Transforming the Collective Spaces Through a Collaborative Urban Diagnosis Involving Citizens, Technicians and Administration.

estel

estratègies socials per al territori i els espais lliures

Index

Introduction

The economy and social meltdown of the last decade brought down the future of the cities in question, signalling an urban crisis and a crucial moment of transformation. These economic, political and social implications of austerity, demand to rethink the procedures for the restructure of the urban space, setting the citizens in the center of these processes.

The civic engagement empowers the interaction between the society and other institutions, increasing the voice of the local residents on the design of the green spaces with and for them. In the same time, the procedures of participatory urbanism strengthen the social thinking, turning the citizens from users into actors of the public space.

The architecture preservation and the environmental protection can happen successfully only if they are complemented by a strong community process that occurs as an extension of the sense of personal responsibility. This, for the community member or the local resident means being willing to engage in a process of developing priorities for a place, while for the urbanist or the architect means willing to work for the community, instead of trying to control the process from the top down.

Following that line of thinking, the basis of our work is a collaborative diagnosis of the public realm, as a result of the overlapped vision of technicians, political-administrative representatives and citizens. This vision arises from ongoing processes, and leads to constructive exchanges between all groups involved.
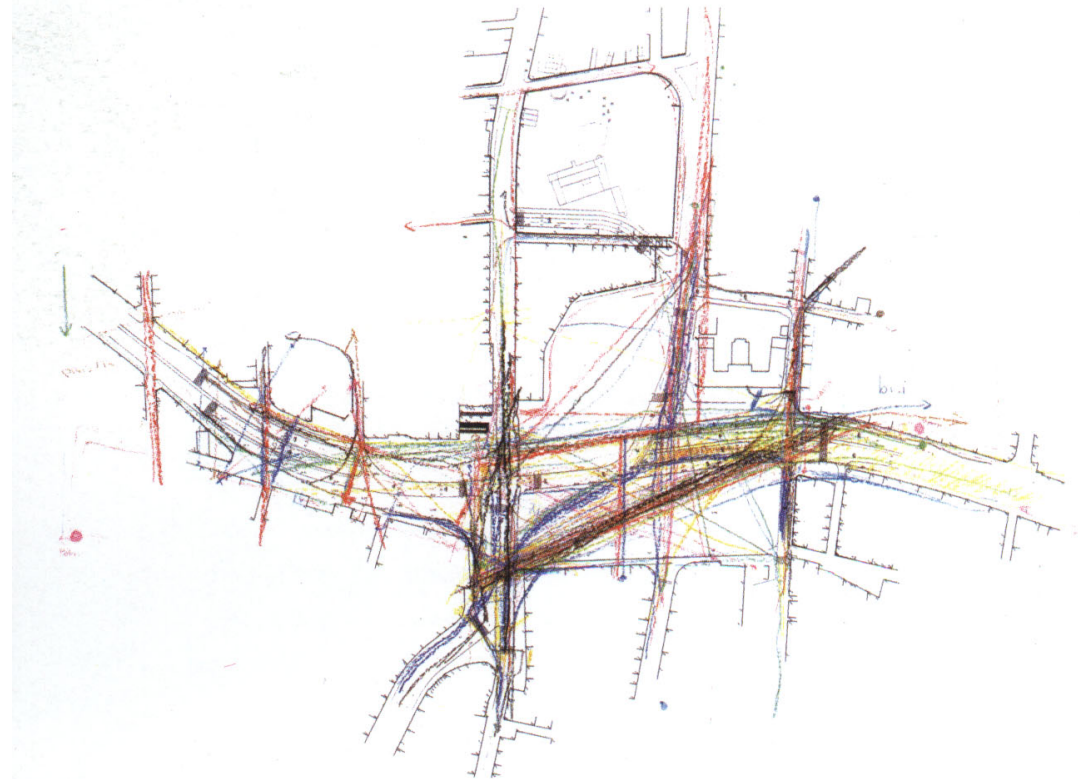
Conceptual Framework

According to Donald Appleard (1981), *"People have always lived on streets. They have been the places where children first learned about the world, where neighbors met, the social centers of towns and cities, the rallying points for revolts, the scenes of repression... The street has always been the scene of this conflict, between living and access, between resident and traveler, between street life and the threat of death.".* However, nowadays, we live in a time where citizens chose to spend their time in private spaces as their houses or the shopping malls, leading the social life in the public space to the downgrade of its quality.

