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# The residential development process in Spain - A Case Study

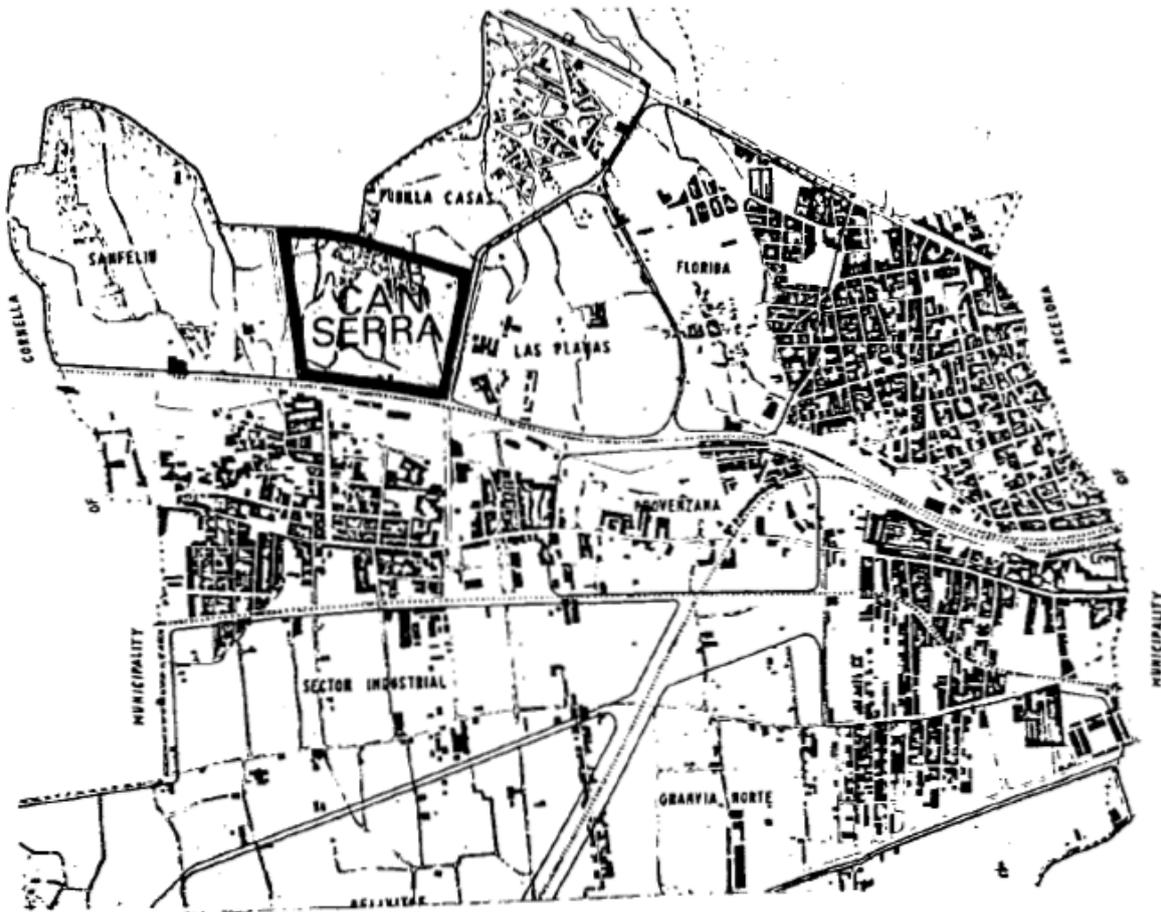
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## Introduction

This article concerns a local level case study of the residential development process in Spain. The case study area - known as Can Serra - is a 30-hectare site, situated about half a mile north of Hospitalet town centre in the Barcelona periphery (figure 1). Since 1960, Can Serra has been transformed from virgin agricultural land into a densely-populated residential dormitory suburb of Barcelona, now housing over 17,000 people in 4,000 dwellings, most of them in tower blocks six to fourteen storeys high.

This type of "boom" development has been a major element in city growth in Spain over the past 20 years. Between 1955 and 1957 alone, four to five million people left the Spanish countryside to live in the country's urban areas. The population of Hospitalet more than tripled from 90,000 in 1955 to 284,000 in 1975, becoming in 1970 the country's most densely populated municipality, with a density of 20,164 inhabitants per square kilometre. In this context, Miguelez *et al* (1975) have commented that "Hospitalet can be seen as a typical growth city, characterising the type of rapid development that has taken place in Spain in recent years".



**Figure 1** The Municipality of Hospitalet in the late 1950s. The built-up area on the right is an extension of the Barcelona centre. By the 1970s the growth of the periphery had spread to envelop Can Serra as well as the old Hospitalet town centre (the built-up area to the left) and most other parts of the municipality. (Source: Hospitalet Council.)

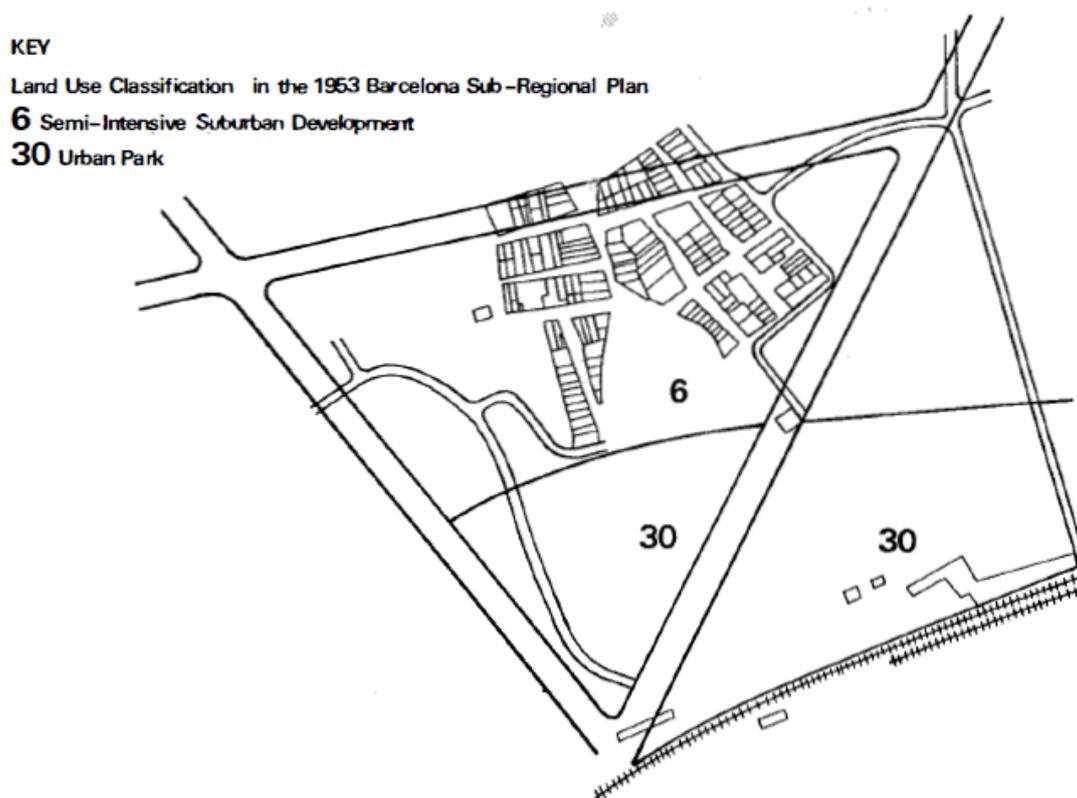
Much of the existing Anglo-American literature on the residential development process (Fisher, 1966, Smith, 1970, Drewett, 1973; Kaiser and Weiss 1970) conceptualises the conversion of land from non-urban to functional residential uses in terms of a series of decision-making stages, involving various agencies, in a pseudo-linear framework for understanding the process as a whole. This article attempts to cover the same ground in a Spanish context, but particular attention is given to the public policy dimension, and, above all, to the *mechanisms* of change in the urban planning system, in an attempt to empirically evaluate the *strategies* of the major forces acting on the urban scene in the case study area.

