECVA	NGO/ECVA Can Batlló Cooperative/La Col and La Borda	04/07/2025	In-person
10	Representative of ECVA Can Batlló, resident of La Marina,	NGO/ECVA Can Batlló Cooperative/Empriu	07/07/2025	In-person

	member of housing cooperative at Can Batlló, Latin American Visual Artist			
11	Resident of Eduard Aunòs houses involved in various neighborhood organizations since the 1980s, political candidate with the PSC	NGO/President, Associació de Veïns Eduard Aunòs NGO, Secretary, Unió d'Entitats de la Marina Public/ Vicepresident of Consell del Barri (neighborhood council)	07/07/05	In-person
12	Retired director of IMUB, key figure in planning and design of Can Batlló and La Marina del Prat Vermell	Public/IMUB, Barcelona City Hall	09/07/2025	Online
13	Professor of urban design, wrote PhD thesis on Can Batlló and was active in the early years of PCBPB	Public/University of California	15/07/2025	In-person
14	Neighborhood activist, business owner and lifelong resident of La Marina	NGO/ <i>Associació de Comerciants de La Marina</i> , <i>Associació de Veïns Plus Ultra</i> Private/Drycleaner business owner	16/07/2025	In-person
15	Anthropologist, founder of IDRA, spokesperson of Renters' Union of Catalonia	Other/Renters' Union of Catalonia Cooperative/IDRA	18/07/2025	In-person
16	Community activist with CSS since 1970s, PCBPB	NGO/ECVA, CSS	23/07/2025	In-person
17	1-MBA, Promotions Manager, Barcelona 2- Territory Director, Catalonia and Aragon 3- PR and Communications Manager, Spain	Private/AQ Acentor (housing developer building mixed subsidized and market-rate housing in La Marina)	29/07/2025	Online
18	Anthropologist, neighborhood activist in Sants-La Bordeta, cooperative bookstore	Cooperative/Ciutat Invisible (bookstore) and <i>Sotrac</i> (housing)	18/09/2025	In-person
19	Local schoolteacher, head of civic association of Equatorial Guineans, and activist around multiculturalism and gender equality in La Marina	Association Guineocatalana a Bisila / Unió d'Entitats de la Marina		In-person

