Barcelona is now widely known as one leader in innovative planning in the world. Internationally, it is celebrated for its accessible open space and walkability. It has survived the economic, environmental and social changes of the last decades through focusing upon the provision of great urban spaces that centralize activity on a variety of scales: city, neighborhood, and within each block. In short, Barcelona has been transformed into a city that provides an example of how to facilitate increasing density while maintaining a livable and relatively compact city.

Some of the guiding principles of Barcelona’s urban planning include:

• Focusing the creation of public amenities in delapitated neighborhoods first,
• Orienting the city back to the Medeteranian Sea by creating access and usable beaches,
• Provide adequate public facilities to every neighborhood
• Reuse of brownfields sustainable planning,
• Restricting urban sprawl by focusing on redevelopment rather than new development,
• Reclaiming famous inner courtyards that act as open space within each block

“No one can survive merely by conservation. If there is no new construction, the city cannot stand; not even the old will endure.
-Pasqual Maragall, Mayor of Barcelona 1982-97

source: gettyimages.com

The Complete Integrated City

context

source: bacelona-home.com
The foundation for Barcelona's transformation has been the city's Eixample district, a series of 520 street blocks planned on a grid with major boulevards cutting through the pattern at 45 degree angles. The visionary urban planner Ildefons Cerdá worked on the design for twenty years and has been an example to planners ever since the 1860 plan was implemented. Its high quality architecture, attention to community green space on large and small scales, and ease of access have stood the test of time and still provide a city that people from around the world love to visit.

**Essential Planning Timeline**
- 1860 - Walls surrounding Barcelona demolished to make way for Ildefons Cerdá's Plan for Urban Renewal
- 1975 - End of Fraquismo and beginning of democracy
- 1976 - General Metropolitan Plan Implemented
- 1979 - First democratic municipal elections were celebrated
- 1980's - City is transformed in preparation for the 1992 Olympics
- 1980 - Architect Oriol Bohigas arrived in the city council
- 1983 - The inauguration of public spaces started
- 1982-92 - More than 490 acres of park had been gained (while 40 years of Franco produced only 172 acres)

**City Statistics**
- City Population: 1,582,000 (2003)
- City Area: 101 km2
- Density Level: 14.9 people / km2

**Governing bodies:**
- City of Barcelona
- Barcelona City Council
Urban Renewal

The major catalyst of the modern transformation of Barcelona in the eighties to the present was the 1992 Olympics. With the end of a long dictatorship known as Franquismo, the city took advantage of its new found democracy as the Urban Social Movement began. Faced with serious problems of urban decay in both inner and peripheral districts, planners used the Games to gain enough funding to complete an amount of reconstruction that would take any city decades to accomplish.

Olympic facilities were built on neglected urban areas, with the Olympic Village, developed on brownfields close to the coast. The rail lines that cut and divided the city from the sea were opened and for the first time in its history, Barcelona has been able to turn and face the sea with pride. Six artificial beaches were created to handle the capacity of tourists that would be in the city for the upcoming Games.

This change was championed by one planner in particular, Oriol Bohigas, who used the Games as a springboard to build more than two hundred parks, plazas, schools, and other public facilities in Barcelona. Most of these amenities were inserted into derelict areas where crime was high. In one area in particular, El Rival, buildings were retrofitted to house a modern museum, police station, and other amenities.

“…getting the authorities to give us a set of traffic lights meant forty days of barricades and stopping cars coming into the district where four or five fatal accidents had taken place” - Avelina Perez

Progression over three centuries

sources:
historiccities.huji.ac
www.cesca.es
http://www.bcn.es/22@bcn/

Olympic games 1992
source: preview.britannica.co.kr
Lessons Learned

Open city to waterfront
During the eighties, the city of Barcelona realized the value of their position on Mediterranean. Until then, they had been dumping contaminants into the sea and making it unusable for the people. Also, there were rail lines that followed the shoreline and made a barrier from the city. They determined to redirect the rail lines and to create six artificial beaches in preparation for the Olympics.

Get your priorities straight
During the incredible revitalization in the eighties, the city prioritized the creation and reconstruction of public amenities. The city worked fast and were able to gain the approval of the community through smart planning.

Sustainable development
The topography in Barcelona has kept the city fairly compact. This has been beneficial for sustainability and has forced planners to look for creative ways to reuse much of the infrastructure. As heavy industry and shipping become less prevalent, the city has taken advantage of industrial sites for development. Right now much of the sea front in being claimed for a new high technology center with an emphasis on open space and parks.

Las Ramblas: One of Barcelona’s great Boulevards

In a city known for great public spaces, Las Ramblas could be the greatest of them all. With a variety of cafes, shops, and markets, tourists are presented with endless entertainment. There are a huge number of pedestrians and people-watchers, and enough street performers and artists to attract even the local Catalans. About 1.5 kilometers long, Las Ramblas are really a series of three pedestrian-oriented boulevards that link the city to the waterfront. Its central pedestrian promenade is unique in that it is wide enough to be lined on either side by seating for restaurants, or a flower stand while leaving abundant space to fit hundreds of people. Towering street trees and adequate seating are also pluses.

The street is lined with five-to-seven-story buildings, and the central walkway is, on average, 60 feet wide. The sidewalks are usually less than 10 feet wide, encouraging walking in the center. Pedestrians have precedence while cars are restricted to narrow lanes on either side of the promenade and must accommodate pedestrians at every intersection.

Artists, musicians, and magicians all flock to Las Ramblas to try and awe and amaze those passing by. People are constantly strolling up and down the promenade at any time of day to catch something new and interesting. This is truly a great public space and is full of life and community. The lesson here is to rethink how we prioritize cars and start accommodating the pedestrian. This is what creates community.

“Barcelona is absolutely a world class city. From its architecture to its boulevards to its parks, it is a vast, diverse, center of culture and entertainment. It literally pulsates with energy.” -Fred Kent (Project for Public Spaces)
Lessons Learned

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Resources

City of Barcelona Urban Planning Site
http://www.bcn.es/urbanisme/

Project for Public Spaces
www.pps.org

Current Urban Planning in Barcelona
http://www.bcn.es/22@bcn/engl/presentacion/

Barcelona Forum 2004
http://www.barcelona2004.org/eng/

Urban Planning field study on Barcelona
http://geographyfieldwork.com/barcelona.htm


The Complete Integrated City

Las Ramblas source: pps.org

Guadi source: crystalcanyons.net

source: azuradec.typepad.com/photos/barcelona