## The Case Study Area

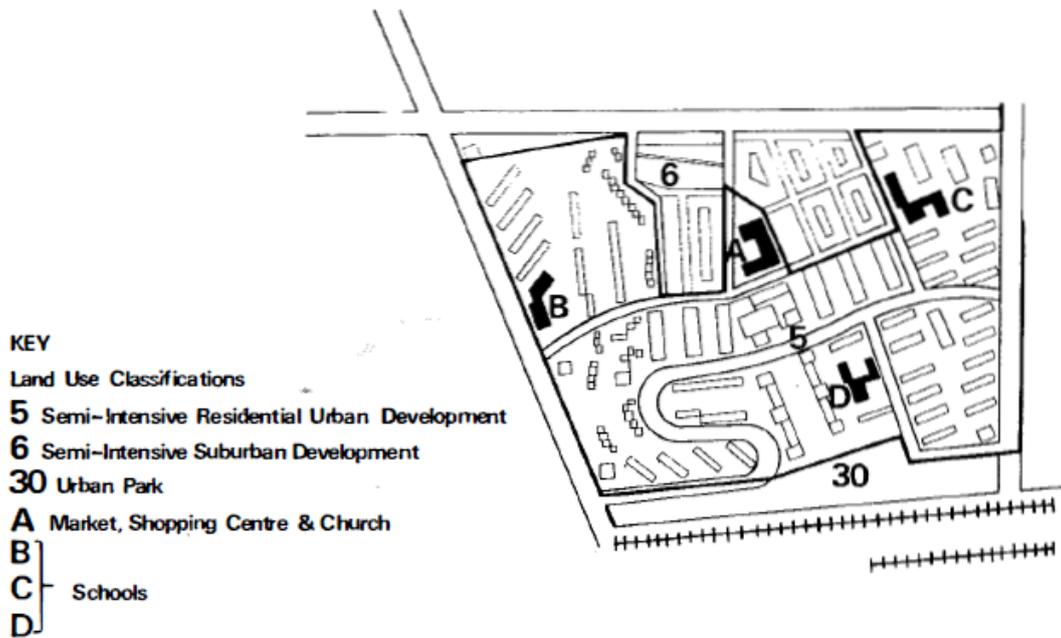
The 1956 Planning Act formed the cornerstone of urban planning in Spain for the next 20 years. A hierarchical system of urban plans and planning authorities was established to incorporate Provincial, Sub-Regional, Municipal, and Local Plans. In Barcelona, a Sub-Regional Plan, giving land zone classifications to the entire Sub-Region of 28 municipalities, has been approved in 1953 and a Sub-Regional Planning Authority - The Greater Barcelona Planning Commission (GBPC) - was created in 1955 to manage the development and enforcement of the plan. This meant, in practice, that each municipality in the Sub-Region took the appropriate section of the Sub-Regional Plan as its own Municipal Development Plan. At the same time, the GBPC formed the upper tier planning authority for the Sub-Region with all plan approval and development control decisions becoming executive only once Definitive Approval had been given by the GBPC.

The Barcelona *Provincial* Plan was not approved until 1963 and even then, it was intended only to act as a rough guideline for future growth. Essentially, then, it was the 1953 Sub-Regional Plan that constituted the major background “plan” in this case study. The mechanics of change, however, centre on the 1961 Can Serra Local Plan and its subsequent modifications. Lack of clarity in the 1956 Planning Act enabled developers to draw up Local Plans which changed land-use classifications specified in upper-tier plans. Further, the 1956 Act made no provision for modification of Local Plans, yet, as we shall see, a series of “Local Plan Modifications” were approved for Can Serra by the Hospitalet Council and GBPC, all of which further increased planned residential building densities.

In the 1953 Sub-Regional Plan, about 50% of Can Serra was classified for “Urban Park” and the remainder for “Semi-Intensive Suburban Development” (Figure 2). These land-use classifications were regulated by planning norms that formed an integral part of the plan. By the late 1950s they remained largely undeveloped and in 1959 the six major landowners in Can Serra employed consultant architect-planners to draw up a Local Plan in which nearly all Can Serra was re-classified for “Semi-Intensive Residential Urban Development”, the “Urban Park” area was reduced to a strip of land running alongside the railway to the south. The Local Plan included detailed plans of the layout of the new residential area, which was to accommodate 15,000 people in 3,000 dwellings, with a church, a convent, a college, three schools and a commercial centre also included in the design (Figure 3). The approval<sup>1</sup> of this plan by Hospitalet Council in July 1960 and by the GBPC in November 1961 was the first of a succession of plans approved by these authorities that were to be instrumental in the transformation of Can Serra in the ‘60s and ‘70s.



**Figure 2** Land use classifications and new road proposals for Can Serra included in the 1953 Barcelona Sub-Regional Plan. These are superimposed on the (narrower) roads and built-up area as they existed in the late 1950s. (Source: Hospitalet Council.)