Naturally, by time, this turned the city into an unfamiliar place, where people prefer to spend time in their private shelters, avoiding the children to go out in order to protect them from the dangers that only exist on TV and that do not match with the reality of the cities or the neighborhoods (Tonucci, 2016). There is a vague literature explaining the alternation of the public space from a place of social and commercial encounter and exchange, a place where you meet people - a basic reason to have cities in first place into an unfamiliar and neutral space that citizens do not feel that they really have the sense of personal responsibility neither feel to uphold their obligations as part of any community (Moataz al Alfi award).

However, in reality the places should be seen as an essential support for a healthy society and not as an architectural leftover (Pertz, 2015.). The importance of having a good quality of public space affects every aspect of the public life, but mainly it influences the democratic life of the city (Gehl, 2011). Barcelona mayor, Ada Colau, told the Habitat III meeting. *"Gaps between citizens are being widened. Public spaces should be for the public good."*

Following that train of thought, the architecture preservation and the environmental protection can happen successfully only if they are complemented by a strong community process that occurs as an extension of the sense of personal responsibility. In order this to happen, both artists, citizens and planners need to develop a common spatial vision and learn to work together in the urban landscape (Hayden, 1997).

The current social cutbacks and economic austerity makes necessary to rethink urban transformation procedures and, above all, target again people and their experiences as the main characters on these processes. The turnover of the neglected social biotop of the community, into an active series of public spaces, shifts as well the role the neighbors from passive users of the space into main actors of the place.

Thought the process of participation process, the community members need to be engaged in the procedure. In this way they will be able to develop priorities for the space they live and work in, within the dynamics of a group. To make this happen, there should be an adequate pedagogy of participation addressed to people of different ages, genders and political views, so that will lead finally to an agreement of meaningful and creative decisions.

Simultaneously, the urban designer, the architect, the environmental planner, should be willing to collaborate with the community instead of controlling the procedure from the top down. Under these circumstances, there should be a holistic comprehension of the community structure and their grassroots organizations while in the same time there should be an alongside cooperation with the city administration. (Hayden, 1997)

The community context includes the needs and the effects of social injustices on members that are not addressed by the existing social or state structures. Hence, that action of overall inclusion, gives the opportunity to the citizens to be involved in the procedures as respected and equal partners. Naturally, the human desire for participatory democracy and the resource limits are factors for the formation of the public landscape design (Hester, 2010).

Consequently, as the geographer David Harvey described it, *¨the exercise of a collective power to reshape the process of urbanization¨* and the environment widely, through analysis, design and construction of the public realm, empowers the urban resilience in short and long term. Through that, the communities, the institutions, the businesses and the systems within a neighborhood, are been taught how to survive, adapt and grow, no matter what kind of chronic stresses and shocks they might experience (100 Resilient Cities, 2016).

Pla Estel and Methodology

Related to the above mentioned, Pla estel* emerges as a reactive response to the established urban project processes for analysis, design and construction of the public realm. The current social cutbacks and economic austerity, request the alteration of the mindset about the urban transformation procedures, the reconsideration of the chosen tools, and, above all, to place the citizens and their experiences as the main actors on these processes.

The basis of our work is a collaborative diagnosis of the public realm, as a result of the overlapped vision of technicians, political-administrative representatives and citizens. This vision arises from ongoing processes, and leads to constructive exchanges between all groups involved.

From here, proposed strategies should support public realm transformation into inclusive environments, i.e. an environment that achieves its maximum diversity of experiences. Natural and urban environment as a sensory extension of citizens: affordances and capabilities meeting point. Consequent transformation priorities are established attending to a cost-beneficiary ratio. This indicator is calculated by assigning estimate budgets to designated strategies, and then relating them to the amount of social groups that benefit from each one. Thus, priorities on proposed transformation processes are leaded by the optimal social return from the economic investments, that is, the larger amount of citizens benefited with a minimum economic cost.

