INCLUSIVE SUSTAINABILITY FOR EL RAVAL, BARCELONA:
Gathering perspectives from first-generation immigrants and planning professionals

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INCLUSIVE SUSTAINABILITY FOR EL RAVAL, BARCELONA: GATHERING PERSPECTIVES FROM FIRST-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS AND PLANNING PROFESSIONALS

by

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We accept this project as conforming to the required standard

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the autumn of 2013, I undertook fieldwork for this project in El Raval, Barcelona, involving interviews with first-generation immigrant residents and professionals in the fields of planning and architecture. El Raval is Barcelona’s most dense neighborhood, with the highest concentration of non-EU citizen residents in the city. The neighborhood has a long history of diversity as well as marginalization. This work seeks to explore El Raval’s ongoing struggles and existing strengths, to envisage contextualized, culturally inclusive planning for sustainability. The project is meant to inform the planning practice of BCNEcología, Barcelona’s urban ecology agency.

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This project would be meaningless without the friendliness and generosity shared by the interview participants: Pere, Salvador, Rosey, Valentina, Saima, Imran, Alisohe, and Ramandeep. Because of their willingness to share time, space, and mint tea, the exploratory research adventure that preceded the preparation of this report was both eye-opening and fun.

I would like to thank my project supervisor, Michael Leaf, for his support throughout the development of this project. His expertise on migration, development, and international planning issues, along with his flexible support throughout periods of indecision, were instrumental in setting the foundations for this project. I would also like to thank my second reader, Jordi Honey-Roses, for his patient and thorough guidance throughout the preparation of this report, his insightful critiques, and for the suggestions for both learning and leisure that he provided during the fieldwork period.
CHAPTER 1: ENTERING EL RAVAL

1.1 Inspiration behind the inquiries

The morning of Saturday, October 12th, 2013 was the fiesta nacional de España, celebrating the cultural and linguistic consolidation of the state of Spain. I woke with an agenda on my mind: purchase a liter of yogurt for upcoming breakfasts; warm up with a café con leche; collect some small oranges for juicing. After exiting the antique caged elevator onto the street, I heard a steady roll—unseen helicopters. East of my apartment in the quiet barrio of Sant Antoni, a patriotic demonstration of thousands was taking place in Sants-Mont Juic, celebrating Spanish national identity. As a contra-effort, supporters of Catalan independence—who at their most extreme positions see Spanish nationalism as fascist imperialism in disguise—provoked this organized demonstration of national pride by also showing up in thousands.

This noisy gathering was invisible to me, due to the immutable geometry of the Barcelona grid (large, truncated neighborhood blocks occupied by tall apartment buildings, conceived and implemented by Catalan urban planner Ildefons Cerda near the end of the 19th century). Avoiding the demonstrations to the west, to which I had no claim for involvement, I made my way east to the once infamous central neighborhood of El Raval. I slow my pace, turning on whims down narrow cobbled streets that seem comparatively muted, but in fact are quietly humming with the calm activity of a normal day. I am surrounded by the tranquility of a community of extranjeros, people equally removed from the national identity conflict to the west, though perhaps facing their own struggles with identity in connection to place.

Here in the east, I can purchase homemade yogurt at the Halal deli: all-natural and sold at the friendly price of 1.20 euro per liter. I gather 700 grams of small oranges for 70 cents. These visits fulfill a dual purpose: finding affordable groceries, and paying visits to the local shop owners who I hope to interview for my final master’s project. On these almost daily excursions into El Raval, I’m elated at being recognized. I relish in the sense of belonging and acceptance offered by a community of people who have also left faraway homes. I spend some time chatting with Sohail, a Bangladeshi around my age who works at the narrow slit of a bar where I stop for my café con leche. When we chat, other regulars of the bar ask where I’m from, and I usually receive reactions which, in my eyes, are a showering of compliments: “You don’t look American at all!”, “But you have an Italian accent in Spanish!”, “You look Spanish!”, “You look Italian!”. In Barcelona, Spain, or Europe in general, I can blend in, while the immigrant residents of El Raval are clearly distinguished by their ethnicities, their accents, even their occupations.

What does this distinction mean for their daily lives? While I am a transient international student, checking off the enviable stint in Barcelona like many other young Europeans, they are investing their lives in this neighborhood and this country. While the Catalan people sort out their sovereignty in relation to the state of Spain, with which culture can or should the immigrants of El Raval integrate? How do they identify themselves in relation to the city? And what kind
of city do they envision for themselves? These questions sparked the elaboration of this professional planning report.

1.2 Overview of the neighborhood

To reinforce the anecdote above, I will provide some background information on El Raval prior to explaining the aims of this project. El Raval is and has been perceived as a neighborhood of marginality since its origins. Yet the spatial reality shows otherwise: El Raval is located at the core of the modern city of Barcelona. The neighborhood occupies an area of 1.1 square kilometers, or 1% of the total metropolitan area of Barcelona, and over one-quarter of the historical city center known as Ciutat Vella (“Old City”) (Barri el Raval 2011). The neighborhood is divided, in terms of aesthetics and urban planning, between the North Raval and the South Raval. North Raval, from Carrer de l'Hospital to Ronda de Sant Antoni, is characterized by the presence of the University of Barcelona (UB), the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA), the Boquería food market (which serves as a significant tourist attraction), as well as a notable diversity of artistic, culinary, and shopping attractions. South Raval, from Carrer de l'Hospital south towards the sea, has been noted as having more controversial attractions for entertainment as well as more crime due to its proximity to the ports (Sargatal 2001). Yet it is also home to the Rambla del Raval, a public space that is increasingly popular with tourists and locals alike, as well as various community centers, schools, hotels, theatres, libraries, and bars.

In 2011, there were 48,485 residents of El Raval, comprising 3% of Barcelona’s total metropolitan area population, and 47% of the Ciutat Vella district population (Barri el Raval 2011). El Raval contains a larger share of the metropolitan population with respect to the area occupied (3% population on 1% land area), suggesting a concentration of density in the neighborhood. In fact, average density in 2011 was 44,000 inhabitants per square kilometer—significantly higher than the district’s average of 24,000 inhabitants, and the city’s average of 16,000 inhabitants per square kilometer (Barri el Raval 2011).

Over 50% of the neighborhood’s residents were born outside of Spain, and at least half of these remain foreign nationals (Barri el Raval 2011; Subirats and Rius 2005:33). Estimates for foreign nationals are conservative because of the purported large numbers of undocumented immigrants. The proportions of registered foreign nationals are significantly higher than those found in the overall Ciutat Vella district as well as throughout the city of Barcelona (Barri el Raval 2011). Foreign residents are evenly distributed throughout El Raval, and the presence of registered foreign nationals never reaches below 14% in any given area of the neighborhood (Subirats and Rius 2005:33).

After foreigners, the neighborhood is dominated by Catalan people from Barcelona or outside, who represent 32.1% of the population (Barri el Raval 2011). The remaining 13% are Spaniards from outside of Catalonia (Barri el Raval 2011). Notably, El Raval has the highest proportion (41.08%) of elderly residents (age 65+) in the Ciutat Vella (Albin-Amiot 2006).

El Raval is characterized as having the lowest socioeconomic indicators among other neighborhoods in the city of Barcelona (Fundació tot Raval). The
historical legacy of the neighborhood as well as its more recent planning history, and ongoing transformative forces, will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

CHAPTER 2: AIMS OF THE PROJECT

2.1 Major questions and goals

The investigative fieldwork that produced the data to inform this report was carried out in El Raval, Barcelona, between October and November of 2013. This project stems from an interest in planning in a globalized, migratory world, in which distinct cultures interact within the territory of a particular city. The identity of a city is constructed, and the presence of diversity throughout its streets is often shrouded by the municipality’s chosen image: particularly in terms of bolstering the touristic phenomenon of Barcelona.

The goal of this work is not to characterize the immigrant experience in Barcelona, nor to compare immigrant perspectives on the neighborhood with professional perspectives. Instead, a joint analysis of first-generation immigrant perspectives with the perspectives of planning and architecture professionals is executed, in order to better inform future projects in the neighborhood. Deeper insight is sought simply through the exploration of multiple opinions. It is believed that the multiple perspectives considered in this project can inspire more inclusive planning projects, and can inform a more inclusive planning ideology, in order to guide the continuing evolution and flourishing of El Raval.

The project was also conceived out of a general inspiration that I experienced while living on the outskirts of El Raval during a two-month graduate program exchange at the University of Barcelona.

Ideas for this project formulated around the relative absence of multicultural approaches to urban planning in cities of immigration. This extended into the quest to define inclusive sustainability. I have a tendency to critique existing paradigms, including the paradigms of sustainability and sustainable development, which are increasingly embraced as solutions to human struggles throughout the world. This work thus seeks to address the complexity of planning for sustainability in a multicultural society, and particularly, in a dense neighborhood with a high concentration of immigrants.

An important preface to this work is the acknowledgement of countless studies on El Raval, and specifically immigration in El Raval, that have been written in various languages. While not every book could be referenced, and some of the Catalan sources were beyond my reading capacity, this work launches off of the existing abundance of social science research about El Raval. It is geared specifically toward planning for an inclusive, sustainable future.

2.2 BCNEcología

The chosen client for this professional report is BCNEcologíà, Barcelona’s urban ecology agency. This agency was formed in 2001 through a public consortium between the Ajuntament de Barcelona, the Barcelona metropolitan region (partially governed by a union of municipalities), and the provincial council. The organization’s primary aim is to promote more sustainable management of
the city by incorporating the tenets of ecology and whole-systems thinking. The agency manages and implements projects by providing administrative support; it also carries out research to analyze and quantify the technical feasibility of urban project proposals.

An institutional agreement allows BCNEcología to develop their work not only in the territorial region of those institutions, but also throughout the world: the agency’s funding is sustained by the 85% projects carried out under contracts for other cities around the world. However, the agency aims to carry out strategic projects that other consultant groups cannot take on, incorporating new concepts, methodologies, and instruments that permit grand changes in cities.

Further information about the client and their ongoing and past projects can be found on their website, [www.bcnecologia.net](http://www.bcnecologia.net).

After interviewing the organization’s founder for the purposes of a research study, I entered into an agreement upon which the research results (constituting this report) would be provided as an informative report to BCNEcologia. Thus, one of the interview participants of this work is in fact the client for which this report is prepared.

**CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORY AND PLANNING OF EL RAVAL**

### 3.1 Historical legacy of marginalization

El Raval’s historical transformations have been reflected in its varying names throughout the centuries, and in fact these names have led El Raval full circle in terms of its identity: Moorish occupation of Spain after Roman times dubbed the neighborhood “rabad”, Arabic for suburb, which later evolved into “arrabal” (Horta 2010:53; Sargatal 2001). During this era, El Raval constituted an open area adjacent to the city center, on which land was cultivated to grow food (“El barrio del Raval”). The extant monastery of Sant Pau del Camp was constructed in the 10th century, surrounded by a small village (Sargatal 2001). When Barcelona’s medieval city walls were erected in the 13th century, El Raval remained outside. In the 14th century, the walls were extended to include El Raval as a security measure amidst urban growth: the area was seen as vital to the city’s food production (Sargatal 2001).