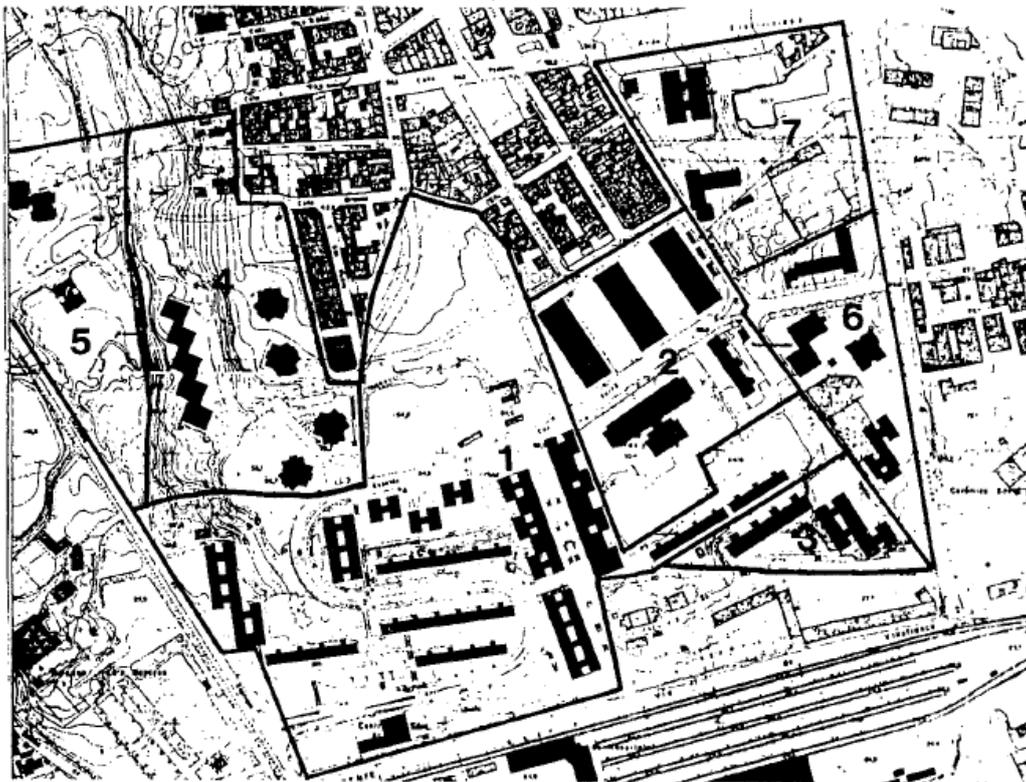


**Figure 3** The Can Serra Local Plan, approved by the GBPC in 1961. (Source: Hospitalet Council.)

### The Development of Can Serra, 1962-73

#### *Higher Residential Densities permitted by Council*

In 1963, a ruling by Hospitalet Council gave rise to a further replanning of Can Serra - in seven separate modifications to the Local Plan, approved over the next 8 years - resulting in a considerable increase in residential densities in the area (Figure 4). In late 1962, the estate agents managing the sale of the property in the southern part of Can Serra had made a routine inquiry to the Hospitalet Council concerning planning procedure for the future



**Figure 4** Can Serra in 1975. Between 1963 and 1971 Hospitalet Council and the GBPC approved modifications to the Can Serra Local Plan for Areas 1-7; the black shaded development - nearly all high-rise blocks - was built in the period 1963-1975. (Source: A. Ferrer, Metropolitan Corporation of Barcelona.)

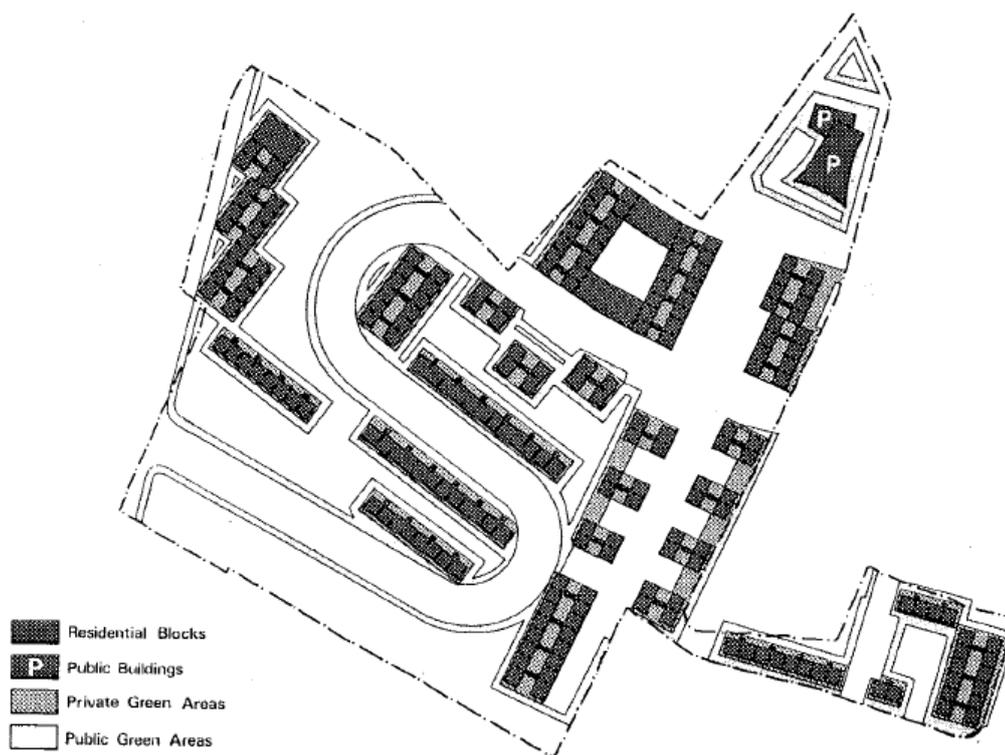
development of the estates of their clients. In his reply, the Mayor of Hospitalet noted that the Municipal Building Regulations for Barcelona specified certain Floor Space Ratios<sup>2</sup> for different types of development and that, according to these norms, a ratio of between 1.25 and 1.75m<sup>2</sup> could be permitted in Can Serra.

What the Mayor did not state was that these Floor Space Ratios were intended to be used only in the *internal* ordering of the blocks that characterise the urban morphology of Barcelona city centre (see Wynn, 1979), and not for calculating building densities in the development of green field sites in the periphery. This ruling thus contradicted the 1961 Can Serra Local Plan which had distinctly specified a maximum Floor Space Ratio of 1.18m<sup>2</sup>/ m<sup>2</sup> for the plan area, and it was on this figure that the local plan design had been based.

This ruling implied, then, that individual landowners and developers could re-design the urban layout contained in the Local Plan to take full advantage of this higher Floor Space Ratio. This further increased the value of the Can Serra estates, many of which were bought up by property developers Aleida S.A., Briseida S.A. and Amaltera S.A. (from here on - the ABA Group) in 1963.