The aim is to unveil the meeting point between bottom-up initiatives and metropolitan public administrations town-planning: public space. Through a dialogue between representatives of both ends of the same rope (the one that leads to and crosses the public realm), people will string together opposite decision-makers point of view.
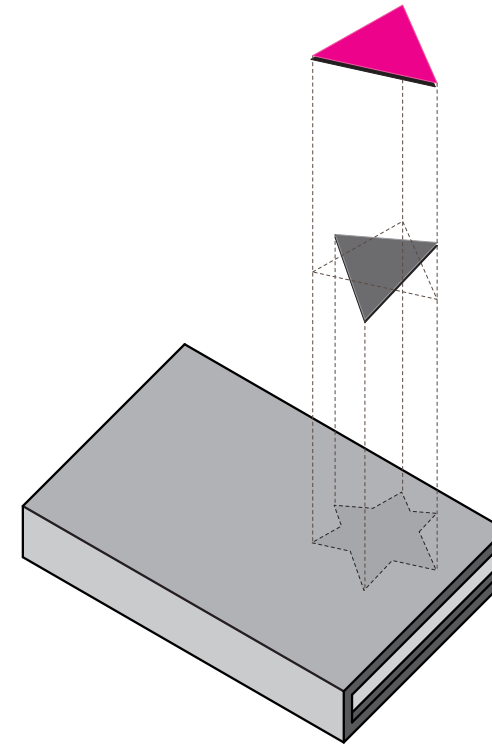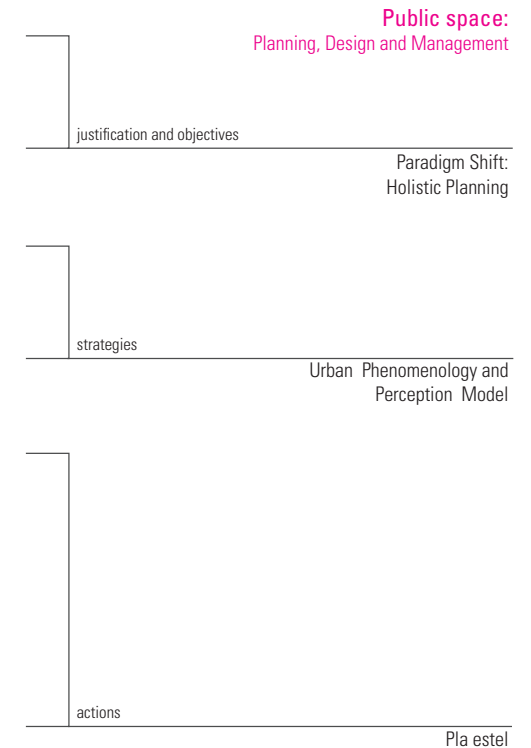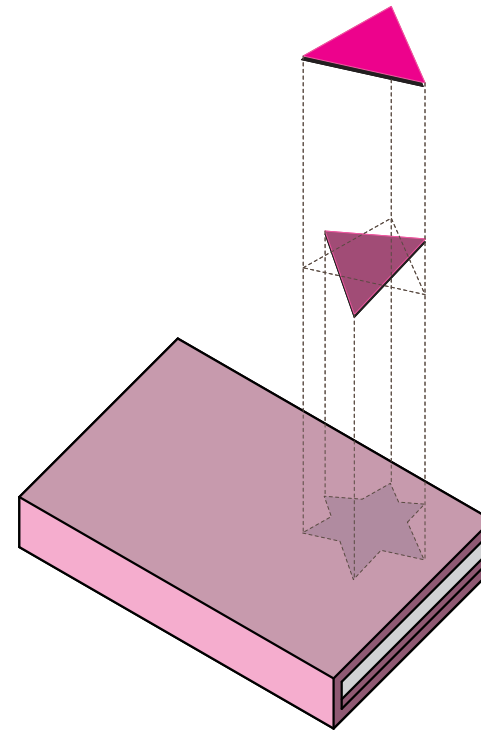
The Workshop

During the workshop, Pla estel* will explain study cases, based on their professional experience, where different projects with a diverse degree of citizen engagement have ended on a successful public space improvement.