With the onset of 18th century industrialization throughout Europe, sites of production related to the textile industry began to emerge within the agrarian zone of El Raval, attracting the first wave of immigrants from other parts of Catalonia (Sargatal 2001). As a result, El Raval became Europe’s most dense neighborhood, as immigrants claimed unused industrial spaces for places of residence (Sargatal 2001). Full urbanization took place in the 19th century: housing was constructed atop old agrarian spaces, and density grew in the form of narrow, rectilinear street grids lacking plazas or open spaces (Sargatal 2001). In 1859, the medieval walls came down, spreading industrial expansion to the outskirts, facilitating El Raval’s transformation into a more residential neighborhood, peripheral to the urban nucleus (Sargatal 2001).

By the 1920s, initial waves of Chinese immigration transformed the neighborhood, and particularly South Raval, into “Barrio Xino”, (“Chinese
Neighborhood") (Horta 2010:53). This nickname was coined at a lecture in which the neighborhood was compared to the Chinatowns of large international cities like New York (Sargatal 2001), and its use has carried forth until the present day, although it is increasingly less accurate in terms of characterizing El Raval’s modern population. In the early 20th century, North Raval was characterized by industrial activities and “better urban planning”, while South Raval, or Barrio Xino, was where crime, prostitution, and drinking were more prevalent, perhaps due to proximity to the ports (Sargatal 2001).

By 1930 the neighborhood was recorded to contain a density of 103,000 inhabitants per square kilometer (Sargatal 2001)—more than double the present-day density. Subsequent waves of immigration followed in the 20th century: as Barrio Xino became El Raval, the neighborhood’s name returned to its Arabic roots in concert with the arrival of Middle Eastern and North African immigrants.

By the 1960s, the equivalent of North American “white flight” occurred in El Raval, as continued degradation and increased crime and drug use resulted in the continued inhabitance of “only those who couldn’t afford to leave” (Sargatal 2001). While Spain’s economy modernized more fully in the 1980s, the neighborhood continued to lose population due to its negative reputation (Sargatal 2001). El Raval was known for “basic structural deficits” along with a gamut of social problems such as crime and drug dependency (Subirtas and Rius 2005:12). This infamy carried El Raval into the 1990s, when a series of municipal efforts transformed the neighborhood.

3.2 Recent physical planning history

In 1979, the Plan General de Ordenación Urbana was elaborated for the city of Barcelona, orienting future urban interventions in the Ciutat Vella toward regeneration and rehabilitation (“Urban Development Programme”). The areas of the Barcelona designated for rehabilitation were chosen in October of 1986, during which urban reform for the Ciutat Vella was embodied in an Area of Integrated Renewal (ARI) plan, comprised of a PERI (Plà Especial de Reforma Interior) plan for each neighborhood (“Project Ciutat Vella” 1998; “Urban Development Programme”). At this time, the entire Ciutat Vella was characterized as “one of the most acute islands of social exclusion in Barcelona” (“Project Ciutat Vella” 1998).

In over a decade of efforts, 897 million Euros were spent on rehabilitation throughout the city, 41.6% of which was invested by the Ajuntament de Barcelona (“Urban Development Programme”). The majority of this funding went to the development of public spaces, followed by city infrastructure and housing, respectively (“Urban Development Programme”). The rehabilitation also received financial support from the Spanish central government as well as the Catalan regional government (“Project Ciutat Vella” 1998). It is important to note that financing also took place through the creation of a multilateral organization called PROCIVESA, comprised of real estate, civil engineering, and financing institutions in collaboration with the municipality (“Urban Development Programme”).
By the time it was enacted, the *Ciutat Vella* rehabilitation converged with the construction of the Olympic Village and littoral zone renovations for the 1992 summer Olympics—grand municipal projects that were promoted with the campaign slogan “*Barcelona, posa’t guapa*” (“Barcelona, get pretty”). The overall rehabilitation is referred to as an example of *acupuncture urbanism*, in which targeted urban design interventions are executed in order to transform the broader urban context (Borja 2010:109).

In the mid-nineties, funding was secured for physical regeneration in El Raval, through the Cohesion Fund of the European Union, which aims to reduce social and economic disparities ("Project Ciutat Vella" 1998; “Cohesion Fund”). It was reported that 45.4% of the buildings in El Raval were rehabilitated (Subirats and Rius 2005:13). One notable project was the development of the Rambla del Raval, completed in the year 2000, which demolished five blocks of residential units in order to create a long, tree-lined, rectangular plaza of over 18,000 square meters (Subirats and Rius 2005:13). The residents of more than 1,000 apartments were offered relocation in four publicly subsidized buildings at either end of the plaza (Ingrosso 2011:53). This project is said to have resulted in “urban speculation of grand repercussions”, to be discussed in section 4.2a (Albin-Amiot 2006:1).

The physical transformation was supplemented by the enhancement of social services: new educational and civic facilities; programs for women, children, and the elderly; as well as programs for “socio-cultural adaptation and intercultural mediation” for immigrants (Subirats and Rius 2005:17). The overall process of transformation in El Raval was led in a hierarchical, top-down process, with an aim toward “cleaning up” without consequential expulsion of more vulnerable populations (Subirats and Rius 2005:11).

Towards the end of the rehabilitation process, Barcelona received international recognition for its efforts in the *Ciutat Vella*. The rehabilitation project won the 1998 Dubai Award for Best Practice ("Project Ciutat Vella" 1998). In 1999, Barcelona won the European Sustainable Cities and Towns award (Evans et al 2004:56). Yet by the year 2000, El Raval was still the neighborhood with the highest economic assistance in terms of social welfare services provided by the municipal government (Subirats and Rius 2005:11).
3.3 Current directions in planning

Today, Barcelona is the largest metropolis on the Mediterranean Sea. The city of Barcelona (governed by a city council, known as Ajuntament de Barcelona) is part of the more expansive metropolitan area of Barcelona, which is comprised of various adjacent municipalities. The province of Barcelona is the effective regional government, overseeing 310 local municipal authorities (Evans et al 2004:56).

Barcelona has been recognized as a sustainable city for its achievements under the LA21 framework. Successful achievement under this framework suggests that a city has met certain policy objectives that fit within the ‘Local Authorities’ Initiatives in Support of Agenda 21—in other words, local authorities engage and consult with citizens and organizations in order adopt a Local Agenda 21 (Evans et al 2004:4). In particular, Barcelona succeeded in improving environmental management throughout the province, while policy outcomes to generate economic and social indicators of sustainability were weaker (Evans et al 2004:45,56). In the Ajuntament’s plan for 2012-2015, priorities included increasing green space, promoting sustainable transportation, improving air quality and energy efficiency, and modifying zoning to maintain a balance of
social, economic, and residential spaces in neighborhoods (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2012).

In terms of ongoing planning in El Raval, no significant physical projects were discovered in planning for the neighborhood. The region of Catalonia is currently suffering from fiscal debt and economic depression related to the general European sovereign debt crisis that began in 2008. Scaling this international situation down to Catalonia, frustration over the public debt has created stronger pressure for the Catalan independence movement, which views the national government of Spain as an inequitable distributor of public resources (Abend 2012). The closing of small enterprises and general lack of jobs is marked in Catalonia as a whole. This provides important context for the associated economic situation in El Raval, as well as the governmental capacity to fund current urban projects.

The Ajuntament does have a recent Cultural Plan for El Raval, which seeks to: study potential in the neighborhood for greater use of public space; adjust city streets to create better access to existing public and cultural spaces; and support the implementation of more cultural centers, projects, and events—all in the aim to ensure that “El Raval remains the cultural center of the city in the collective imagination” (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2013).

Yet the neighborhood is still characterized by uncertainty, with pockets of “marked ethnic and social homogeneity” as well as “manifestations of high culture” and “a very significant presence of tourists” (Subirats and Rius 2005:31). The suggestion is that the neighborhood is uniquely dynamic within Barcelona—that there are “many Ravals” (Subirats and Rius 2005). How can professionals involved with El Raval plan in many directions, rather than in one? In order to explore what inclusive, sustainable planning should look like for El Raval, we must first understand who is included in the neighborhood, and how they came to be there.

CHAPTER 4: THE EVOLUTION OF DIVERSITY

4.1 The broader immigration context
   a. The global phenomenon
   
   The key context framing this work is that of immigration, in Barcelona and in Spain, in the Mediterranean, in Europe, and throughout the world. While immigration of the modern era is perceived to be a product of the forces of globalization, it is not novel in our human history, and some go so far as to say that humankind is perpetually nomadic (Rizo García 2004: 24). This ongoing nomadism may be difficult to perceive at the time-scales that our society uses as a frame. Human nomadism is often frozen within the span of a human lifetime, making a person a once-emigrant, once-immigrant, and disguising nomadism under the immigration phenomenon: the relatively concrete (within our time-scale) transformation of a particular place by a particular group of people.

   Academic analyses of migration have led to the development of various explanatory theories for the phenomenon, as well as categories among types of migrants. These include, for example, the internationalization of the capitalist
economy as spurring labor migration; the role of ethnic networks; and the informal and sometimes formal industry that exports immigrant laborers (Sassen 2007). Yet the construction of these theories does not always leave room for the myriad reasons why any particular individual may migrate.

This report does not adhere to one particular theory of international migration in order to explain the presence of immigrants in El Raval. It is important to note that many of the immigrants in this neighborhood may be unidirectional, circular, or stepwise migrants, but that no particular distinction is made among the first generation immigrants who were interviewed. The theoretical summary that best serves this report is that which suggests that the only permanent migration is to the graveyard (Skeldon 1997). As opposed to categories of labor migration such as brain drain, however, El Raval is better characterized as a destination for international low-skill labor migration, and a source of remittances. It is also worth noting that most non-forced migration is demand-driven, and this demand is related to the modern understanding of “development” as framed within the paradigm of economic growth (Skeldon 2008:3-4).

b. Immigration in Spain, Catalonia, and Barcelona

As mentioned previously, El Raval’s demographic proportion of foreigners is much higher than that of its surrounding city district, and of Barcelona as a whole. The principal immigrant groups in the neighborhood as of 2011 were from Pakistan, the Philippines, and Bangladesh (Barri el Raval 2011). With over 5,000 Pakistani immigrants in El Raval, this group also represents the largest proportion of immigrant population in Barcelona as a whole, followed closely by Italians (Barri el Raval 2011).

Within the broader context of immigration in Europe, Spain, among other Mediterranean countries, was primarily a country of emigration until the 1980s, after the relatively rapid period of modernization and economic growth, coupled with a restriction in immigration policies in the north of Europe—resulting in the steady increase of immigration in southern Europe until the present day (Zontini 2010:3; Generalitat 2009:11). The period of modernization leading up to net immigration is also related to the growth of a “thriving informal sector” in Spain that, along with deserted labor positions left by modernization, created an arena of both formal and informal work opportunities for incoming immigrants (Zontini 2010:3).