#### *Replanning and Development of the ABA Group's property, 1963-72*

Land transactions in Can Serra in 1963 gave the ABA Group almost half the undeveloped land in Can Serra. In November 1963, the developers wrote to the Hospitalet Council asking that a new plan be drawn up by the Council to facilitate the development of the ABA Group's property to take full advantage of the new Floor Space Ratio maximum of 1.75m<sup>2</sup>/ m<sup>2</sup>. Within three days, the municipal architect had completed the plan. The new layout (Local Plan Modification 1, Figure 5), contained 2,200 dwellings in linear and tower blocks, six to fourteen storeys high, located around Can Serra Avenue, the major new road planned to cross the central hill area of Can Serra from east to west. The church and commercial centre of the Local Plan were retained in the modification (LPM 1) and the "co-operative system"<sup>3</sup> was to be used to finance the provision of road and basic service infrastructure. The new plan was initially approved by Hospitalet Council in December 1963 as a partial modification to the 1961 Can Serra Local Plan, and by the GBPC in March 1964, having followed the standard plan approval procedure.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 5** Local Plan Modification 1, for the property owned by the ABA group, approved by Hospitalet Council in 1963 and by the GBPC in 1964. The H-shaped blocks are 12-14 storeys high, the linear shaped blocks 6 storeys high. (Source: Hospitalet Council.)

In September 1964, Hospitalet Council granted Municipal Building Permits for the construction of 1,374 dwellings in the land owned by the ABA Group in accordance with the building design contained in LPM-1. At the same time the developers employed consultants to draw up a Roads and Service plan<sup>5</sup>, to plan and programme the provision of road and service infrastructure. This was completed in 1966 but not until September 1969 did the Council approve the plan, and by the time the GBPC approved it in April 1970 both road infrastructure and house construction were well under way, with all the linear six-storey apartment blocks and about half the 12- and 14-storey tower blocks completed.

As house construction continued, the developers notified the Council in July 1971 that the road infrastructure was complete; in November 1972 an “Act of Definitive Acceptance” was signed by the Mayor of Hospitalet and representatives of the ABA Group, whereby Hospitalet Council officially accepted the public roads and gardens, within the area covered by LPM-1. At the same time an “Act of Mutual Agreement” was also signed in which the land on which the roads and gardens had been built was officially ceded to the Council. The significance of these agreements will be discussed later.

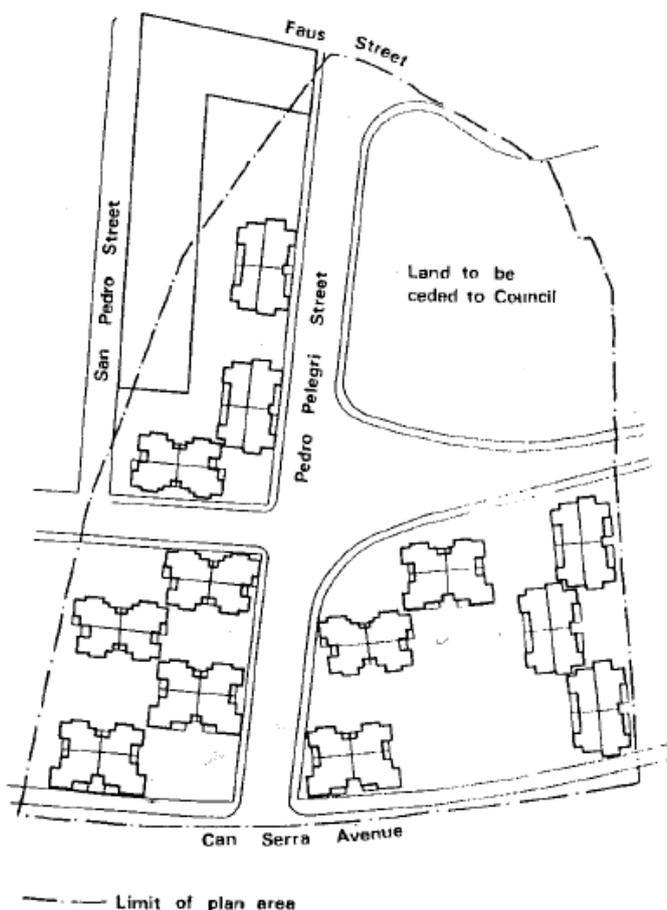
*Other developers follow suit (1965-73)*

The approval of LPM-1 in 1963-4 set a precedent for the replanning and development of Can Serra. Landowners and developers, sometimes with the aid of Hospitalet Council, drew up similar modifications to the Can Serra Local Plan; between 1965 and 1971 the Hospitalet Council and the GBPC approved six such further modifications to the Can Serra Local Plan (Figure 4).

The development proposals contained in these modifications were based on the revised Floor Space Ratio of 1.75m<sup>2</sup>/m<sup>2</sup>; at the same time they included proposals for schools, nurseries, green zones, etc. and the initial approval by the Council was in all cases accompanied by an Act of Mutual Agreement (AMA) between Council and landowner/developer, in which the latter agreed to cede the land areas designated in the plans for these collective service installations and the road infrastructure, free of charge, to the Council, once the plan had been definitively approved by the GBPC. In some cases the AMA also committed the developers to undertake and finance the implementation of road infrastructure (“co-operative system”)<sup>6</sup> although in others this was left to the Council (“cession of road areas system”). Finally, all these plans lacked precise time projections for the implementation of development proposals; by 1973, Building Permits had been granted for some (but not all) of the residential blocks contained in these six plans, and by 1975 house construction was under way in all six plan areas (see Figure 4).

*Hospitalet Council attempt further re-planning of Central Area of Can Serra, 1972-73*

While Hospitalet Council and the ABA developers were finalising official cession-acceptance-procedure for Can Serra Avenue in 1972, the Council were also drawing up a new plan for the development of the empty area of land just north of the new road (Figure 4). In LPM-1 (Figure 5), 12 H-shaped residential tower-blocks had been planned for this area with a church and commercial centre further north in the apex of the land owned by Aleida S.A. In June 1972, the



**Figure 6** Local Plan Modification 8, approved by Hospitalet Council in 1972. The successful battle fought by the College of Architects of Catalonia and the local residents’ association to preserve this area for recreational and service facilities marked the turning point in the development of Can Serra. The 13 tower-blocks shown in the plan are 10-14 storeys high. (Source: Hospitalet Council.)

Committee of Housing and Urban Affairs of Hospitalet Council decided that “in the interests of the city” this area should be replanned to increase the public space area and accommodate the construction of a new through road linking Can Serra Avenue with the northern part of Can Serra.