This meeting point will explore the limits of participatory democracy in terms of planning and management of green urban spaces. How collaborative diagnosis and co-design of the public realm improves citizen's quality of life, cohabitation, urban maintenance, local networks and agreements on future city enlargements or consolidations. How cartographies arise as a shared language between citizens and administrations, allowing both ends express their own questions, proposals and common ground.

We will also raise questions for debate. What tools do we have to legitimate citizen participation on a metropolitan scale? How do we guarantee citizen continuous engagement on long-term transformation or planning processes? In which way can we develop and address through the process of participation, the sense of belonging and ownership for the care of the environment?   How can we assure that citizens are aware of the principles of environmental justice and the consequences of their choices? How possible and useful is to bring together technified metropolitan planning and citizen leadership on public life and public realm success?

Public space:
Planning, Design and Management

justification and objectives

Paradigm Shift:
Holistic Planning

strategies

Urban Phenomenology and
Perception Model

actions

Pla estel

Analysis and Projects

During the recent decades, the public spaces were designed following the top down criteria, serving, mainly, the interests of the administration. However, the changes, in the socio economic context, brought a new era, demanding new approaches for the urbanization of the cities. The United´s Nation Habitat III, held in Barcelona in 2016, discussed this new reality, focusing on the public spaces and housing.

With this in mind, Pla estel, focuses on the post crisis public space where the efficiency about the investments and the public money on the one hand and the integral strategies about planning and management on the other, change the urban policies weighting with the major challenges that the cities and inhabitants face in the present time.

It is essential therefore, the creation of an integral tool for the public space, that will incorporate the anticipated strategies for all the administrative departments that have competencies in order to form an inclusive environment for all. The elimination of the social stigmatization for various groups of population according to the age, the gender and the discapacity, is mandatory for the equal enjoyment of the urban space.

Mention should also be made on the ways that cities were studied, represented and designed in the past. The one dimensional focus, on selected perspectives (plan, section, façade), had as a result the approaching of the public life and its issues in an overly simplistic way. The urban space tended to be studied on a static moment in the absence of flow of people and vehicles, counting out the passing of time, the seasons and the dynamics during the day and time.

Conversely to the above, the initiative aims to shift the focus from the vertical and horizontal plans, in order to understand the urban environment as a multidimensional scene. In view of that, the incorporation of the perception of the facades is essential on how citizens experience the public spaces. Likewise, the confrontation of the space as dynamic and not as static, provides the information to understand the movements and the activities that occur there , evaluating the quality, under a variety of circumstances. That particular methodology, intends to study the public space not only as a public
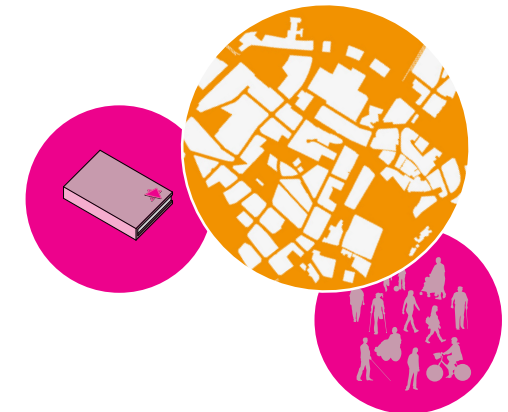
Design

