Students Reinventing Cities

Passages & Covered Walkways of Ciutat Vella, Barcelona

08001, South-East Barcelona

The Ciutat Vella district is located in the heart of Barcelona and encapsulates the city's history. **The area was constricted by mediaeval walls** until 1859 and is currently surrounded by Cerdà's Expansion Plan, the city's port, the beaches and the sea. This district is located in the southeast of Barcelona.

The project proposals **should analyse the spaces defined as passages and covered walkways**, with the aim of **identifying those that are currently in a situation of degradation due to minor and marginal uses**. Despite being in the city centre, many of these spaces have become neglected, inaccessible, unsanitary and unsafe, especially at night.

Through **urban design elements and other strategies**, the proposals should enhance the physical space, as well as promote new uses that improve the current dynamics. **'Passages'** are defined as **narrow corridors between two streets** that often have a strong commercial character but can also be residual spaces. **'Covered walkways'** are the result of buildings being **constructed above the street**, limiting the perception of their public character.

In Ciutat Vella, there are several types of passages: some are roads that have been **interrupted** *(C/ del Malnom)*, others used by **businesses** (such as the Pje. del Crédito or the Pje. del Reloj in the Gothic Quarter), created around **factories and the transport of goods** (Pje. Sert, C. de Sant Vicenç, C. Talleres o Pje. Bernardí Martorell).

Some of the passages and covered walkways in the district are located in the **Raval neighbourhood**, the **'new-old' town** which, in the past, was located between the first and second city's medieval walls before Cerdà's Expansion Plan. For this reason, the city's first **factory houses** were built here and the neighbourhood became a **growing area**, creating different passages and covered walkways.

A different case is the **Barceloneta neighbourhood,** which was **completely designed in 1718 with a regular urban plan** to house the population displaced by the construction of the Ciutadella. Later on, the **construction of covered passages** was proposed on **Almirall Cervera Street**. These structures, **more modern** than those in the district's other neighbourhoods, **were built between 1950 and 1970**, giving them **distinct physical characteristics** compared to other passages and covered walkways in the area.

There is no specific site, as the aim of this challenge is for students to **identify the spaces most in need of intervention.** The project proposals must contribute to the **improvement of the public space by converting the current inadequate realities into new ones**, taking into account the **high density** of the area and the strong historical legacy of the Ciutat Vella district.





Figures 1 and 2: Aerial and ground view on Malnom Street Source: Google Earth

Approx. site area

- **Study area**: Ciutat Vella district.
- **Intervention spaces**: Covered walkways, passages, or corners. The proposals will need to focus on **specific spaces** – covered walkways and passages – but must be aware of the impact they will have on their **urban surroundings**. They can also take advantage of adjacent spaces to enhance the project.

Key Information

- **Population:** 111.262 inhabitants; compared to 1.6 million inhabitants in Barcelona
- **Density:** 25.689 people/km^2, compared to 16.339 people/km^2 in Barcelona.
- **Average income per person:** €12,832 compared to €16,750 average in Barcelona.
- **Social diversity:** 54% foreign population; compared to 13.8% average in Barcelona.

Priority areas & main expectations

In their proposals, teams should focus on::

- Activate these spaces by improving their **visibility and connection**.
- **Create healthy and safe public spaces** that improve energy efficiency and allow air to circulate more easily between buildings,
- **Maintaining and enhancing the value** of the Ciutat Vella's historical past.
- Seek new solutions to **integrate green, permeable and sustainable spaces.**



Figure 3: Orthophoto of the studio site with some areas of interest shaded Source: Google Earth



Figure 4: Aerial view of the study site Source: Google Earth

Historical Evolution

To understand Ciutat Vella's history, it is essential to know the different stages and transformations that have led it to its present-day form.

We begin with the Roman wall of ancient Barcelona, Barcino. The city was founded in the 1st century BC and its first wall was built, which was expanded over the following centuries.

Later, thanks to Barcelona's commercial and demographic growth, the **first medieval expansion** took place in the 13th century, when the walls were extended. During this period, the Rambla stream became a natural boundary, and no wall was yet built in the area of the Rec Comtal.