Following consultation with the developers, a new plan - LPM-8 (Figure 6), was initially approved by the Council in September 1972, and at the same time an AMA was signed by both parties whereby over 10,000m<sup>2</sup> to be used for roads and public buildings would be ceded to the Council once the new plan was definitively approved. During the Public Information Stage<sup>8</sup>, the College of Architects of Catalonia appealed against approval of the plan on the grounds that the new design, which included 13 tower-blocks, 10- to 14-storeys high, constituted a further illegal modification of the 1961 Can Serra Local Plan. This appeal was dismissed by the Municipal Technical Section as “absurd” and it was asserted that the new plan was not a modification of the 1961 Local Plan at all, but rather a “recomposition of an approved building density, with the objective of adjusting the lay-out to the necessities of road infrastructure and service provision” (Hospitalet Council, 1972). The Council took this line of argument further by giving both provisional and definitive approval to the plan in December 1972 which they justified on the grounds that the new plan related only to “secondary aspects of planning” and therefore did not need definitive approval by the GBPC. In April 1973, however, the GBPC, who had been sent copies of the plan for information purposes only, notified the Hospitalet Council that this plan *did* constitute a modification to the 1961 Local Plan and that the Council did not have the right to give definitive approval to “secondary aspects of planning” anyway. The definitive approval was thus annulled by the GBPC at a time when the authority were beginning to fulfil an increasingly effective development control function in the Sub-Region after almost two decades in which they had been little more than a rubber stamp body for the planning decisions of the larger councils.

## **Public Outcry and the Brake on Speculative Development, 1974-78**

### *Suspension of Building Permit Cession 1974*

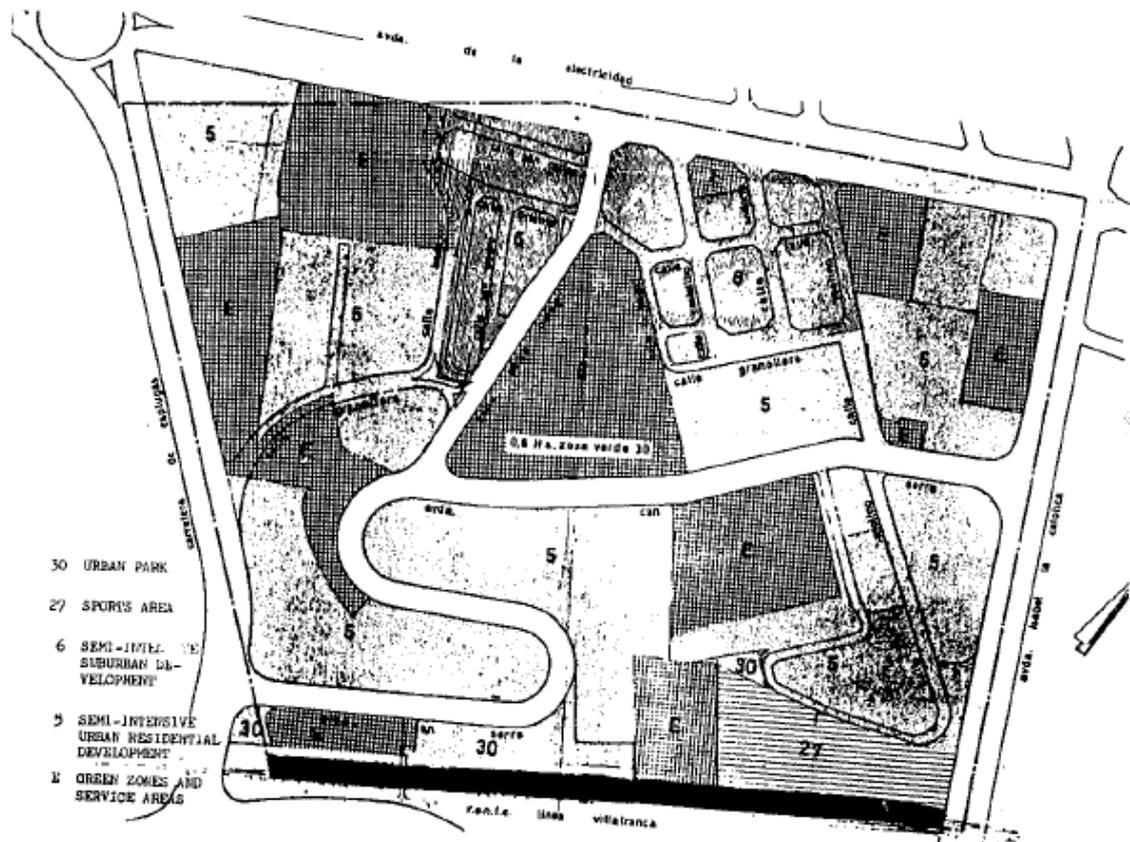
According to the official Council census, 6,216 people lived in Can Serra at the end of 1972. Press coverage of the involvement of the College of Architects and the GBPC in the LPM-8 debate coincided with the start of organised resident protest in 1973-74. Demonstrations and petitions presented to the Council drew attention to the lack of schools, health services, nurseries and parks in Can Serra and the inadequacy of much of the road infrastructure. Above all resident protest focused on the undeveloped area known locally as “La Carpa”, precisely the area covered by LPM-8. The Residents’ Association demanded that this land, which had traditionally been used for the siting of fairs and festivals, should remain as public open space. This campaign was encouraged by the “Christian Community of Can Serra” which organised community activities and counselling services (night school for adults, legal advice, day excursions, etc.) and generally supported resident protest over living conditions and the lack of services. Similarly, the College of Architects of Catalonia helped the Residents’ Association to draw up alternative planning proposals, and in May 1974 they helped organise a Public Exposition of local service deficits in Can Serra.

In May 1973, following the GBPC’s invalidation of the Council’s approval of LPM-8, the Hospitalet Council resubmitted the plan to the Sub-Regional Authority for *their* definitive approval. In March 1974, the GBPC returned the plan to the Council for “reconsideration”, and in April, following a series of audiences with representatives of the Residents’ Association, the Committee of Housing and Urban Affairs of Hospitalet Council recommended that, in view of the deficiency of community services in the area, the cession of Building Permits in Can Serra should be suspended for one year (extendable to *two*). whilst a service plan for all Can Serra was drawn up. This decision was approved by the Full Council in July 1974, and the Residents’ Association, who viewed this as a great victory over the private developers, proceeded to organise (with the aid of the College of Architects of Catalonia) mass petitioning of the Council to take rapid action to provide service infrastructure in the locality.

### *Approval of the Special Plan of Interior Reform*

In 1974, Hospitalet Council, in consultation with the Metropolitan Corporation of Barcelona, undertook preliminary work on the new plan for Can Serra. The major objectives were “to use the undeveloped areas in Can Serra for the provision of services and infrastructure (and) to limit, as far as possible, any increase in residential density in the area (Hospitalet Council, 1975).” In July 1975, a Special Plan of Interior Reform (SPIR)<sup>9</sup> for Can Serra was initially approved by the Council. Whilst detailed proposals were made for the creation of community facilities in the land areas ceded to the Council by developers in the AMAs signed in the 1960s and 1970s, the plan also reclassified other parts of Can Serra as green zones and service areas (Figure 7). These included “La Carpa”, the focus of resident protest, where a market, an adult training centre and public square and play area were to be built. Implementation of these proposals was to be in three five-year phases; finance for road infrastructure was to come largely from property owners under the “co-operative system” of development, whilst public facilities were to be financed by state aid and credit loans to the Council.