In recent years, overall immigration in Spain has been characterized by a link with its colonial legacy in Latin America, along with an asymmetrical sex distribution among immigrant groups from particular countries (Zontini 2010:5). For example, Ecuadorian women make up 55.5% of Ecuadorian immigrants to Spain in 2000, while Moroccan men made up 66.3% of the Moroccan population—these two groups representing the largest asymmetric sex distribution (Zontini 2010:5). Among male dominated immigrant groups, it is presumed that these men migrate alone in order to assume low-skilled labor positions (Zontini 2010:6). It is also important to note that Filipino immigrants may represent a large proportion of overall immigration in Spain, yet they can acquire
citizenship rights due to the past colonial relationship between Spain and the Philippines—thus, they are not counted as Filipino immigrants in census (Zontini 2010:6-7). This holds true for Latin American countries previously colonized by Spain, as well. In Catalonia as a whole, Moroccans make up the largest proportion of immigrants (18% in 2008) (Generalitat 2009:19).

Barcelona is the municipality with the largest absolute numbers of immigrants in the region of Catalonia, at 273,175 immigrant residents—yet it contains only the fifth largest proportion of immigrants to total population, at 16.9% (Generalitat 2009:23). So while total immigrant numbers are higher in Barcelona, smaller Catalan municipalities may have higher concentrations. This reflects the powerful immigrant presence in the region of Catalonia as a whole (addressed in regional government policy, as described in the next section).

Zooming the focus into El Raval, immigration has abruptly and notably transformed the neighborhood in the past 30 years, despite the historic presence of Chinese immigrants. In 1991, emigration and immigration rates out of and into the neighborhood were fairly level—yet by 2002, the annual immigration rate had exploded to four times the emigration rate, suggesting remarkable growth in the neighborhood population due to immigration (Subirats and Rius 2005:23).

While over 50% of El Raval’s population is composed of foreign nationals, only 11% of these 20,000 or so foreign nationals are from the EU or OECD countries (Subirats and Rius 2005:36-37). The other 17,000 or so are from “developing” or “less developed” countries. All sources suggest that Pakistani immigrants are most prevalent in the neighborhood, making up over 10% of the total population, followed by Filipinos as the next largest immigrant group. Immigration is credited for improving the housing market, as “previously abandoned or rejected sub-standard housing has reappeared on the market with people being packed into these dwellings” (Subirats and Rius 2005:25). Immigration thus brought a wave of new life into the neighborhood just as it was undergoing directed physical transformation.

In section 1.2, it was suggested that general immigrant presence is evenly spread throughout El Raval—yet this changes when looking at the spatial distribution of specific immigrant groups. For example, Filipinos and Ecuadorians live overwhelmingly in the Riera Alta area of the neighborhood (in the northwest corner) (Subirats and Rius 2005:38). Pakistanis and Moroccans are more evenly distributed (Subirats and Rius 2005). Yet all four of these immigrant groups reside primarily in western areas of El Raval—considered to be “poorer” zones (Subirats and Rius 2005) of less prime real estate, as they are removed from tourist activity near the Opera House and Las Ramblas and constitute the outskirts of the Ciutat Vella district.

As migration networks are reinforced, there is some fear that “frontier dynamics” could develop, with particular streets in El Raval delineating immigrant group territories (Subirats and Rius 2005). Some authors suggest that long-term native residents of the Ciutat Vella are “dispossessed” by the growing presence of immigrants as well as tourists in public spaces (Borja 2010:110). Overall, the immigration phenomenon in El Raval has been viewed as a “strident precedent” for what the rest of Barcelona will face in the future, and a mélange of cultures is
often pitched as the utopian vision for the neighborhood (Subirats and Rius 2005), in which people of mixed ethnicities, socioeconomic classes, professions, and lifestyles can find high quality of life within the 1 square kilometer that is El Raval.

c. Migration policy in Barcelona

It is impossible to focus strictly on immigrant integration at the spatial scale of the city or neighborhood, as regional and national policies have a “profound influence” on integration institutions and frameworks (Sandercock 2003a:319). Following the wave of immigration that began in the 1980s, Spain initiated amnesty laws to grant residency to illegal immigrants in 1991, and also introduced a quota system from 1993-1997 (Zontini 2010:16). Spain as a whole has attempted to shift its policy approach, moving from controlling flows towards more progressive attempts at “integration” of legal residents (Zontini 2010:15).

Catalonia specifically has been regarded as framing immigrants on ethnic terms, emphasizing innate cultural differences (Zontini 2010:10). Yet in the Catalan regional government’s Plan for Citizenship and Immigration 2009-2012, the first point of recognition is that Catalonia is a nation constructed by immigration, recognizing over 250 languages spoken in the region and concluding that the immigrant presence has resulted in a microcosmic “world within Catalonia” (Generalitat 2009:7). Within Catalonia, immigrants composed around 15% of the population in 2009, reflecting a steady proportional increase since 1999 (with a slight drop in actual population numbers in 2008 due to the economic crisis) (Generalitat 2009:12-13).

Yet the regional government also separates distinct categories of citizenship and immigration when taking census: there is a difference between

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>4,465</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipines</td>
<td>3,350</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marroc</td>
<td>1,788</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>1,352</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equador</td>
<td>1,120</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itàlia</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolívia</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Índia</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>França</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>República Dominicana</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resta de Nacionalitats</td>
<td>5,785</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21,499</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: 2007 Data on Immigrant Residents in El Raval from the Ajuntament de Barcelona Department of Statistics
people who maintain foreign nationality though born in Spain (children of first-generation immigrants), foreigners born outside of Spain, and people with Spanish nationality who were born outside of Spain (acquired citizenship) (Generalitat 2009:29). It is not sufficient to be born in Spain in order to gain Spanish nationality, unless one parent was also born in Spain, or the parents’ country of origin does not recognize the child as a national. Thus, acquired Spanish nationalities are distinguished in that they are “Spaniards not by origin”.

The region of Catalonia has a statute on the social integration of immigrants that requires the regional government to establish a political model for integration with associated legislative functions (Generalitat 2009:51). An example from this statute is the ordinance on coexistence, which is oriented towards preventing possible conflicts of coexistence (Generalitat 2009:51). The regional government does not expand much upon more specific tools for integration, but instead suggests that its statute serves as an orientative and normative guideline for smaller communities to take actions toward integration (Generalitat 2009:52).

The regional government does describe Catalonia as a “democratic, integrative receptor society” for immigrants, and the region as a whole as “diverse, now and forever” (Generalitat 2009:58,71). The associated plan for immigration entails the following objectives, as examples: managing migration flows to ensure access to a labor market; coordinating development with places of origin; universalizing public services to guarantee access to all people; and reinforcing cultural integration through public participation, gender equality, reinforcing Catalan as the common public language, and promoting the coexistence of beliefs (Generalitat 2009:86).

The Ajuntament of Barcelona has been criticized for rejecting ideas of multiculturalism and cautiously guarding Catalan cultural identity. Rather than fostering special services for immigrants, cultural and linguistic assimilation have been promoted, linked to the assertion that “normal” services should be available to everyone (Zontini 2010:16). Is this a rejection of multiculturalism, or a sincere effort toward integration and equity?

Prior to the recent wave, immigration was encouraged in Barcelona as a source of construction labor during the 1992 Olympics (Capel 2001). In its introduction to the municipal planning documents regarding intercultural dialogue, the city uses the term “interculturalism” (further discussed in section 4.3) and recognizes the city itself as a “space of coexistence within an increasingly plural, diverse society” (“Diálogo intercultural”). Current municipal efforts include combating rumors and stereotypes about cultural diversity through public events, and developing the Barcelona Plan for Interculturalism in 2009, which promotes interaction (or reciprocal action) as the core of its efforts towards an intercultural city (Plan Barcelona Interculturalidad 2009).

This plan initially recognizes that Barcelona is a product of “the migrations of yesterday”, and seeks to find new opportunities for coexistence and social cohesion through recognition of equality within diversity, specifically by launching research and public consultation into barriers and difficulties (Plan Barcelona Interculturalidad 2009). Interviews and questionnaires resulted in the
understanding that the majority of participants view Barcelona’s increased multiculturalism positively, and that rather than viewing language or education as barriers to coexistence, they perceive relational issues such as prejudice and differences in customs to be more significant problems (Plan Barcelona Interculturalidad 2009).

4.2 Transformative forces in El Raval

a. The gentrification debate

El Raval is regarded as a classic example of the clashing forces of gentrification and immigration. As summarized by Sargatal, historic city centers, often degraded in terms of living conditions, attract immigrants or marginalized minorities as a provisional place in which to begin their new lives; simultaneously or later, the centrality of the neighborhood begins to attract people of higher economic classes, who allegedly displace the immigrants by raising housing demand (2001). This problematic process is known to have occurred in cities such as London, Paris, and New York, and is often associated with the remodeling and rehabilitation of residences to suit the desires of more economically equipped renters and buyers (Sargatal 2001). This process has been regarded as both beneficial, in terms of generating a tax base; and detrimental, in terms of threatening the inner city working class through an “invasion” in which the city center becomes a “bourgeois playground” (Hamnett 1991).

Since its academic genesis, the concept of gentrification has often, whether purposely or by subconscious bias, been told from a privileged perspective, in which neighborhood improvement is understood as a gain and lower class displacement is an unfortunate but unavoidable by-product of market forces: for example, in the 1980s it was referred to as generating “Islands of renewal in seas of decay” (Berry 1985 referenced in Hamnett 1991:173).

In the consideration of neighborhood economic sustainability, gentrification changes the availability of affordable housing stock in an area by increasing demand, thus displacing the existing social composition of residents (Hamnett 1991:176). Notably, the acknowledged process of gentrification in El Raval has been characterized by an influx of young, “middle class” residents (often of artistic or bohemian tendencies, and internationally sourced), rather than by the traditional gentrifying “upper class” (Saragatal 2001; Subirats and Rius 2005).

The Rambla del Raval has been pinned as a stimulus of gentrification in El Raval, and locals point to the existence of luxury hotels and expensive bars encircling the plaza as evidence. In fact, the year in which the Rambla was built, scholars began to note the process of gentrification in its early forms (Martínez Rigol 2000). Particularly, it was noted that the percentage of people living in El Raval with higher education degrees has steadily risen since the rehabilitation (between 1981-2001)—while remaining lower than other areas of the city (Martínez Rigol 2000).