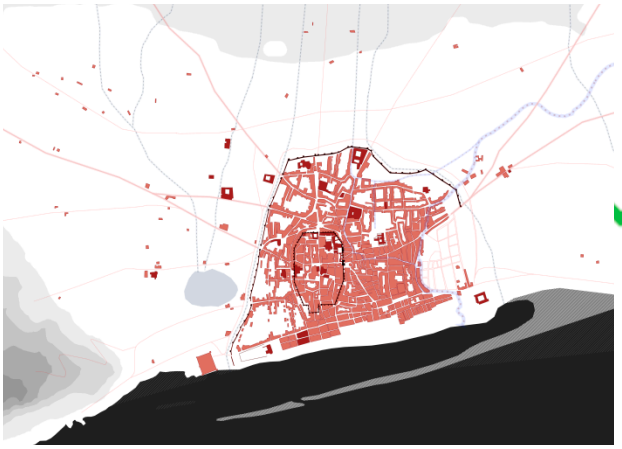
Shortly afterwards, urban growth continued, leading to the **second medieval expansion** in the 14th century, further extending the walls to encompass new areas such as El Raval. For this reason, although El Raval is a neighbourhood within Ciutat Vella, it is referred to as the "new city" of the old city.

Finally, in the 19th century, the medieval walls, which had been limiting urban growth, were demolished. This allowed for the construction of Cerdà's **Eixample**, leaving the heart of Barcelona as the district of Ciutat Vella.

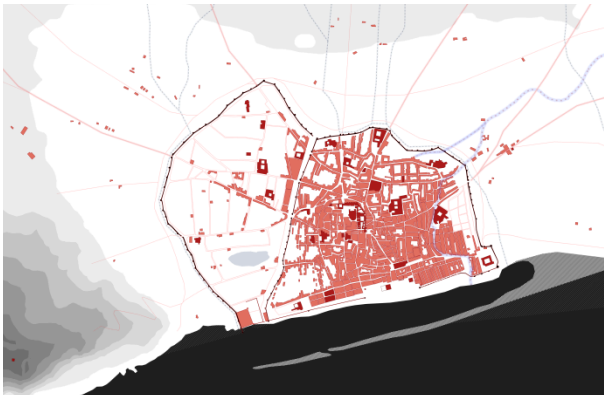
Map of Barcelona in 14 BC.



Map of Barcelona in 1300.



Map of Barcelona in 1400.



Map of Barcelona in 1920.



Figure 5) Expansion of Ciutat Vella. Source: Museu d'Història de Barcelona

Cerdà's Plan responded to the city's growing needs by creating more space for urban growth and addressing poor living conditions and health concerns within the walled city.

Since then, proposals for reform in this district have been varied, some of a *Haussmannian* nature and others of a *regenerationist* or *conservationist* type. These reforms included modifying the urban grid to create **new straight roads** –such as **Via Laietana**–, **reconstructing buildings and creating new spaces that mimic medieval design**- such as the **Plaça Sant Felip Neri**.

More recently, urban reforms and interventions –under the regulations of the **PERI del Raval**– have created **new facilities** in the urban fabric, such as squares in strategic places, like the construction of the **MACBA** and adjacent open spaces or the opening up of the **Rambla del Raval**.

As we can see, there are many ways of intervening in a historic urban space. Currently, the latest urban interventions in Ciutat Vella –such as the reform of **les Rambles**– are being carried out under the **Pla de Barris**, an ambitious programme that seeks to address both the urban social and economic needs of the area.

Urban reforms in the district have focused on **creating new facilities, squares and green public spaces**; the intervention and expansion of pedestrian areas and the promotion of sustainable mobility; the restoration of heritage buildings and the improvement of sanitation and lighting infrastructures to achieve **healthier and safer spaces**.