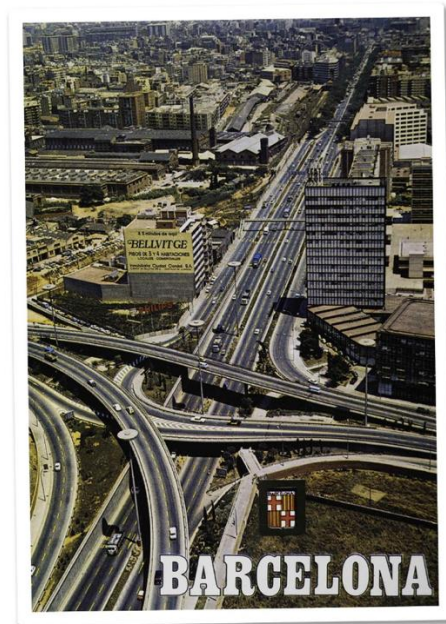
9 Appendix 3 – Visuals



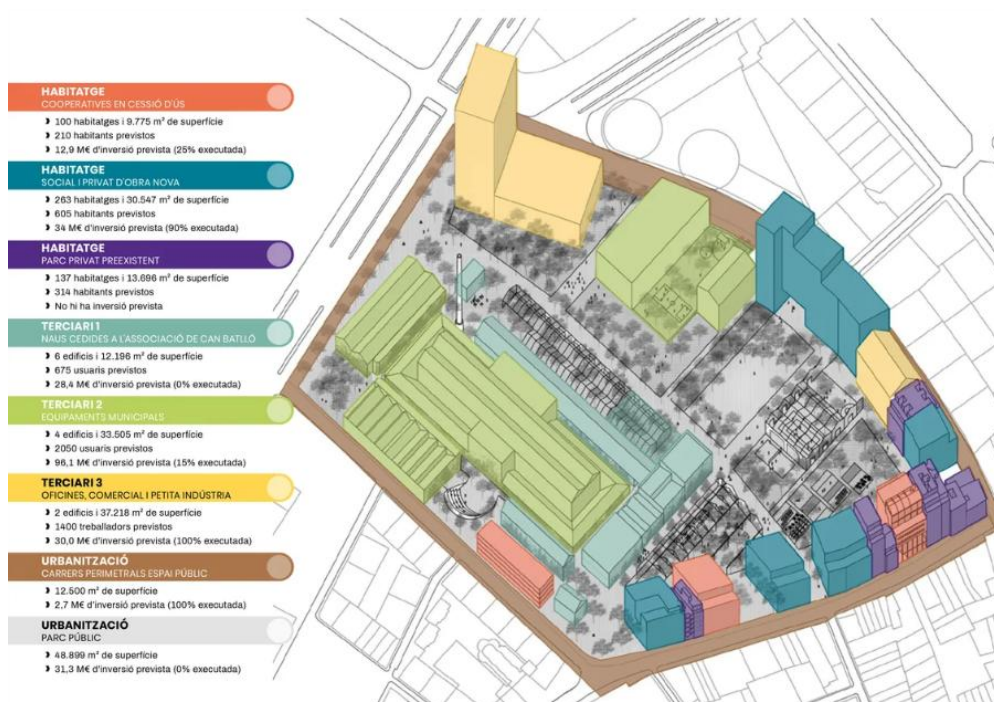
Map of the districts of Barcelona



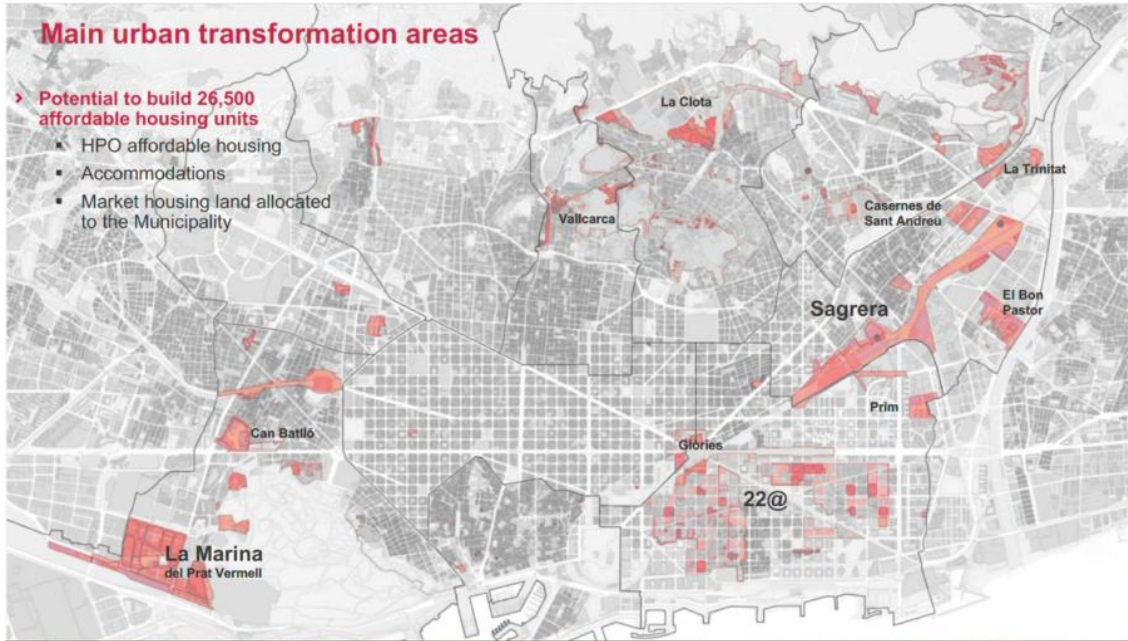
*Map of the neighborhoods of **Sants-Montjuïc**. Note that the large, unmarked area bordering La Marina del Prat Vermell is the Zona Franca industrial area. The area encircled in green is Montjuïc mountain.*



A postcard of the Ildefons Cerdà flyovers, now a large roundabout with a pedestrian flyover called a plaza, with Can Batlló and Magoria in the background, in 1960s or 70s. Billboard is for one of the largest polígonos, the Bellvitge development of L'Hospitalet de Llobregat. To the right, Seat (automobile manufacturer) office building. Note Gran Via still has the pedestrian elevated walkways, very much separated from La Marina.



Can Batlló as conceived in the year 2021 in the Lab Batlló project, led by the La Col architectural cooperative. The area in grey constitutes Can Batlló Park <https://lacol.coop/es/projectes/labbatll%C3%B3/>



Screenshot from video interview with Eduard