The Rambla has been regarded as contributing to social sustainability in the neighborhood by creating greater value in public space and the urban
environment (Albin-Amiot 2006). Comparing real estate values between 1998-2006, El Raval had not experienced a proportionally larger increase in ownership value than any other parts of the Ciutat Vella, suggesting that gentrification, in terms of its economic significance, had not yet occurred (Albin-Amiot 2006). Nonetheless, ongoing gentrification in El Raval has ramifications: a shifting demographic presence, a boom of hotels and bars in the area, and associated tourist demand and rental price increases.

b. Capitalist consumption of the city

The notion of gentrification lends well to the exploration of broader theoretical and ideological arguments about capitalist consumption and human agency (Hamnett 1991:174). This makes it a particularly useful theoretical concept through which to explore El Raval, as both the neighborhood and Barcelona as a whole have been subject to fiery debate on capitalism in cities, and the exclusive profits gained from promoting the city as an object for consumption.

I acknowledge the validity of the ongoing critique of the global capitalist economic system, which has unprecedented influence over the activities of people and the transformation of places across the globe. Throughout the city of Barcelona, voices in media, documentaries, news, and academia acknowledge the "sale of the city in its totality" (Miró 2014). This is primarily because tourism has become a core industry sustaining the Ciutat Vella, particularly during the economic crisis (Borja 2010:110). Some describe a "neoliberal revision" of the Plan de usos: Ciutat Vella ("Plan of uses: Old City"), critiquing the growing presence (and profits) of the cruise industry in terms of lack of substantial employment benefits to local laborers (Miró 2014). Overall, there is a sense that capital from the tourism industry is accumulating in the hands of few, and not necessarily benefiting locals—perhaps a reflection of the inequitable distribution of capital in the present-day economy that is being recognized worldwide.

As described previously, the process of gentrification in El Raval, however slow and unique it may be, along with the decades of improvement in crime rates and public health, have made the neighborhood a focus for tourism. The pressure from tourism is so conspicuous throughout the year that some authors suggest that as Barcelona has become more attractive to the world (partly due to improved urban indicators after the renovation), it has become less attractive—full of uncertainty and a sense of “progressing dispossession”—for its traditional residents (Borja 2010:187). One can imagine how Times Square is experienced by native New Yorkers. The increase in demand for tourist lodging has become so powerful that the city recently took action to limit the capacity to rent temporary lodging.

Yet touristic consumption of the city is still seen as a solution to the economic crisis by the city council. The Ajuntament recently embraced the idea of fueling consumption in order to address small business closures in the center of the city, creating a plan to “capture the interest of the consumer” in the Ciutat Vella district (Pla Argent 2012). In its most recent 2012-2015 plan, the Ajuntament emphasized the sustainability of ongoing tourist demand in particular
neighborhoods, with aims to diversify touristic offers in the city and distribute tourist activity throughout the city (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2012:48-49).

Considering that small private enterprises have been negatively affected by the current economic crisis, some champion a more democratic urban economy that allows cooperatives and public partnerships to thrive at the neighborhood level, involving municipal coordination and cooperation with neighborhood associations, so that Barcelona may be “increasingly governed by its laborers” (Miró 2014). Movements speak to the “collective re-appropriation of the life of the city” (Miró 2014), and such movements connect to, for example: protest over the newly instated fees for entry into Parc Guell, characterized as de facto exclusion and privatization buckling to tourist pressure; and disgruntled members of the street art movement, who feel criminalized, specifically due to the branding of Barcelona as a city for tourist consumption and the subsequent increased police control of public space (“BCN Rise and Fall”).

However, it is unclear where immigrants fit into this vision for a democratic urban economy. Gentrification, the forces of global capitalism, touristic pressure, and the ongoing economic crisis are key to understanding immigrant and professional perspectives on sustainability in El Raval, as these broader forces permeate daily life in the neighborhood and the city as a whole.

CHAPTER 5: FOUNDATIONS AND METHODS

5.1 Immigrants in academic literature

This section references existing academic literature on immigrants. Volumes of books, articles, studies, and policy plans have been produced about immigration in El Raval. Lenses have been historical, sociological, anthropological, planning-related, and more—they cannot all be fairly represented in the literature review for this report. However, some of the relevant, thought-provoking literature that informed this report (other than the works already referenced) will be detailed in this section. Aside from numerous studies on the immigrant experience in El Raval, it is crucial to summarize existing critiques on the rehabilitation of the Ciutat Vella as it converged with the immigration wave.

In her 2004 Doctoral Thesis, Marta Rizo García asked how the lives and perceived identities of immigrants in El Raval have transformed since they left their places of origin, suggesting that specific urban contexts shape the redefinition of identity after migration (Rizo García 2004:8). She uses oral history to inquire into the immigrant perception of El Raval, and into the as the relationship they have established with the city, focusing on resulting narratives of identity (Rizo García 2004: 11).

Rather than portraying immigrants as protagonists of the modern migration phenomenon, many studies apply the lens of the “other” in order to explore themes such as lost identities, stigma, and discrimination (Rizo García 2004:8). Recognition that host communities view immigrants as the “other” is valid, exposing a typical, problematic reaction that leads to the controversy over migration faced in many countries (Hugo 2005:1). However, maintenance of this
A dichotomy in contemporary research is problematic, as it victimizes without giving voice or acknowledging agency, and paints a decidedly negative view of the complexity of human interactions. To address the problem of immigrants as the “other” fails to recognize their perspective in the story. And as a dichotomy, it fails to recognize diverse perceptions and interactions; the “other” theme does not account for the spectrum of subtleties between discrimination and integration—variations of which certainly transpire in cities such as Barcelona where there is more than one “other” to be defined.

Even academic approaches that aim to characterize best practices of “integration” and intercultural dialogue manage to consolidate stereotypes of a problematic, inherently different population within a host society (Rizo García 2004). Often, the work of integration rests on the shoulders of immigrants through the dated assimilation approach held by countries such as the United States. In response to the historical legacy of assimilation, some authors suggest that “host societies” must remain open to new notions of integration towards a common culture, specifically by adapting to immigrant presence on a level more similar to the adaptation required of the immigrants themselves (Sandercock 2003a:322). This notion is also controversial, as expressions of social adaptation will vary by context—in some areas, immigrants may be perceived as making no effort to adapt. There is a need to identify a middle ground of integration on which immigrants and host societies can meet in equitable effort.

Socio-spatial exclusion based on ethnicity has been recognized as an ongoing problem in European cities (Khakee, Somma, and Thomas 1999). Spain in particular has been noted as maintaining a negatively slanted, “inferiorising” recognition of difference between natives and immigrants, perhaps rooting back to the era of Moorish occupation, and thus associating new Muslim immigrants with this historic “other” (Zontini 2010:14).

Nations and states have also created problems of acceptance by the simple adherence to terms and phrases such as “immigrant”, “non-native”, or “of outside origin”. As evinced by the Catalan regional government’s various categories of citizenship, it is unclear when second generation “immigrants” become “native” to their place of birth. Thus emerges the complex question: how can one be vindicated by the otherizing label of “immigrant” long after their migration, or long after their parents’ migration, to be recognized as belonging to their new territory. This question is politically controversial when flipped to consider the case of colonization in Canada, in which Canadian “settlers”, whose families arrived on the continent in the past couple of centuries, are reluctant to be labeled “settlers” and question how many generations it takes to become indigenous to a place.

As a solution to this debate, I propose that one remains an outsider, or an immigrant, to a place when she or he is culturally, economically, socially, or systematically excluded: when they are culturally otherized by their neighbors or the government, or when they are marginalized from access to resources or civil rights. This, historically, has been a cost of being indigenous/native on the American continents, and is now the cost of being an immigrant/settler from the “developing” world, worldwide. There are racial components to be considered as
well. The otherizing nature of writing about immigrants is thus acknowledged. In order to avoid otherizing people who may be ethnically distinct from Catalan natives but who feel very much at home in El Raval, I chose to interview first-generation immigrants who arrived in Barcelona during their adult lives.

5.2 Theory and methodology

This paper adheres to the philosophical perspectives of phenomenology, which seeks to understand real world phenomena through the perspectives of involved actors (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:26). This methodology establishes that the descriptions of experience and meaning divulged by participants constitute qualitative data (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:26). These data are subsequently left to interpretation by the researcher, and later, by the reader.

It must also be acknowledged that the knowledge produced during the interviews was naturally influenced by the researcher’s interaction with the participant. Had the researcher been a different individual, a different interaction may have resulted in a different production of knowledge (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:32). To enter the discourse of “the other” without recognizing the “I”, or the “self” through which the other is seen, is to create a meaningless abstraction. This is important to consider even when trying to objectify the “other” as experienced by “another” particular group, with an invisible “I”, as in the case of this work.

“I” am inseparable from the work that I produce—thus, as the author of this report, it is important to provide some background as to who is constructing the lens for this analysis (Rizo García 2004:18). All at once, I am: a candidate Master of Science in Community and Regional Planning with a focus on international comparative development planning; an anthropologist; a student of sustainability in the built environment; a person of mixed ethnicity; an emergent serial migrant; an aspiring planner; a lover of Barcelona, and especially El Raval; and a female, born and raised in the United States under the primary influence of Western culture. It is with this “self” that I hope to present a practical, professional report of high caliber, infused with cultural sensitivity and an awareness of both the macro and micro forces influencing the arena of one very unique neighborhood.

The problem of the perceived “other” has been saliently expressed in both fictional and academic literature, from William Shakespeare’s *Othello* to postmodern and feminist philosophy. To address the otherizing gaze, this work builds a fresh story of El Raval, seeking diverse perspectives through focused, informal, semi-structured interviews. When interviewing participants for social science research, there are “historical and sociocultural constraints against which individuals [participants] labor to impart information about themselves to other individuals who, in turn, [at]empt the inherently contradictory project of making something scientific out of everything biographical” (Sandelowski 1991:161). The retelling of these interviews is thus written in a narrative form that seeks to elevate the perspective of each protagonist as valid in their own right, rather than to objectify the perspectives that they share as data, to categorize them, or to align them with a particular ideology.
Sandelowski speaks to the capacity of narrative to approach problems such as “the ambiguous nature of truth [...] and the temporality and liminality of human beings’ interpretations of their lives” (1991:161). In other words, there are many truths existing simultaneously within a story. Thus, this project seeks to tell a story about El Raval from multiple perspectives: the stories that arise out of the daily experiences of resident immigrants, as well as the stories perpetuated by professionals in architecture and planning.

Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie speaks to the power of telling multiple stories in her TED Talk, “The Danger of a single story”. Specifically, the single stories chosen by history, literature, film, and all media have resulted in stereotypes and “patronizing, well-meaning pity” for groups of people who become defined by their poverty, or individuals whose unique stories are shrouded by that of “the abject immigrant” (Adichie 2009). Adichie declares:

“It is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are difficult rather than how we are similar.” (2009)

However, Adichie also acknowledges the power of stories to empower, stating that: “when we reject the single story—when we realize that there is never a single story about any place—we regain a kind of paradise.” It is my hope that the use of diverse perspectives in telling the story of present-day El Raval will contribute to the eventual evolution of a “kind of paradise” for the residents of this unique neighborhood.