During the Public Information Stage for the SPIR appeals were presented from three major groups. The developers



**Figure 7** The Special Plan of Interior Reform for Can Serra, approved by the Metropolitan Corporation of Barcelona in 1977. (Source: Hospitalet Council.)

(Corin S.A., Alcida S.A., Briseida S.A. and Procyt S.A.) complained that the new classifications contradicted those contained in previously approved plans and the clauses of some of the AMA's signed by the Council and developers. In the subsequent report of Hospitalet's planning officers, these appeals were considered invalid as the SPIR was to be seen within the framework of the replanning of the whole Barcelona Sub-Region<sup>10</sup> which, by necessity, would to some extent contradict previous plans and agreements. Nevertheless, new AMAs were signed between the Council and some developers in the second half of 1975 by which the Council secured adherence to the proposals of the SPIR as regards the reclassification and cession of land to be used for service facilities through agreeing to lift the Building Permit suspension in localised areas so that house construction could continue. Even within the constraints of the SPIR, a further 920 dwellings could be built, bringing the total to 4,893 in all Can Serra.

Representatives of the Can Serra Residents' Association also lodged an appeal during the Public Information Stage, generally supporting the plan but drawing attention to certain details of development that the plan did not cover, and stressing the need for urgent action in the area. Finally, the professional Colleges (Architects, Industrial Engineers, Civil Engineers) all signed an appeal in which the proposals of the SPIR were supported, but which called for greater specificity in the programming of the three phases of plan implementation. This was accepted as valid criticism by planning officers and adjustments made accordingly. In December 1975, the SPIR was sent to the Metropolitan Corporation of Barcelona. Following a delay of over a year, in which the Revision of the Barcelona Sub-Regional Plan was definitively approved (with Can Serra classified in accordance with Hospitalet Council's proposals), the SPIR itself was definitively approved in March 1977.

By 1980 the implementation of the first phase was well under way. Some of the road infrastructures and access passageways in the housing complexes had been improved and completed; the junior/middle school "Samonto" had been completed and opened on Electricity Avenue, as had the church on Can Serra Avenue. A further school and a children's play area had been built and opened in the lower part of Molino Street. "La Carpa" remained rough terrain, used by the public as a recreational area, whilst the top left and top right sections of Can Serra were more or less as they were in 1975 (Figure 4), with the developers awaiting the approval of the Council's roads and services plan for the area before proceeding with building permit application and construction activities. Meanwhile, the Residents' Association and political parties of the left continued to canvas for a more rapid implementation of the proposals of the SPIR approved in 1977.

## Analysis

### *The illegality of the Planning and Development of Can Serra*

The development of Can Serra in the 1960s and early 1970s was carried out within the framework of small-scale urban plans that were contrary to the spirit, and in many cases the letter, of the law. The vagueness of the 1956 Planning Act on the Local Plan/General (Municipal or Sub-Regional) Plan relationship meant that landowners were able to introduce a speculative Local Plan giving residential classifications to an area originally zoned, in part, as Urban Park. Two years after the approval of the Can Serra Local Plan a law was passed specifically prohibiting such reclassification of green zones, although even this failed to prevent all such operations (Ferrer 1974).



Can Serra plan Area 5.

If the 1961 Can Serra Local Plan was debatedly within the law, then its subsequent modifications were blatantly not. Leaving aside the fact that there is no provision in Spanish planning law for the “partial modification” of Local Plans, the Council’s ruling that a maximum Floor Space Ratio of  $1.75\text{m}^2/\text{m}^2$  could be applied in the development of Can Serra clearly contradicted the (theoretically) legally binding planning regulations contained in the 1961 Local Plan. These stated that only those aspects of planning “not specified here or in the accompanying plans will be governed by the Municipal Building Regulations” (Hospitalet Council 1960). At the same time the Municipal Building Regulations used by Hospitalet Council stated that Floor Space Ratios included in the Municipal Regulations “may be used only when the building layout and occupation of land has not previously been fixed either graphically or through a Floor Space Ratio” (Barcelona Council, 1959). In the case of Can Serra, a Floor Space Ratio had been previously fixed ( $1.18\text{m}^2/\text{m}^2$  in the Local Plan) so the basic premise for the seven modifications to the Local Plan, approved, and in some cases drawn up, by Hospitalet Council (and the GBPC), represented a clear misinterpretation of planning law. Further, as previously noted, the Floor Space Ratio of  $1.75\text{m}^2/\text{m}^2$  quoted in the Building Regulations was intended for “blocks” of development - i.e. residential areas enclosed, but not divided, by streets. In the calculation of building densities in some of the modifications to the Local Plan, the entire area covered by the “block” plan, incorporating road and service areas, was included, thereby facilitating a further increase in building density. At the same time, public floor space was usually omitted from calculations so that residential building densities could be even higher still. In LPM-1, for the development of the ABA group’s property, the true Floor Space Ratio was  $2.24\text{m}^2/\text{m}^2$ , almost twice the maximum set in the Can Serra Local Plan.

The actual number of houses constructed also exceeded that specified in the Local Plan modification in some cases. In plan areas 2 and 3 (Figure 4), 674 and 202 dwellings respectively were built, whereas only 576 and 174 were included

in the approved Local Plan modifications for these areas. Further, with the possible exception of the development of the ABA group's property, where road infrastructure and house construction took place simultaneously, most house construction preceded the provision of road infrastructure and therefore contravened Articles 63-67 of the 1956 Planning Act, which stipulated that the provision of roads, pavements, water supply, sewage and drainage systems and street lighting must always precede the development of any site in urban areas. This implied that the cession of Building Permits before the approval and realisation of Road and Service Plans was also a contravention of the law.

Finally, the attempt by the Hospitalet Council to definitively approve LPM-8 in 1972 represented a flagrant misinterpretation of planning law, which was subsequently remedied by the GBPC who annulled the approval of the plan by the Hospitalet Council. In support of their approval the Council made reference to the Regulations for the implementation of 1953 Barcelona Sub-Regional Plan. Article 54 states that "the Greater Barcelona Planning Commission can themselves make modifications concerning secondary aspects of urban plans"; without going into what exactly constitutes a "secondary aspect", suffice it to say that nowhere were Municipal Councils given the power to make such alterations, and that this manoeuvre clearly lacked any authentic legislative basis.