Planification   Management

Pre-crisis Public Space

Design   Planification

Management
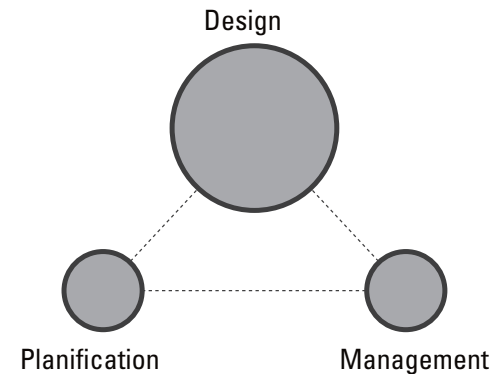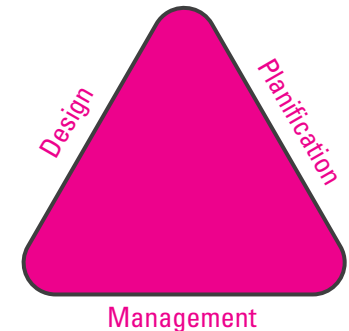
Post-crisis Public Space

Sectorial Planification and Exclusion of Social Groups

Transversal Planification and Inclusive Urban Environment

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property given for public use as usual, but as individual parts that compose the urban environment. Therefore, to give an illustration on that, the public space is consisted by the places of private use (i.e bars terraces) and of public use (i.e squares and streets). Moreover, the private spaces, are separated into those of public use (i.e shops and bars) and of public enjoyment (i.e visual perception,...).

Equally important, is the way that bureaucracy was influencing the quality of the public space, the efficiency on maintenance and security. The urban policies that used to be followed had limited potentialities on the expected and unexpected cost of maintenance wasting economic and human resources. In addition to that, the cost of security in the urban environment was increasing steadily with the need of cameras, private security and police.

Pla estel, answering to these issues, proposes a series of mechanisms where public and private gestors share mutual responsibility, incorporating yet, the neighbors on the decision making. In the same line of thought, the policies for a sustainable maintenance, both for the expected and the unexpected focusing on the selection of the right materials, and the education and to the empowerment of the citizens, will prevent the costs in long term. Finally, a revitalization of an urban space that maximizes the visibility and reviews the uses on the ground floor, allows eventually to have more ´eyes on the street´ (Jacobs, 1961). In this way, safety works better and more casually, while the same people of the community who use and enjoy the place, they watch and take care of it.
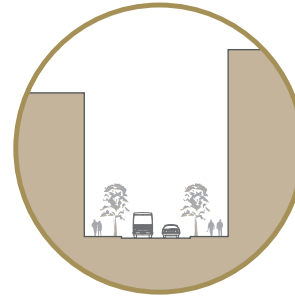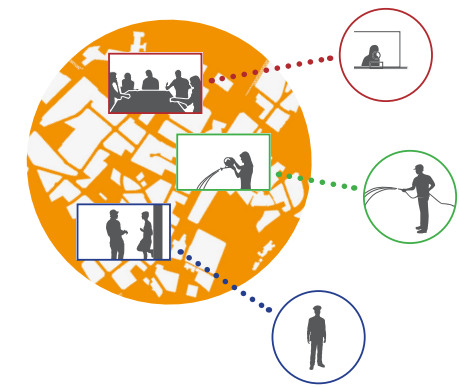