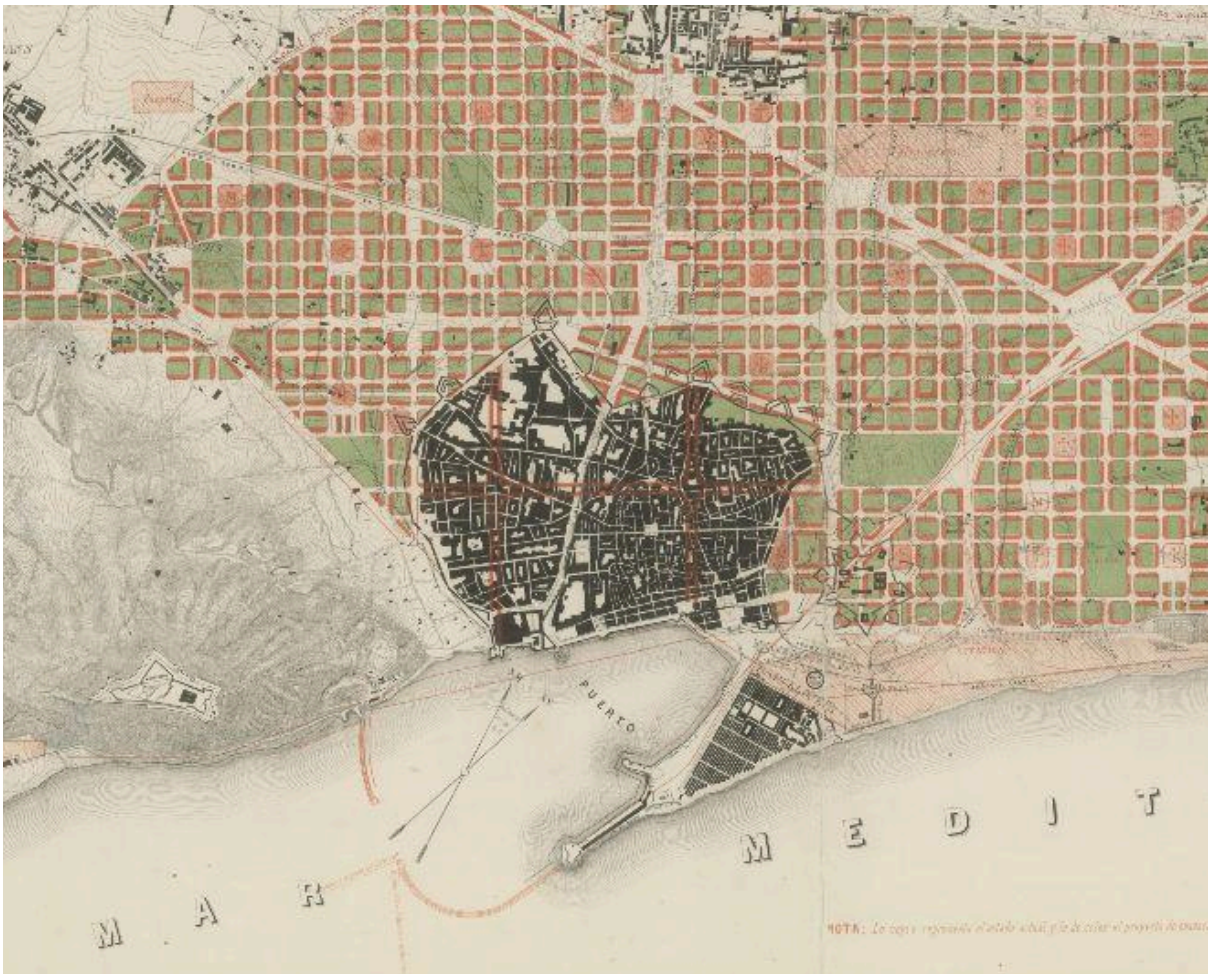


Figure 6) Plan of Barcelona and its surroundings. Source Barcelona Historical Archives

Description of the Urban Space

The morphology of the district is a consequence of the city's two-thousand-year-old history. This is reflected in the urban grid with **narrow streets**, **discontinuities**, i**ntersections of all kinds**, **residual spaces**, and **irregular squares**.

Nowadays, with current urban regulations, most of the streets and spaces in the Ciutat Vella district are not conceivable. Despite this, many of these spaces and squares are corners that we like to walk through, that **tell us stories of the past** and that fascinate us with their architecture.