### **Council Development Strategy in the 1960s and 70s**

There seems little doubt, then, about the collusion between Hospitalet Council and the developers in the 1960s and 1970s to bring about increased residential densities by means of operations on the margin of, or outside, the law. Clearly, informal discussion between municipal architect, committee members and developers often preceded official presentation and approval of the modifications to the Can Serra Local Plan. But rather than a total identification of interests, it seems there was some element of bargaining in the behind-the-scenes negotiations that were formally stated in the plans and the Acts of Mutual Agreement.

It can be argued of course, that the AMAs were just a smokescreen for collusion, a public justification of the dubious legality of modifications to the Can Serra Local Plan, that had to be approved by the GBPC as well as the Hospitalet Council. In an era of mass migration into the region, financially weak councils were largely dependent on central state authorities and private initiative to provide enough houses to hold at bay the spread of shanty towns and associated social-political problems. At the same time, State housing operations tended to represent a financial imposition for the local authorities who were usually responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of public housing areas whilst tenants were often exempted, under state housing legislation, from paying rates and local taxes. In general, collaboration with private developers was a financially preferable option; and with the Acts of Mutual Agreement the Council secured cessions of considerable areas of land to be used for public facilities that would otherwise have been costly to maintain.

Similarly the Council exerted *some* control on the implementation phase by holding back approval of the Roads and Service Plans until these were completed by developers to the satisfaction of municipal engineers; until definitive approval of such a plan, all development was technically illegal and *could* be pulled down. Nevertheless, by 1972, although Can Serra Avenue had been completed, the fragmentary replanning and residential development of Can Serra had not been accompanied by the provision of community services and infrastructure. Although developers had ceded plots of land to the Council, these remained rough terrain, with the exception of the 10,000m<sup>2</sup> site on Can Serra Avenue where the Ministry of Education and Science had constructed the "Torres y Bages" secondary school in the late 1960s, following Council cession of the site to the Ministry in 1968. It was this lack of service infrastructure, combined with the chaotic nature of residential development, that gave rise to the Residents' Association movement in Can Serra and Hospitalet in general in the early 1970s.

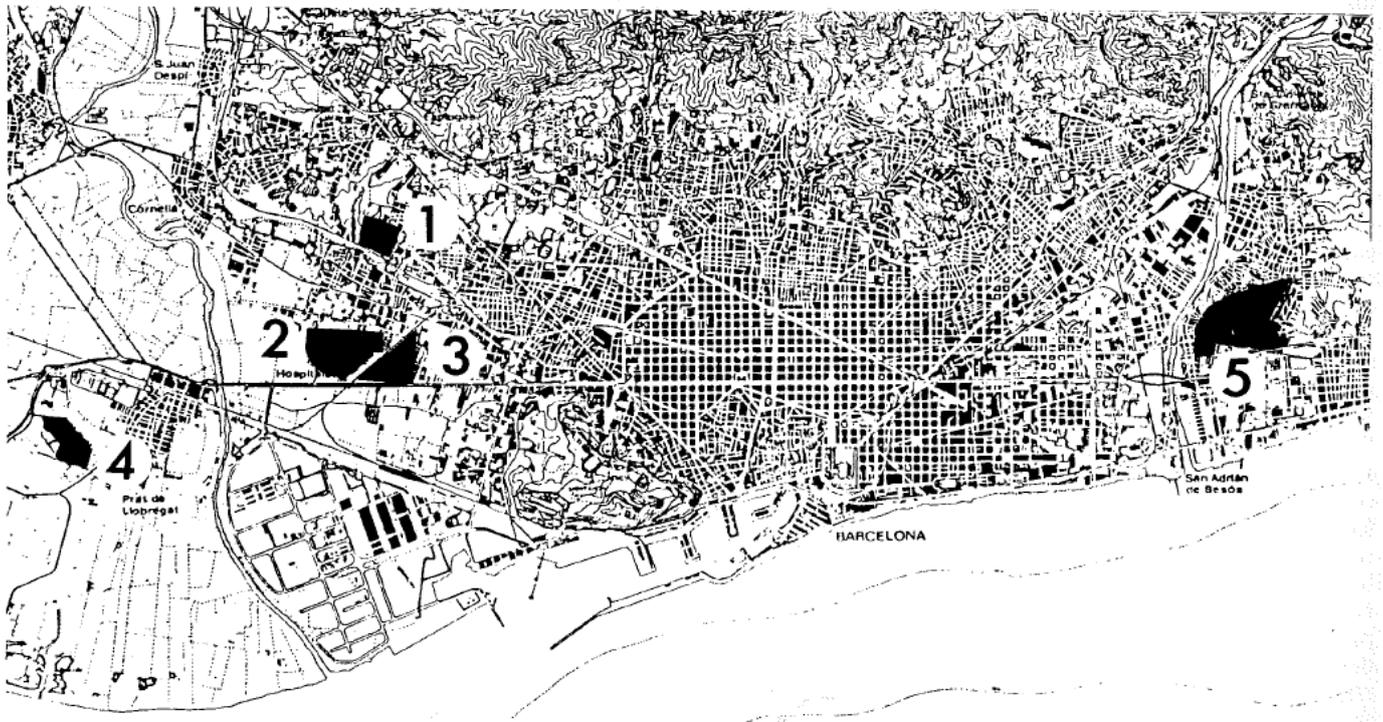
### **The Residents' Association Movement and Political Change, 1972-75**

The repercussions of capitalist planning and development in Hospitalet were not confined to Can Serra. By 1973, fourteen Local Plans had raised the residential capacity of Hospitalet to 575,000, more than double the projection on which the land zone classifications for Hospitalet in the 1953 Sub-Regional Plan had been based. Of the 300 hectares classified as Urban Park in the municipality in 1953, there existed only a few hundred square metres in 1973. In an essentially working class area, state schools in the municipality provided education (obligatory and free according to the law) for only 35% of children aged between six and thirteen; there was no public hospital and only two surgeries. Whilst the Residents' Association movement in Hospitalet focused on various other issues as well (e.g. indemnity payments, housing defects) it was essentially this deficit in local services and facilities that characterised protest in Can Serra in the early 1970s. From an initially defensive stance, the movement came to include, by the mid-1970s, positive counter-proposals for Can Serra, centering on the future of "La Carpa".

### **The SPIR as an instrument of change in the post-Franco era**

Since the approval of the SPIR for Can Serra in 1977, four other such plans have been approved for the renewal or

provision of services in the Barcelona periphery (Figure 8) and three others are currently being drawn up. The SPIR has been a major instrument in the improvement and reform of the Barcelona periphery since the approval of the new Sub-Regional Plan in 1976, and SPIR's have been used elsewhere (e.g. Madrid) for the rehabilitation and conservation of old city centres. As Roca Cladera (1979) has said, these plans "represent a true precedent in our (Spain's) planning history. Until now planning has essentially concerned extending the built-up area to the exclusion of service and free space areas; in this way the property value of land has been *increased*. With the SPIRs, this value has been *reduced* and the social use of land increased. This has marked then, a qualitative change in the function of urban planning".