Static and One-dimension Design
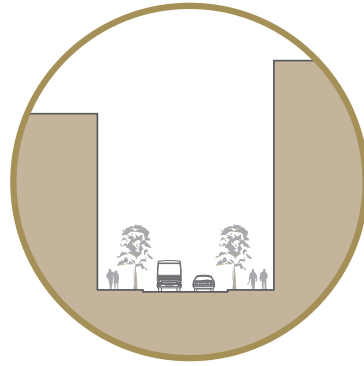

Dynamic and Peirherical Design
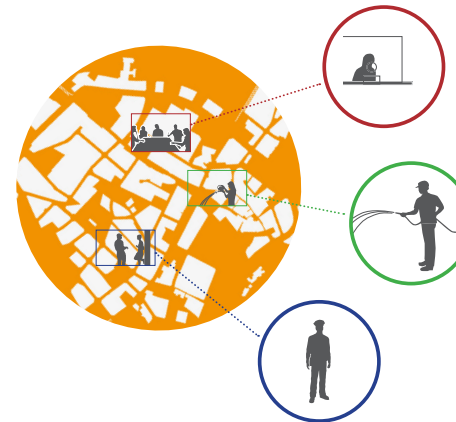
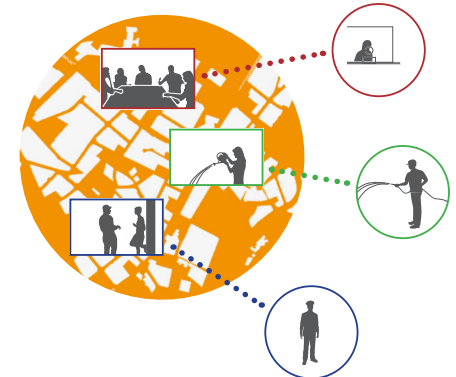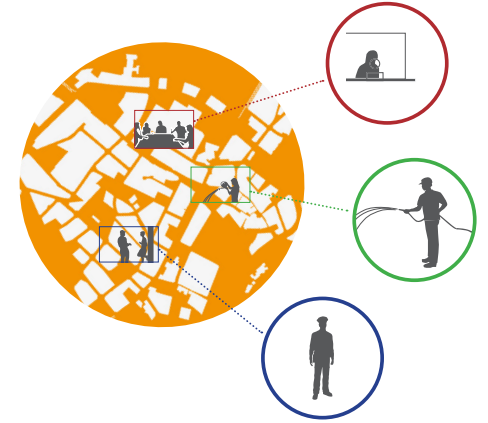Bureaucracy, Cost of Maintenance and Public Safety

Governance, Sustainable Maintenance and Passive Surveillance

PLANIFICATION
VS
PROGRAMING

DESIGN of a project
VS
DESIGN of a process

MANAGING administratively
VS
GOVERNING correspondably

# Urban Phenomenology and Perception Model

The urban policies that have been followed on the planification in the past were creating unequal relations in the urban space. They were focusing mainly on the built environment, while, on the contrary, the natural was a complementary aspect ignoring the fact that, the interrelations that urban spaces create offer the ecological perception of the city.

Despite that, they were considering the citizens as passive users and never as actors of a diverse environment, excluding them from the decision making, reinforcing a universal design, not suitable for all. In relation to way of thinking, the municipal plans of accessibility of the previous decades, they fell short on issues as the impermeability between the natural and urban design from the one side and the self-awareness of the human diversity and complexity on the other. The consequences of that inattentiveness, took shape in the city as physical barriers for the people with discapacities and as a problematic network in a wider sense.

Moreover, the universal design, a strategy which has been applied systematically in the urban space, created some new issues of exclusion. By considering the human diversity as a singular form of user, it was giving a universal solution, limiting the potentialities for the further activities and qualities that could occur.

However, the urban phenomenology, the initiative's approach, empowers the urban spaces in order the activities that take place there to be able to generate the maximum diversity of experience that is possible. These activities, the social, necessary and optional, determinate the quality of space due to the integration of the human diversity and the urban and natural environment from an ecological perspective.