5.3 The interview methods and process

Focused, informal, semi-structured interviews were carried out over the course of two months during a master’s course exchange in Barcelona. The eight interview participants were selected through snowball sampling: among both the immigrant community and the architecture and planning professionals, initial connections led to further acquaintances. This sampling method suggests the inherently biased nature of this small selection of perspectives. However, the resultant project attributes value to each unique perspective because of the larger, collective story that they suggest. In terms of the immigrant sample, connections were made through the owners of small grocery shops where I shopped while living in Barcelona. Among the professionals, connections were made via the supervisor at an environmental non-profit where I worked as an intern. This supervisor knew a number of architects and planners in the city through her work.

Interview participants received a consent form detailing the purpose of the study, and were asked to choose a time and place appropriate for the interview based on their personal and work schedules. Interview time lengths ranged from 60-90 minutes. The consent form was read aloud to the participants in Spanish,
and they were given the option of whether or not to be identified by name, to be photographed, or to be audio recorded.

I exhibited deliberate naiveté in the interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:30-31), asking general questions about life in El Raval with openness to new information, and without presumptuous or preconceived expectations. Interviews were thus open-ended, without premeditated categories for analysis that could be used to catch and contain particular answers.

The interviews with professionals took longer periods of time and flowed more naturally. They involved much more speaking on the part of the professionals. Instead, the first-generation immigrant interviews (with the exception of Valentina) required more rephrasing of questions on my part, and often involved terse answers. This was certainly due to the language barrier: none of the participants were able to undertake the interviews in their native languages (including the professionals native to Barcelona, for whom Spanish is a second language after Catalan). Interviews were conducted in Spanish, with one exception (the interview with Italian architect Valentina Maini switched into English early in the discussion). I am a native speaker of both English and Spanish, but I do not have working knowledge of Catalan.

For some of the immigrant participants, elaborating upon particular questions in Spanish was a challenge. In one case, an immigrant who had previously lived in Italy switched into Italian in order to better communicate, as I also have a working knowledge of Italian. In all cases, these obvious language barriers resulted in limitations to the study, particularly for the immigrants who could not express themselves as fully as they would in their native languages.

Only two of the interviews were audio recorded, and were subsequently transcribed. Other interviews were transcribed instantly, as participants agreed to my rapid-note-taking on a laptop computer as opposed to attempting an audio recording in a noisy café or grocery shop.

5.4 From interviews to analysis: data presentation

The interviews are presented in chronological order, so that the reader may experience the unfolding of perspective in the same sequence that I experienced. Rather than presenting answers to individual questions from the semi-structured sessions, narratives will be provided as an aggregated form data, constituting the knowledge that was generated from each interview. The individual interview questions asked to professionals and immigrant residents are included in the appendices (provided in English).

The interview participants included six first-generation immigrants, and three professionals in the field of architecture and planning (Valentina Maini is both an immigrant and a professional). Aside from Valentina, all of the first-generation immigrants live in El Raval and work on Carrer de l'Hospital, the street that traditionally straddles North Raval and South Raval.

The transcribed, translated interview text and audio recordings constitute the data used for subsequent analysis. There is difficulty in generating policy-oriented analyses from qualitative interviews: “the analyst faced with a bank of qualitative data has very few guidelines for protection against self delusion”
Miles 1979:591). I recognize the limitations in presenting interviews in narrative format—there are inherent biases of interpretation that emerge during the transcription, translation, and analysis processes. However, I also believe that the narrative approach chosen presents a more humanistic level of understanding for the issues presented. As Sandelowski points out, “a decision to view respondents in qualitative research as narrators and interview data as stories” creates new opportunities for analysis, requiring the researcher to draw on the skills of literary critics and historians (1991:165).

Analysis of the interview narratives is later used to generate creative planning recommendations for BCNEcología. It is believed that this study will generate a connection between on-the-ground perspectives and planning actions, in the same way that investigative journalism can open the door to new policy responses.

In the following chapter, the eight interviews will be presented as narratives detailing the perspectives, understandings, and experiences of individual people who are connected to El Raval by their work or by their daily lives. All direct quotes are italicized, while un-italicized text is rephrased interview content. Each narrative contains bolded quotes and keywords that were selected at my discretion as being particularly colorful or interesting for analysis.

CHAPTER 6: GATHERED PERSPECTIVES

6.1 Pere Cabrera Massanés, Catalan Architect

The first interview participant was architect Pere Cabrera Massanés. Cabrera worked as an architect for the city of Barcelona from 1992 until 2005, and designed the Rambla del Raval as part of his work in directing the “integrated rehabilitation” of the neighborhood, a project that concluded in 2001. Cabrera now runs his own architectural firm in the Sarrià neighborhood of Barcelona. In designing and implementing the Rambla del Raval, he oversaw the transfer of over 600 households from “very degraded” blocks of housing into alternative housing. When elaborating upon the social politics involved in such an urban transformation, Cabrera suggested that it was key to provide residents with the opportunity to continue living their lives in the neighborhood during the rehabilitation, rather than displacing them. He referred to a political commitment generated by the “Vecinos del Raval” (“Neighbors of Raval”), a neighborhood association (to be described later), which to facilitate the voluntary transfer of these families.

When prompted about the economic crisis, Cabrera noted that neighborhoods with lower socioeconomic status are the first to suffer from unemployment, and if there is a prolonged economic crisis, it will certainly affect the city physically. In his perspective, the current economic crisis is not as rough as that which occurred in the 1980s, when El Raval was also plagued by drug use and prostitution.

He also referred to a “touristic phenomenon” that did not exist prior to the rehabilitation. He alluded to public rejection of the increased tourist activity in El Raval, and in particular activities connected to tourism. Other ongoing
problems are pressure on rental pricing due to the positive economic effects brought on by the rehabilitation, and the ongoing informal economy. However, Cabrera noted that these three problems are not particular to El Raval, and instead permeate all of Barcelona.

To his knowledge, there are no important physical transformation projects in ongoing planning for El Raval, and most ongoing initiatives involve cultural rather than physical change in the neighborhood.

The public health situation in the 1970s and 80s was linked to drug use, prostitution, informal economic activity, and cases of tuberculosis. In his opinion, contemporary problems in El Raval are comparable to the social problems of any modern city. He notes less industrial activity in the neighborhood, as well as the lack of accessibility by automobiles, which has reduced atmospheric contamination. Referring to ongoing problems, he suggested: “If there is any current aggression, it would be acoustic.”

When asked if he attributes the improved social wellbeing in El Raval to the physical changes that he designed, he suggests that it is better attributed to an overall improvement in the quality of life in the center of Barcelona—and that it is clear that the overall rehabilitation effort improved the quality of life in El Raval. He suggests that improvement in wellbeing is a transversal effort, and not purely one of physical urban transformation—that economic and cultural interventions are also fundamental.

Cabrera sees a “substantial demographic change” in El Raval today in comparison to the 1980s, prior to the rehabilitation. Parallel to the grand transformation brought on by the municipality, there was also a grand demographic shift in the neighborhood, with an increase in immigrants of “Eastern or Sub-Saharan” origin. Cabrera claims to have witnessed the foreign population grow from less than 20% to over 60% in the past 10 years. He saw the rehabilitation as mitigating the potential negative effects of such a massive demographic change: “It was the great luck of El Raval that when immigration came, the rehabilitation was being finalized”. Cabrera elaborated: “I’ll put it the other way: if this demographic change had arrived in the 80s, we would have had grave problems”.

When asked if he believes El Raval needs to be “cleaned up” further, Cabrera responded that this seemed to be a negative approach; instead he suggested that there is a need to understand how to live under the neighborhood’s present conditions. The specificities referred to in this exchange, whether they were about informal/illegal activity or simply immigrant presence, were left vague by both myself and by Cabrera.

Cabrera asserted the importance of transversal, preventative interventions of social character. He stated: “If I have to be critical, I would say we could be more proactive in addressing current and new problems.”

When asked about his interpretation of sustainability for a neighborhood such as El Raval, Cabrera responded that it is a very complex concept, and that we must first accept a “Mediterranean context of urban density”, which can be a positive factor for quality of life. In terms of transitioning toward sustainability, he recognized “a need to work on the same trajectory that we have been talking
about”, such as: aspects linked to public health; economic impediments for the public such as rental affordability; anticipation of economic crisis and related unemployment, in terms of pressure on social services; and cleaner consumption of energy and water, and the relationship between tourism and consumption. Cabrera believes there is always work to be done for further improvement in these areas. He then noted the ongoing need for the social integration of immigrants, and the need to promote citizen participation among these “new neighbors”.

When Cabrera began working as a technician for the city, the majority of buildings in the city center had exposed water tanks, which wasted excesses of unconsumed water through spillover, and also created sanitary problems. Most of the sewage from homes went to “dead zones”, or spaces of land designated for natural filtration of the water—which have since been reformed to a water treatment system. “As I tell you this now, it seems crazy, but if I were telling you this and you were from Senegal, it might seem normal.”

When asked why immigrants come to live in El Raval, Cabrera answered that historically it has been because of the central location, which is fundamental for laborers. He noted that El Raval is not particularly affordable for new immigrants, and it is not the only point of reference for starting a new life in Barcelona: more and more newcomers go to other zones of the city and outside of Metropolitan Barcelona.

When asked to elaborate on the concept of gentrification in El Raval, Cabrera responded: “In the classic sense of the word… to use it now is an error. Does the improvement of a neighborhood result in the expulsion of the least favored residents? Yes, this happens in neighborhoods all over the world. The great difference in El Raval was that the residents had the right to keep living in the neighborhood. In these degraded blocks, the building owners were not interested in the buildings. Now, with slight improvement, students or tourists come and produce the gentrification of other residents. But it hasn’t been a very important problem in El Raval.” Cabrera also added that politically, it would have been untenable if a conflict over gentrification occurred during the rehabilitation: “Our society would have stopped it. This city has had socialist tendencies since the beginning of the democratic era in Spain. But to acknowledge that the process is occurring, yes.”

6.2 Salvador Rueda, Catalan Urban Ecologist

Salvador Rueda is a trained biologist, psychologist, urban ecologist, and founder of BCNEcología. As an urban ecologist, Rueda regards a city as an ecosystem, and incorporates the academic tenets of ecology in his approach to the city. In his work, he also incorporates “sustainability, and the fact that we have entered a new era known as the Information Age” as intentions in the transformation of the city. In Rueda’s perspective, the city must be treated as an integrated system, so in any given transformative project, one impact is not held above other variable impacts, but “all aspects of reality win from the transformation”. Rueda founded BCNEcología in 2000.
From 1986 until 1992 Rueda was Director of Technical Services for the Environment for the city of Barcelona. From 1990-1992 he also coordinated all of the programs (social, urbanistic) for the rehabilitation of the city center, particularly in El Raval. Unlike Cabrera’s role of designing as an architect, Rueda’s role was to plan and evaluate. He coordinated each of the area groups for the rehabilitation. “What we sought in El Raval was to develop... to make a normalized city out of El Raval. This is to say, when we entered it was a deprived, marginal area in which there were many people linked to social services, because they needed economic support.” Rueda saw El Raval prior to the renovation as dominated by automobiles and low-quality housing. He mentioned old buildings with leakages and without elevators, and generally low conditions in terms of the built environment. However, he suggested that there was “a cultural life that was not small, and what we wanted was to multiply this”. He described the political will to transform El Raval in terms of urban form, and in terms of social factors, the need to create “a virtuous mix to penetrate the hard nucleus of El Raval.”