**Figure 8** The five approved Special Plans of Interior Reform that are designed to renew and/or provide service infrastructure in areas of the Barcelona periphery. Significantly, three are in Hospitalet, perhaps the most overcrowded and ill-equipped municipality in the sub-region, in terms of community services and infrastructure.

1. Can Serra (approved 31-3-77; covers 29.4 hectares).
  2. Bellvitge (15-5-77; 64.1 hectares).
  3. Gornal (24-2-78; 18.1 hectares).
  4. San Cosme (21-4-78; 50.2 hectares).
  5. Liefia (30-10-78; 103.8 hectares).
- (Base map source: Metropolitan Corporation of Barcelona).

True though this is, it seems important to note that local authorities in Spain still lack the necessary legal and financial powers to take the necessary steps to transform built-up areas that are essentially the product of past decades of land and property speculation. The majority of Spain's urban municipalities, including Hospitalet and Barcelona, now have Socialist or Communist councils, but political devolution from the right of centre National Government remains slow. Since the approval of the SPIR for Can Serra in 1977, very little new property development has taken place there; new road infrastructure has been laid or completed, by both developers and the Council; and new schools have been built and opened by the Ministry of Education and Science. But any positive contribution by the Council towards the provision of community services remains limited by their lack of resources. Whilst the SPIR provides the planning framework for such action, reform of local authority finances would seem a necessary prerequisite to any large-scale comprehensive intervention by the new democratic municipal councils in the years to come.

## Concluding Remarks

If we now consider the Can Serra case study within a broader context, it is perhaps possible to pinpoint certain lessons which may be of interest or relevance to those working within similar administrative or developmental frameworks in other countries.

The Can Serra experience strongly suggests that it is unrealistic to view plan-making and plan-implementation as independent, clearly defined stages in a linear model of the planning process. Interdependent decisions are made in the planning and implementation of development at a variety of different levels, involving a multitude of individuals and

agencies. Even once definitely approved, urban plans are often subjected to a series of modifications and changes which, even then, may not accurately monitor or effectively control development on the ground.

Then, the changing role of the local authorities, acting within a rapidly evolving social, political and economic framework, highlights certain aspects of authority intervention of broader significance. Until the mid-seventies, the local authorities in Can Serra generally worked towards the realisation of the developmental objectives of the property developers. Despite the loose imposition of certain constraints and controls by the local council, scant regard was paid to the letter of existing planning law, indeed, the acceptance and approval of quasi-legal plans and planning mechanisms became a pawn in the bargaining process undertaken with private sector developers. With the emergence of the residents' association, however, and the popular and professional support they generated, the local council tended to switch its allegiance, seemingly almost overnight, to the realisation of the more socially acceptable planning objectives put forward by the residents. These included the immediate curtailment of speculative residential development which the council and the Sub-Regional Authority had previously permitted or even, at times it appeared, encouraged.

It would appear then, that to view local authority intervention in terms of black and white will rarely accurately represent reality. Rather, authority activity, constantly evolving at different levels and through time, can more realistically be seen to fluctuate within a spectrum made up of shades of grey; and a multiplicity of internal *and external* factors and influences will contribute towards the end product at any one time.

One of these external factors is likely to be the strength of popular support or opposition to any particular plan or policy. In the early seventies, Can Serra residents successfully stepped up their campaign against the development of "La Carpa", demanding at the same time that the provision of service infrastructure in the zone be improved. The experience brings home the point that local authority planning initiatives which fail to take into account the opinions and preferences of residents are, in the long run, unlikely to be successful. In Can Serra this lesson was learned the hard way; it is to be hoped that this example may help others to avoid the same pitfalls.

Finally, and connected with the above, local authorities must clearly be provided with the necessary financial resources to confront the problems associated with rapid development. Without it, approved plans and regulations cannot act as effective instruments in the planning and control of urban growth, and the authority itself cannot play a leading role in this process. In Can Serra, the local council still lacks adequate resources to effectively fulfil its attributed planning and control functions. The past decade has nevertheless seen significant changes towards the necessary devolution of power and resource allocation, and it must be hoped that in Spain, and elsewhere, events will continue to move in this direction.

## Notes

1. The standard procedure in Spain for the approval of Municipal or Local Plans was established by the Planning Act of 1956. After reports by the Municipal Authorities (Technical Section, Relevant Committees, etc.) the plan is *initially* approved by the Full Council. It is then submitted to the public Information Stage for one month via announcements on the Council notice board and in the Official Bulletin of the Province. Those whose property is affected by the plan are notified individually by post. During the Public Information Stage anyone may consult the plans and accompanying documentation in the Council Offices and consequent appeals or observations may be presented to the Council. These are then considered by the Municipal Authorities and changes made accordingly. The Council then *provisionally* approve the plan and forward it, along with the appeals or observations, to the Provincial or Sub-Regional Planning Authority (in this case, the Greater Barcelona Planning Commission) for *definitive* approval. Only once the definitive approval is given is the plan executive. Against such decisions appeal may be made to the relevant Planning Authority and to the Provincial Tribunal (appeal court). If there are no appeals in the Public Information Stage, a provisional approval by the Council is not necessary and the plan goes directly to the higher authority.
2. The Floor Space Ratio (*Coeficiente de Edificación*) is the number of square metres of built floor space per square metre of ground space.
3. Under the "co-operative system" of development, (Articles 115-120 of the 1956 Planning Act), landowners are responsible for the provision of basic service infrastructure, essentially concerning roads, the construction and surfacing, paving, street lighting, drainage, sewage, tree planting, etc., which was to be ceded, free of charge, to the Council once completed.
4. See Note 1 above.
5. In accordance with articles 11 and 63-67 of the 1956 Planning Act a Roads and Service Plan (*Proyecto de Urbanización*) had to be drawn up to plan roads, pavements, sewage and drainage systems, street lighting, etc., if these did not exist prior to house construction. In theory this infrastructure should have been completed before house construction started, but in the peripheral growth of Barcelona in the '60s this was rarely the case.
6. See Note 3 above.
7. Under the "cession of road areas system" of development (Articles 129 and 130 of the 1956 Planning Act) the land areas designated for road and associated service infrastructure are ceded, free of charge, to the Council, which then undertakes to provide this infrastructure but can levy "special contributions" from developers to cover the bulk of the expense.
8. See Note 1 above.
9. The concept of "Special Plan of Interior Reform" had been introduced in the Planning Reform Act of 1975 for "... the provision of urban and community services" (Article 23.)

10. The first draft of the Revision of the Barcelona Sub-Regional Plan was initially approved in March 1974 and used as a rough guideline by the planning officers of Hospitalet Council in drawing up the SPIR for Can Serra.

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