This competition aims to collect ideas on how to **improve passages and walkways** in the district. To do so, it is essential to value the area's attributes but also to **consider how certain complex spaces can create problems**, such as dead ends, stairways, passages, and porches.

The narrow and irregular typology of these streets makes them very shaded, with corners, nooks and crannies, that make them unsafe and dirty.

This competition seeks to provide an outlet and look for alternatives for urban improvement through **intervention in covered walkways and passages**.

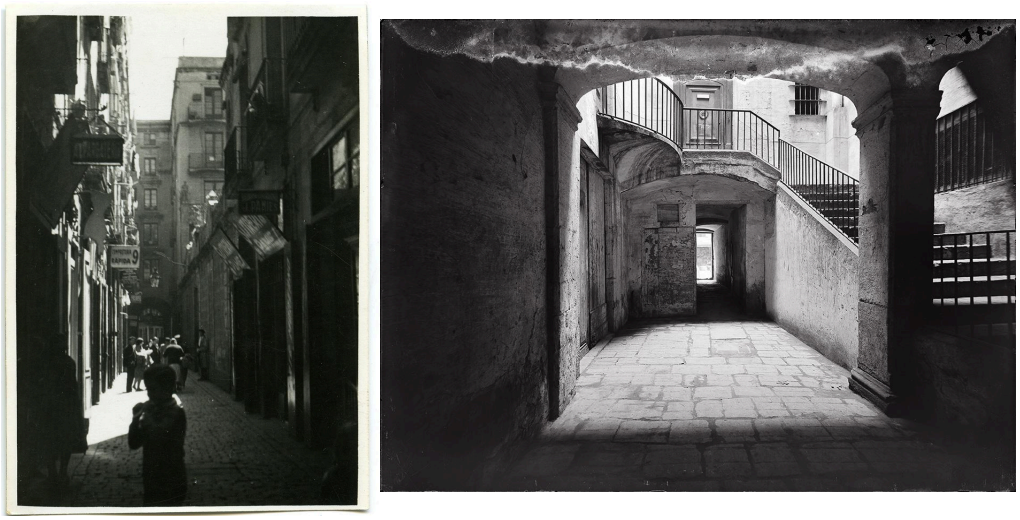


Figure 7) Historical photographs of the passage between Bernadí Martorell (1934) and the passage between C/ Basea and C/ Tarongeta (1908).



Figure 8) Photographs of the streets dels Pescadors, Volta dels Tamborets, Volta d'en Colomines, and les Penedides.

Recently, the district has conducted a **detailed identification of covered passages and some walkways**, classifying them as **public or private**. Different interventions are being considered to improve these covered walkways and passages, and this contest should serve to provide ideas to the City Council.