Rueda acquired EU funding for the development of the Rambla del Raval. He described the pre-existing area as constituted of “narrow streets where the sun didn’t enter, which was sufficiently uninhabitable”. In his perspective, the Rambla del Raval “created this opening that allowed El Raval to breathe—it allowed people with varying incomes to penetrate the area”. Rueda went on to describe the difficulty of attracting local families to live in the neighborhood, as they were inhibited by the student body at the neighborhood’s schools. He referred to “large numbers of students with low financial resources and a lack of cultural upbringing—many immigrant children who didn’t speak the language, and the parents didn’t want that for their kids. They want to give their kids the best connections.” Rueda suggested that the rehabilitation efforts were meant to “allow people with diverse incomes to penetrate the heart of El Raval”, making the neighborhood more attractive to such families.

When prompted to speak further about immigration in the neighborhood, Rueda describes “a demographic explosion of, more than anything, Pakistani people... a brutal domination”. In Rueda’s perspective, the rehabilitation was a process towards creating a diverse, stable social mix in the neighborhood—yet this influx of new immigrants “threw off percentages in the mixes that we aimed for”. When asked what exactly the ideal mix was, Rueda responded: “We sought a demographic mix that matched the mix of any neighborhood in the city. Each neighborhood of a city admits a certain number of foreign people, and no more.” Rueda elaborated that the prevalence of one particular immigrant group is a breaking point for the neighborhood, “because they are very different cultures”.

“Barcelonian people, or Spanish people in general, do not tolerate the use of public space as carried out by the Maghreb [North Africans]. Because it is only men who occupy the space, in a static manner, and that generates a lot of unease, uncertainty, and fear among women.” Rueda went on to suggest that creating a more equitable use of public space could curb further problems in the neighborhood: “The problem is always one of numbers—it
is who occupies space and in what way. The mix of people in a space and what they are doing determines its success. When there is too much one of thing, it will not work... too much of something from outside. If there is too much of what comes from here, there might be low diversity, but the norms are standard, the regulation of behavior is guaranteed. And I think this is good.” Rueda concluded that the goal for the neighborhood was to achieve a mix of incomes, ages, cultures, and origins.

When asked about the banners reading, “We want a neighborhood of dignity”, hung from numerous balconies throughout El Raval, Rueda responded without doubt that these banners express discontent over the noise. He went on to elaborate about this ongoing problem: “The most important indicator in a city is coexistence: one can carry out their liberties in a way that is respectful of the surrounding population.” Rueda specifically referred to groups in the neighborhood that are in conflict over the right to good rest versus the right to have fun at night. He described “a cluster of activities that have a nocturnal schedule and disturbing noise levels.” Rueda explained that the noise of cars is more permissive for people trying to sleep—the noise of a human voice talking or singing loudly generates more tension and alarm that the noise generated by a car. He later noted that these activities should be more dispersed to avoid concentrations of noise.

When prompted to discuss ongoing prostitution and drug use in the neighborhood, Rueda summarized the recent history of prostitution legislation in the neighborhood: “This zone was known as Barrio Xino, it was the neighborhood of prostitution. What we did was, whoever wanted to operate an establishment of prostitution had to have beds in private rooms equivalent to the number of workers. It is legal. Yet there are still workers outside on the street, because to enter the building is to be obliged to purchase the service, but being outside means assessing your purchase before making a commitment”. Rueda suggested that the rehabilitation eradicated the majority of prostitution activity on the streets.

When asked about the results of his work for the municipality in the 1990s, Rueda believes that “It created the foundations for the transformation of El Raval, so that it converted into a normalized neighborhood.” In terms of ongoing concerns, he suggests that when facing “an avalanche of people from the exterior, how they came, there is little you can do... [laughter]. Put up with it and return to rethink…”

In terms of sustainability for the neighborhood, Rueda believes there are many forces that help the collective wellbeing to grow or to decrease—“drugs, occupation of spaces, overcrowding... things that are not best for the normal development of a neighborhood.” To summarize on the neighborhood’s current state, he stated “In principle, I think it is a situation that... I don’t know whether to say it is acceptable... it is a situation where conflict lives on, but in an acceptable manner... There is a mix in which outside cultures are prevalent, but they enrich our culture. An equilibrium, and while it remains that way, meaning that the children of immigrants continue integrating into our society, El Raval will be a normal neighborhood.” Rueda gave examples of children going to school,
learning the language, learning behavioral norms for social interactions, as well as increases intercultural marriage, assuring that “\textit{after a pair of generations this is will be normalized}.”

When asked about the environmental health of El Raval, he described it as “\textit{Not bad. It’s very rich in colors, odors, in diverse people and diverse activities}.” He noted: “\textit{public space and its use is the key piece in the transformation of El Raval}.” When asked if he believes the residents of El Raval are satisfied with their neighborhood, he responded with a quick, honest, “\textit{That I don’t know}.” Rueda had worked on a “\textit{very interesting}” statistically significant questionnaire on the quality of life in El Raval in 1991, in search of the perception of local quality of life, and that at the time it was a very positive perception.

Rueda described the following in his vision for a sustainable El Raval: “\textit{That it would be an inclusive neighborhood. That it permits people to have access to the city. That it permits the metabolism adjusts to the necessary parameters so that the impact of various scales is maximized. That a human scale is achieved, and that coexistence is achieved. They talk a lot about social cohesion but very little about coexistence.}”

In reference to the economic crisis in Spain, Rueda believes that it is less notable in Barcelona, and that despite the crisis, liveability is still in a healthy state in Barcelona.

When asked why immigrants live in El Raval, Rueda expressed his belief that it is a chain-effect—that families reunite with “\textit{a person who has previously colonized and made a place to survive}.” He referred to the attractive climate and work opportunities that allow immigrants to “\textit{develop as people}.” Like Cabrera, he emphasized that El Raval is not particularly affordable to attract immigrants. Describing other factors of attraction, he noted: “\textit{these people are disposed to live in uninhabitable conditions},” and that there are owners of buildings with unsuitable living conditions that he would put in jail if he could, because of the rent prices that they ask. He noted the difficulty of regulating the rent market due to lack of will by the government, which chooses to “\textit{turn a blind eye}.”

Later, he described the immigrants as “\textit{peaceful, accustomed to accepting their own conditions, they thrive… They are intelligent people, many of them, they go looking for alternatives in their lives to allow them to live and bring their families}.” He then described some problems with the “Magrhebi”, particularly from Morocco and Algeria, because “\textit{they are cultures, like I told you before, that are more aggressive, very proud, sometimes they generate explosive scenes. It’s not taken very well, this thing that women have to go around covered—Catalan culture is very open and cosmopolitan, and it doesn’t very well support cultures that approach the idea of slavery}.”

When prompted about gentrification in El Raval, Rueda responded that “\textit{It has always been considered to be something very bad, and I don’t think it’s so bad if you want a neighborhood to be normal}.” He mentioned the need for diverse incomes, ages, single people, and families—that “\textit{in the mix there is}”
grace”, and that if you don’t allow this diversity to incorporate then you will have problems. On a final note about changes in El Raval, Rueda suggested: “Public space has won in terms of color, but it is impoverished in terms of a diversity of activities. Some don’t develop their cultures in public space because they are afraid—they have very different cultures. They have their parties behind closed doors… their celebrations don’t manifest outside.” Rueda noted that by having a particular majority of users, public spaces are impoverished. He describes the “little margin for surprise” compared to when El Raval had “more people from the first world, who come traveling with few resources, they play guitar or flute, more bohemians…” In Rueda’s perspective, the decline of these bohemian travelers is related to the negative image associated with Muslim culture, because of fanaticism and terrorism.

6.3 Rosey, first-generation Bangladeshi immigrant
Rosey is a 28 year-old woman from Dhaka, Bangladesh, who arrived in El Raval in 2007 when she was 21. Rosey currently works as a barista at a small bar on the corner of Carrer de l’Hospital. She serves coffee or beer during the

![Figure 2: Shops and apartments on Carrer de l'Hospital, El Raval. Image captured by Megan Ahearn 2013.](image-url)
daytime. She has no immediate plans to leave the neighborhood. Rosey prefaced her interview by noting her limited speaking abilities in Spanish.

Rosey’s sense of the quality of life in El Raval, in comparison to her neighborhood of origin, is that the quality of life in the latter is undeniably better. Her reasons for this are primarily social—Rosey’s mother and siblings all still live in Dhaka. During her life there, she spent time with friends frequenting her favorite cafes and restaurants and visiting markets. Of El Raval, she said, “Here there are a million things too, but it’s different. I like it better with my friends.” Rosey’s friends in El Raval are mostly Spaniards and Bangladeshis. She went on to describe that she enjoys the “very central” location of El Raval, the fact that her friends are concentrated in the area, and the accessibility to food and goods from Bangladesh: “you can buy all the things from my country here—there are many shops from my country”. Rosey also believes nearby access to goods from home is the primary reason why other immigrants also choose to live in El Raval. Rosey later noted that the neighborhood was very well equipped in terms of groceries and restaurants, and that there was no need to “go outside of the center, everything is here, I can walk very little and buy my things”.

In further reference to Dhaka, Rosey noted, “It’s my place”. However, she also mentioned that the streets of Dhaka are very loud in terms of human and automobile congestion—El Raval is notably “calmer”. She had encountered more air pollution in Dhaka due to the quantity of vehicles.

Rosey had never heard of the term sustainability. Once I explained the standard definition encompassing economic, environmental, and social capacity for the future, Rosey stated, “for those themes, it’s better here”—suggesting that she views El Raval as more sustainable than Dhaka. In terms of the urban environment, she had no complaints about El Raval, even when prompted about the possibility of more green space or cleaner streets. She had noticed that when there are problems in the neighborhood, “they go changing things”, perhaps referring to the city government.

Rosey’s perspectives on tourism in El Raval centered around the attraction of Barcelona’s mild climate, along with the historical buildings present in the neighborhood. Personally, she also enjoys the fact that “here there are many people going around in the street, and everything is close, there’s the market, lots of food around here.”