We can classify every human action that takes place in a street, from a list of urban actions. An urban activity, involves all the spheres of the model (natural, urban, perspective, corporal and mental), but only partially, as is represented by the red thread. If the projects that are implemented , enable the public space to amplify the red line, then the urban actions maximize the direct and indirect beneficiaries .
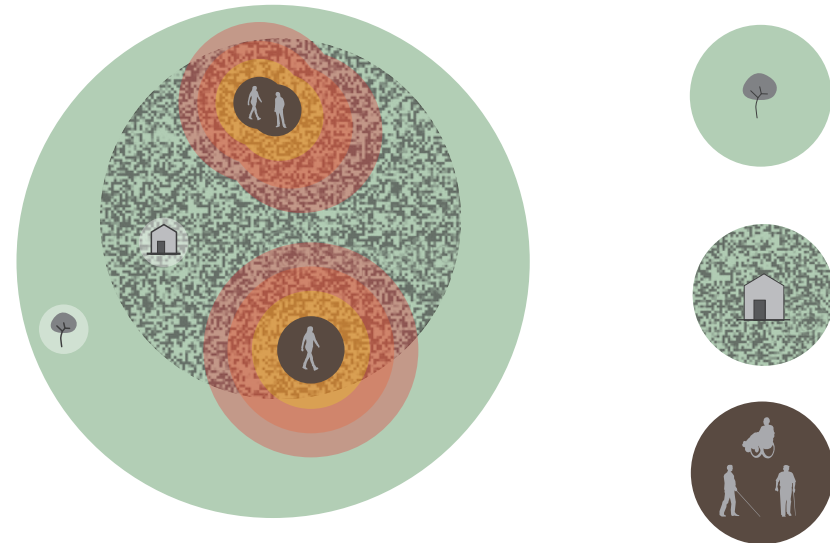
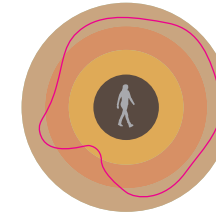
Accesibility, Universal Design and Urban Phenomenology
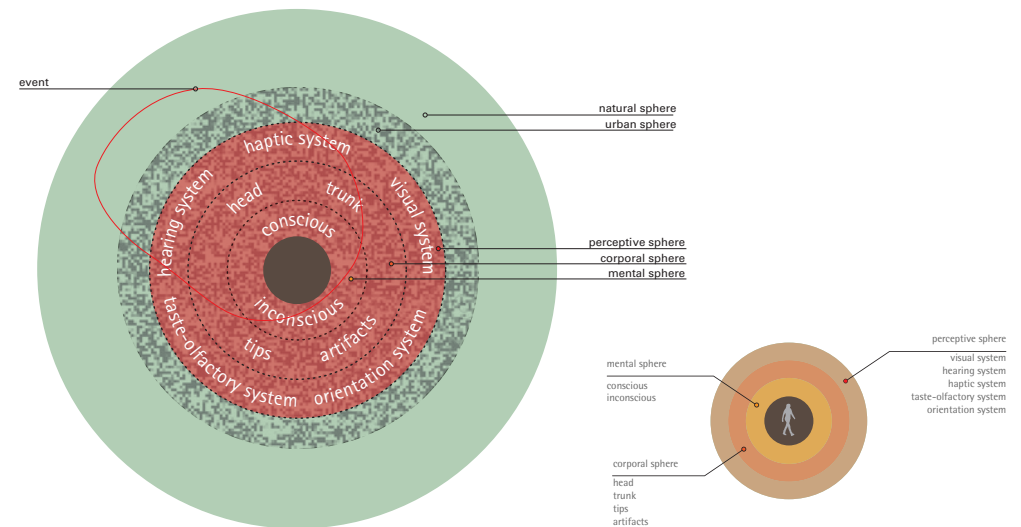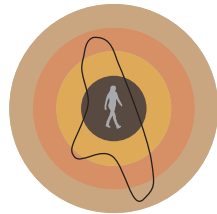

Maximization of Beneficiaries
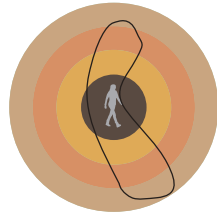
At the Municipal Parc of Olessa (Spain) there is a pavement along the lake, which allows the visitor to walk, contemplating the landscape.


The Moses Bridge in Halsteren (Netherlands) amplifies the perception of the lake allowing the pedestrian to touch the water.


At the Municipal Parc of Olessa (Spain) there is an important difference of altitude which is solved by a ramp for the people with disabilities.
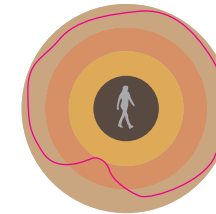
At the Place du Chapitre, Nimes (France) along the ramp there are ponts which convert the path in a highly sensory experience.
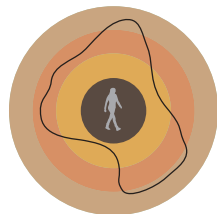
The Barcelona street at Olessa separates the Plaça de l'Estatut with the Rambla Catalunya. The residents have to cross the street carefully from the one place to the other.
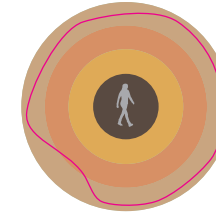
At he New Street of Brighton (England) vehicles and pedestrians share the road (shared space) respectively.