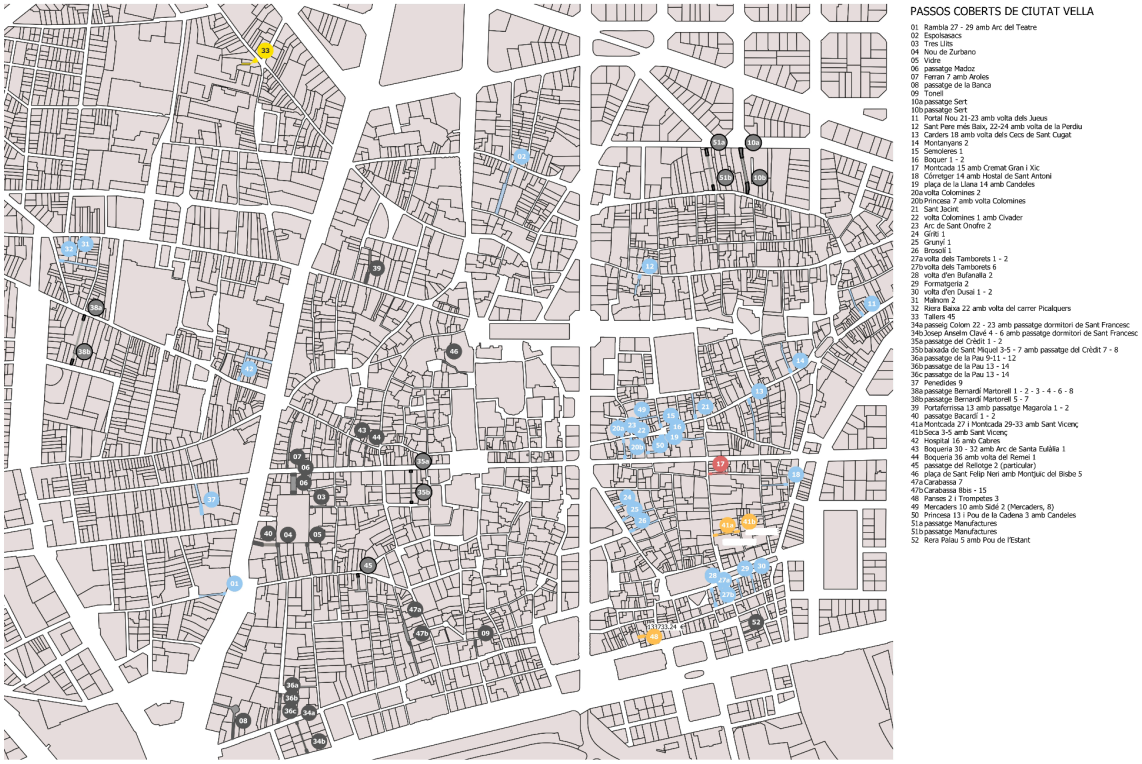


Figure 9) Identification of covered passages and walkways | Ajuntament de Barcelona

City Climate Priorities and Environmental Challenges

Barcelona is a coastal city on the Mediterranean Sea bordering the Collserola mountain range and the Besós and Llobregat rivers. The environmental conditions are typical of the Mediterranean climate and set the city's main climate challenges: heat waves, hot nights, torrential rain, biodiversity loss and drought.

The city is committed to the well-being of its citizens. Therefore, new urban proposals should aim for a **multifunctional, efficient and compact city** that improves residents' quality of life. Consequently, urban planning regulations should seek **sustainable solutions in urban, socio-economic and environmental aspects**.

Barcelona aspires to give neighbourhoods and streets back to their residents, creating **public spaces to share, socialise and enjoy**. For this reason, regenerating the city must incorporate safe meeting spaces, boost the local economies and promote neighbourhood life.

Thus, all participants are encouraged to seek creative solutions that are sensitive to the population but also to the climate and energy resources. In short, urban planning and architecture should reflect climate ambition.

Within the framework of sustainable development for Barcelona and in the context of the Ciutat Vella, the most relevant points for students to consider are:

- Consolidate a **clean and safe street network**.
- Create **meeting spaces** and encourage interaction between citizens and neighbourhoods.
- **Reactivate local commerce** and the local economic fabric.
- Seek solutions for the integration of **green infrastructure**.
- Improve the **accessibility** of public space.
- Enrich the **cultural diversity** of the neighbourhood.
- Consider a **gender-inclusive perspective**.
- Promote street uses that create safe, **mixed-use public spaces** that guarantee that the population can meet their needs within a **15-minute** walk from their homes.
- Increase resilience to extreme weather events and provide **weather shelters**.

Planning Rules and Regulations

Due to the unique urban nature of the district, Ciutat Vella has multiple urban planning ordinances and plans, such as, for example, the **Neighborhood Plan** and the **Proximity and Courtyards Program,** which seeks to renovate neglected spaces throughout the city to bring out the green and benefit the health of the neighbours in order to reduce the impact of heat in the current context of climate change.

Planning these areas should be rethought to improve the connection with the surrounding fabric, without losing their historic character. Existing areas should be redesigned to align with the vision of the city, but adapted to current technologies and existing uses. For more specific urban planning information about Barcelona, please consult the **BCN Urban Panning Information Portal.**

Language Requirements

Proposals must be submitted in Spanish, English or Catalan.