When asked whether El Raval has changed since her arrival in 2007, Rosey expressed no perception of any significant changes in the neighborhood. She has not changed her living arrangements since her arrival, yet prior to finding work at the bar, she worked in a factory near Gran Vía, which she described as “very far away” (although the avenue Gran Via is approximately 1 kilometer from Rosey’s current workplace in El Raval). Because of the current economic crisis, Rosey feels her work at the bar could be threatened, and she would like to move to a different place that has opportunities to make more money working. She expressed that El Raval was a better place for work prior to the economic crisis, and that now money is not circulating in the economy—she referred to the situation as “very bad for business” and claimed to have noticed fewer people on the streets in the past year.
When prompted further about the merits of living in El Raval, Rosey responded that: “It’s good for living. When you live somewhere, in the end you like it a lot”. Yet she bluntly stated that the neighborhood was expensive for her to live in, and that prices have not gone down despite the economic depression. Rosey also noted: “I don’t know if El Raval will change, but it won’t get cheaper, little by little its growing much more expensive—before it was cheaper.” She noted that if it were not for the current economic crisis, she would feel more confident in terms of searching for new work and perhaps moving to a quieter neighborhood such as Sant Antoni, or near Plaza España, although she hadn’t thought about it extensively. “I’d like to, but because of the crisis I can’t move”. In summary, she explained that: “There is no opportunity here! For work, there was before, when I arrived.” Rosey believes that because of lack of opportunity, many immigrants who have passports are moving to England.

In terms of improvement in the neighborhood, Rosey mentioned a need for more cleanliness on the streets as well as more light. She also expressed disgust at the presence of prostitutes on Calle Robador, a street between the Rambla del Raval and Las Ramblas. Yet Rosey referred to the Rambla del Raval as her favorite street in the city (calling it by its nickname, “Rambla del Gato” due to the presence of a giant cat sculpture by Colombian artist Fernando Botero).

6.4 Valentina Maini, first-generation Italian immigrant and architect

Valentina Maini is an architect who specializes in natural construction methods, with a particular focus on natural materials and straw bale building. Maini teaches workshops and hosts events related to these construction methods.

Figure 3: The “Gato del Raval”, a public sculpture created by Fernando Botero and purchased by the Ajuntament de Barcelona in 1987, relocated to the Rambla del Raval in 2004. Image captured by Megan Ahearn 2013.
methods. She is from Bologna, Italy, and has lived in Venice, New York, Madrid, and Barcelona, and she considers her experiences in these cities to be a very important part of her architectural training. She moved to Barcelona in 1995, and lived in El Raval for a year in 1998. Maini was the only participant who bridged the categories of first-generation immigrant and professional in the field of architecture.

Maini never worked directly for the City of Barcelona, but she dealt with them in her work on several projects. In 2001, she presented an idea for an outdoor market in the Rambla del Raval to the Ajuntament: “It was a big failure—a great learning process but a big failure.” While the idea was initially well received, Maini and her colleague did not succeed in organizing a method to keep the market running. An artisanal market eventually returned to the Rambla del Raval and continues to function on Saturdays and Sundays. She notes that this ongoing market was initially run by people from outside of the neighborhood, and that it has since shifted to be run by residents: “and that’s a nice change”.

Maini later explained that her idea for the market generated out of “the domination of North African men” in the Rambla del Raval, and the desire to improve the neighborhood by “[attracting] other kinds of people to use this space, because what happens is that the locals are not using it”. She noted, “Pakistani men are the biggest community” of immigrants, followed by Filipinos.

Maini lived in North Raval in 1997 on Carrer Valdonzella, near the University of Barcelona. She describes her arrival in Barcelona as receiving a “kind of myth” about life in El Raval in the 1980s. She saw the subsequent transformation of El Raval as characterized by “the feeling of speed without awareness… El Raval is globalized… to make globalized people react and participate is not the same because they’ve lost touch with local interaction.”

More recently, Maini has spent three years exploring the area and networking with all of the neighborhood associations that she could, including the Fundació tot Raval. The Fundació tot Raval (Foundation for all Raval) was formed in 2002 as an umbrella organization under which various other foundations, schools, libraries, associations, museums, and individual patrons work to improve the quality of life in El Raval (Fundació tot Raval). This organization includes particular planning goals, such as social cohesion, integration of and opportunity for immigrants, economic revitalization, improving participation and the use of public space, and improving education and quality of life for children and adolescents (Fundació tot Raval).

Maini has entered into a program of interchange with other professionals in order to develop a training course for straw bale construction. This has been done primarily through the association BAM, which promotes sustainable construction in the Mediterranean region. BAM has allocated a space next to the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA) in which Maini and her colleagues can build an 80 square meter structure out of natural materials. Maini’s team received the keys to the space in October 2014, and they will manage the space for three years. They are currently in the process of getting in touch with residents from El Raval: “the hope is to integrate, for example,
immigrants that have knowledge of, for example, earth plaster, to show them that... this traditional technique is powerful and important, not nasty or poor. There is still this feeling that to be modern you need to put concrete and plastic everywhere”.

When asked about other ongoing projects to physically alter El Raval, Maini explained that the three-year management of this space near the MACBA is part of the “Pla de Buit” (or “Plan for the Empty”), which involves the management of 12 plots of empty space in Barcelona. This plot is the only one in El Raval. Maini also went on to describe the efforts of a number of other organizations, such as the Fundació tot Raval, and a local urban farm known as the Chinese Garden (“Hort del Xino”). She summarizes activity in the neighborhood: “It’s incredible, it’s one of the most active... a concentration of cultural institutions and associations.”

Maini believes that El Raval “is healthy because citizens are alive and reacting, active and reactive, so this is a symptom of health”. She referred to “a lot of energy and diversity and self-management and new businesses”, as well as “increasingly heavier pressures on this kind of health”. Despite the rehabilitations of the 1990s, Maini still sees degraded housing conditions in El Raval, in terms of “structure, humidity, windows and ventilation, water pipes are a mess, and there are overcrowded flats with no air or sun, maybe 10 people living in one room.”

Maini notes another issue in terms of the socioeconomic status of the neighborhood: a number of foundations and associations related to social welfare use El Raval as a focal point, which in turn attracts “concentrations of people with some economic or social issue coming from outside”—particularly in terms of homeless shelters, drug rehabilitation centers, language learning and educational facilities, as well as childcare centers for families without resources.

When prompted to speak on the ongoing economic crisis, Maini noted that she sees “the crisis as a huge fantastic opportunity” that has been mismanaged, particularly due to the focus on marketing for tourism as a solution. She notes that the promotion of “low-level skills for tourism” as a resource is bringing down the capacity for an “economy of knowledge” for the future, and that the forces of privatization associated with using tourism as an economic rescue mechanism is “used to really fuck the best part of the city”, explaining that “Ciutat Vella is really under attack from this”. Maini also described the crash of social services that particularly affects the possibility for immigrants to receive health care, which is “really going back to the worst of the 18th century”.

On the topic of ongoing problems in the neighborhood, Maini notes a “violent” approach to policy, particularly in the realm of prostitution, which the “urbanistic reform didn’t succeed in changing”. She expressed that law enforcement seems to be “getting really heavy”, referencing recent incidents in the neighborhood. Later, she explained that there is a danger in terms of the international sex trade, as some African women recruited to work as prostitutes cannot speak Spanish or Catalan well, “so their relation is completely changed with the neighborhood”.

Yet Maini reframed these troubles by stating that “Raval has always had this kind of tolerance for everybody, so maybe it’s not marginality but tolerance... there is always some kind of freedom in the marginal.” In her opinion, “loss of freedom unfortunately has to do with the urban renovation”. While Maini recognized the “really horrible and unhealthy” conditions of the neighborhood prior to the 1990s rehabilitation, she expressed that the process was “depriving that generation of the intent of growing a better place”, as the process instead gave way to “just speculation and gentrification”. Later, Maini explained that gentrification is happening, and that in her opinion it is also enforced by the police. She described the phenomenon as “dismantling people, at the risk of losing biodiversity, and biodiversity is what we need to survive”. Like Salvador Rueda, Maini characterizes the human city as an ecological entity.

In Maini’s mental map of El Raval, touristic appeal is divided into quadrants: the northwest corner is frequented by hipsters; the northeast area is more welcoming to tourists; the southeast side has peripheral use by local tourists, for the theatre, for example; and the southwest side: “forget about it”, when it comes to tourist appeal. When asked to expand upon why tourists would dislike the southwest side of El Raval, Maini explained: “Tourists like not to find new things. They like to repeat experiences they have at home with a little touch of something different, so they are scared if something is different. Fear about marginalities is real every day globally on TV.” In other words, the heavy presence of immigrants in the southwest corner of El Raval has been a deterrent to tourists. She mentions that “this is a pity, but at the same time it’s a kind of resting place for local communities, otherwise it would be like Barcelona is completely under attack [by tourists]”. Later, she mentioned “an increase of hipsters coming south” and that these “green” and “modern” people are perhaps unaware that “they open the door to the forces of gentrification”.

In Maini’s opinion, the immigrant residents of El Raval are “really satisfied because they have their own community with the neighborhoods—physical proximity is helping with solidarity.” She mentions that in many cases immigrant communities do not mix at all, “because of their different social structures”. She mentions that the diversity of El Raval is its strength, and that the immigrants “really have a lot of knowledge on how to deal with the global situation, interaction within cultures, self-management...” In her opinion, El Raval’s most valuable resource is people, yet it is also “a history map of Barcelona, changing much more than all the other parts of the Ciutat Vella... it was built in the last century in a way, and through immigration it has seen all the change of economic powers”.

In terms of inclusive sustainability in El Raval, Maini believes “the first step should be to recognize the richness that is there, so it’s not a problem, it’s a richness—and to work with this is completely different and would change everything... If you think you have a problem you have to solve the problem, if you think you have a treasure...” This culminated in Maini’s current idea for transformation in El Raval: “The physical [change] should be to activate the knowledge of workers to self-restore, in a sustainable way, the flats. There
is a lot of potential to convert, if the worker can work with clay and his own traditional materials from his country... They are the maximum experts of resilience and surviving."

In describing her own vision for a more sustainable El Raval, Maini would seek “a little less grey and more light”. Later, she elaborated on her interest in a wind study in order to examine how ventilation passes through narrow streets, in order to “increase the flow of air from the port throughout the neighborhood”. Maini also expressed interest in an adjustment of regulations to allow micro-shops to open in times of restricted needs, referring to shops of two square meters in which craftsmen occupied the first floor of buildings and carried out small-scale manufacturing of “little products like windowsills doorknobs, or little items of clothing”. She also noted the need for more urban community farms, particularly to utilize rooftop space. She also notes that El Raval still lacks public spaces: “If you live in a very, very small house but you have a public space like a plaza, you don’t care. I’m part of a European program for best practices in social housing to understand this precisely: the house as a service and the connection between public space and housing.”

Finally, she believes an impediment to sustainability is that “the management of relations of people is a mess”. Rooftop farms, for example, require collective management of space, and “it can be a source of conflict... we are losing abilities”. She mentions that this is partly because of the “social transformation of globalization” and that “I myself, if I talk to a local I don’t have the same background so it’s not the same to collaborate”. Maini referred to fear of uncertainty and liability control in the United States that appears to be spreading to Europe, and suggested that perhaps in North America “they are already criticizing this model... to find a balance between self-organization and regulation. This was the traditional way of doing things in Mediterranean culture”.