Conclusion

The Pla Estel, is a document of urban diagnosis that visualizes the situation of the urban space, through the mapping of a system of indicators which is designed especially for the description and the evaluation.

The urban diagnosis visualizes the quantitative data that have been collected such as activities, comparison of the public spaces, and the tracking of the implementations. In addition to that, it maps the qualitative information, for instance the degree of wellness, the sense of comfort and the perception of security.

Therefore, the implication process that arises, validates the analysis, supports the urban diagnosis and finally it designs the return process. The plan, contains the empowerment and the activation of the public and private spaces that support the transformation process, including the different levels of the public administration, the private sector (shopkeepers, local owners etc), the social agents (social groups) and the citizens .

The process of intervention, contains specific actions of activation, revitalization and evaluation of the place. The urban acupuncture with concrete interventions, give responses to the needs and the problems that arise from the analysis and the diagnosis. It develops guidelines of intervention and criteria that allow the public administration to develop a discussion for the public space that will have continuity in long term.

In conclusion, Pla estel does not propos a unique operation of transformation, but a process or regeneration of the environment in a determinate period of time: a program of prioritized actions about the environment, the economy and the society.

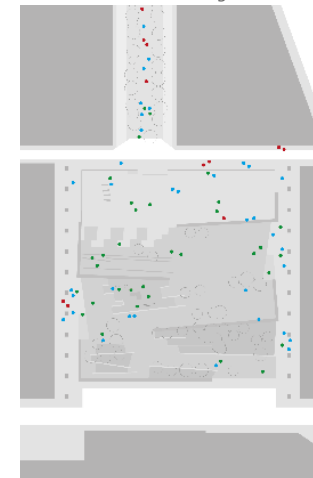D-PES Rush hour during weekdays
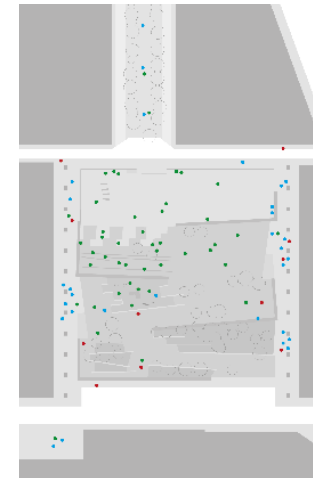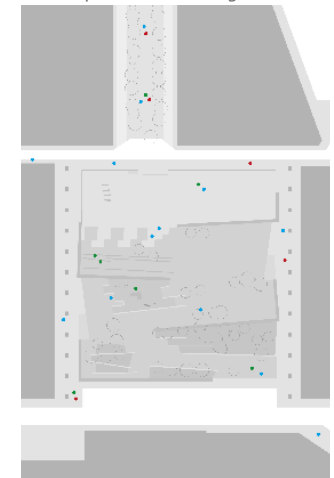
D-VES peak hours during weekdays
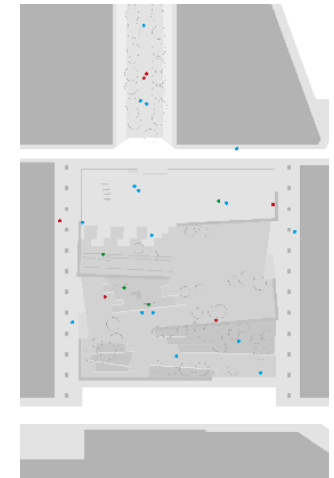
Children ●
Adults ●
Elders ●

D-PCS Rush hour during weekend

D-VCS peak hours during weekend

Children ●
Adults ●
Elders ●

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