Maini suggested that “Catalan is a great instrument of integration... I even felt it on my own skin as an immigrant, that it really helps to break the first barrier of understanding because it means you are living here... the fact that you can speak Catalan is like, ok, you are part of the community even if you think things that are completely different or have a completely different background.”

6.5 Saima, first-generation Pakistani immigrant

Saima is a 23 year-old Pakistani woman who arrived in El Raval in March of 2006 at age 16, and has lived in the neighborhood consistently since then. I met Saima as I was a client at the fruit and vegetable shop where she works.

Saima notes that El Raval has changed significantly since her arrival: “There is little work, there is little money because of the crisis. People work many hours, almost thirteen hours per day and they make very little”. Prior to gaining employment at the fruit and vegetable shop, Saima was an entrepreneur: she painted henna, often receiving calls from organizations and offices to paint henna or teach henna for special events. She also spent time teaching henna to adolescents in prison.
In El Raval, Saima has made friends from Italy, the Philippines, England, Australia, Pakistan, and India. She notes that her quality of life is “much better” in El Raval when compared to her life in Pakistan. She noted that in Pakistan there were “problems with light, and things were super expensive—here food is cheaper. There people make less money… in one day you gain four euros. People are very poor there.” She has not returned to Pakistan since her arrival in Spain. Expanding upon the problems with light, Saima explained that due to economic crisis “they don’t want to keep the city lit”, due to the cost of natural gas that keeps city lamps running. “When the light is working there is more work—when the light and water shut down, you can’t work nor study”.

Saima went on to describe the differences of her life in El Raval, specifically as a woman: “There have been many changes for me. In Pakistan a woman or a girl can study out of the house or in the city, but here it’s more free: you can work, when you want to go somewhere… I’m not afraid of anyone. There, there are many people who bother if you let your daughters go out. Here women are freer. I can’t go out with boys though—my religion only allows brothers or cousins.” Yet she also noted that unlike her life in El Raval, life in Pakistan meant living communally: “Everyone lives together”. Saima lived with her parents, her two brothers, and her sister in Pakistan.

When prompted further about opportunities for wellbeing in El Raval, Saima explained: “flats are very expensive here… if you find good work you can live well in the neighborhood, you can eat really well. But now there’s no work. There are families in which only one person in the household finds work. Hands are very closed in order to save.” While rent in the neighborhood is expensive for her, Saima also suggested that El Raval’s prices are attractive to tourists—despite the presence of pickpockets, the tourists like “that it’s cheap—other neighborhoods are very expensive”.

Saima had never heard of the term sustainability. When I explained the term and prompted her further on a more sustainable El Raval, Saima expressed that “If there were no crisis, it could be that El Raval is sustainable… it’s very good physically. In Pakistan there are many trees but they don’t clean the streets like here. The houses are very big, very different… I love it here. It’s much better.” She noted that an exodus of people in search of work in other places is impeding the neighborhood’s economic sustainability.

On the topic of public health, Saima did not believe El Raval represented general wellbeing: “There are many people who are sick and poor… because all of the poor people are here, there are a lot of people, and many become sick.” She mentioned that she came from Pakistan carrying Hepatitis C, and that she received an injection: “There are many Pakistanis who have this problem because there the water is not clean.”

Saima initially expressed overall satisfaction with El Raval, stating: “I like everything, I’m only afraid of pickpockets. Many times they grab girls’ bags, sometimes they are outside of my shop.” When prompted further on a more economically sustainable El Raval, Saima believes that less pickpocketing would reflect a more sustainable neighborhood: “If there was work, people wouldn’t have to pickpocket”. She reasserted, “If you take out the crisis, it’s a very
good neighborhood.” She also mentioned that the quality of flats in the neighborhood is “very bad” and that this is an area in which she hopes El Raval will change.

When describing typical neighborhood interactions, Saima noted that she has experienced some discrimination from her Catalan neighbors—particularly, an older woman who lived next door to her and often called the police if Saima left any of her belongings outside. Later, she elaborated on her perception that discrimination from Catalan people is an impediment to immigrants finding opportunities: “Other Spaniards have opportunities, but Catalan people don’t want immigrants to keep arriving. They want us to go away, I think if Catalonia became independent they would kick us all out of their country”.

When asked what factors influence the decision of immigrants to live in El Raval, Saima noted that: “This neighborhood is a little cheaper, others are very expensive to eat and to live,” later clarifying that while rent is expensive in El Raval, food is cheap—perhaps because of the foreign food options. In terms of work opportunities, she listed: “selling water and beer, selling drugs, or selling food.”

Saima expressed interest in leaving El Raval after the summer of 2014 to find work, perhaps in England. She expanded upon her reasons for wanting to leave Barcelona: “There are a lot of drug problems, a lot of noise... I would like a cleaner place to live... Raval is a little dirty. Something calmer outside of Barcelona.”

Despite her initial expression of satisfaction with El Raval, by the end of the interview Saima concluded that she would prefer to live somewhere else, and that there is no particular aspect that she can claim as her favorite part of El Raval.

6.6 Imran, first-generation Pakistani immigrant

Imran is a 26 year-old man from Pakistan who works at a fruit and vegetable shop on the north side of Carrer de l’Hospital. I also met him through my grocery excursions. Imran’s hometown is Gujrat, a populous city in the Punjabi Province of Pakistan. He has lived in El Raval for four years since his arrival in 2009. In those years, he has not noted any significant change in the neighborhood. Prior to working in the fruit and vegetable shop, he worked in a restaurant for three years.

Imran’s friends in the neighborhood are from Pakistan, India, and “all different countries”. He notes that his life in El Raval is comparatively better than his life in Gujrat, because “My family is here”. He noted that there is a mosque he likes in the neighborhood. Yet Imran expressed nostalgia for a park in his home city, and the lack of parks in El Raval. He also explained, “I like to play cricket, and here there is only soccer... in Gujrat we had a cricket field.” He summarized: “I liked it there before, but now here I live better.”

Imran had not heard of the term sustainability, and when I explained the term to him, he suggested: “I think sustainability here is good because in four years living here everything has been good, no big problems.” Yet when the term was repeated, Imran began to consider the environmental significance of
sustainability: “In Pakistan the environment is better, here it’s still not good. The water and the air… I liked the taste much better in Pakistan. We have fields of vegetables and fresh milk, here no.” Imran noted that he knew of some Pakistani immigrants who had started vegetable fields outside of Madrid.

In terms of tourism, Imran believes the attraction is that “there is a lot of life… a lot of people live here.” He later elaborated that the merits of El Raval are that “The whole world is good here. I’m good, the whole world is good.” In characterizing typical neighborhood interactions, he noted: “They reunite in the street, because there is a lot to do on the street here… when there is a party there are lots of people talking on the street. Normally I gather with the people.” In explaining why immigrants choose to live in El Raval, Imran believes that it is because “In this neighborhood there is everything, I think there’s everything… There are not a lot of Catalans, but there are many foreigners.” He also listed proximity to the sea as something he particularly likes about El Raval, as well as “the opportunity to work because of people from my country.”

Imran also experiences El Raval as expensive for renting, yet cheap for food—and he thinks that things will become cheaper due to the crisis. In terms of improvements to be made, Imran cited the economic crisis as a difficulty. While he noted that the crisis is not particularly affecting his life—“everything is normal for me”—he sees that there is a lack of work opportunities in El Raval. In his perspective, tourism is a solution to the crisis: “In El Raval there are a lot of tourists, and I want more… so that everyone can be able to work. That way we can work more, if more people come.” He noted that summer provides more work opportunity for immigrants because restaurants fill with tourists.

Later Imran suggested that the crisis is visible on the streets, as “a few people have died because they couldn’t eat, had no work… 6 months ago, a person had been sleeping in a bank because he had no bed, it was very cold, and he had no food… he died.” He also believes that there are not sufficient economic opportunities for the immigrants that continue to arrive, although “work is going well for me and my family.”

In terms of physical changes to El Raval, Imran did not perceive any significant need for change—he mentioned that “There is silence on my street” and that he sleeps well. Yet like Rosey, his least favorite part of El Raval is Calle Robador, “where there are dirty girls… it’s ugly.”

6.7 Alisohe, first-generation Pakistani immigrant

Alisohe is a 45 year-old man who arrived in El Raval in August of 2014. At the time of his interview, he had only been living in the neighborhood for 2-3 months. He is the uncle of Imran, works in the same fruit and vegetable shop, and also hails from Gujrat, Pakistan.

As a new arrival to El Raval, Alisohe described his positive first impression of life in the neighborhood: “People are good. They all respect each other from whatever country. If a person is good, they can have friends from all countries. It’s pretty tranquil.” Later, he restated that most interactions are positive: “It’s very calm, they respect and we respect”. However, he also noted:
“I’m always in my house.” Like many of the other participants, Alisohe summarized that fellow immigrants in El Raval are generally “content and calm, but without the crisis people would be more calm.”

Alisohe lived in Milan for over a decade before relocating to be with his nephew in Spain. When asked to recall differences in his quality of life between Gujrat and El Raval, he mentioned: “It’s not so different, but here… Vegetables, fruit, milk, a lot of other fresh things, the fresh air… that was all better in Pakistan”. His family lived outside of the large city of Gujrat, and for that reason life was more tranquil—it was “very beautiful and fresh.”

Elaborating on his perceptions of sustainability in El Raval, Alisohe expressed that “everything is dirty, it would be better with a little cleaning”, and that the neighborhood “lacks a bit, more plants, green is lacking… if there is a little money for parks, if there were more plants, trees… For health it is very good to have trees.” He listed the Rambla del Raval as an exception to the lack of green space, and he would appreciate more “areas for health and green things.” He summarized that a more sustainable El Raval would be “more green”.

On the topic of neighborhood wellbeing, Alisohe also noted that tourists leave waste in the streets. He also believes the neighborhood is attractive to tourists because “They like to look, to speak with people from other countries, to get to know us…”

When asked why immigrants such as himself choose El Raval as their neighborhood, he explained: “This is a center. People come to the center of any country or city because there are other people, many shops, people come to shop or to look… and so there’s work.”

Alisohe expressed some worry over the future of the neighborhood related to the economic crisis: “Because I have family here it was easy, but if there is no work and many more people arrive, it will get worse. People will rob or die. If immigrants who have money come, it will be better.” Yet his overall perception of El Raval was very positive—he found no particular area to complain about, and said that he likes any area: “It’s all the same—where there are good people, I like it there.”

6.8 Ramandeep, first-generation Indian immigrant

Ramandeep is a 23 year-old woman from Uttar Pradesh, India, who works in the same fruit and vegetable shop as Saima. Saima and Ramandeep are close friends as well as colleagues. Ramandeep arrive in El Raval in 2010, but she later moved throughout different areas of the city for 2.5 years. She settled in El Raval again about 8 months prior to the interview, in the spring of 2013. Ramandeep asserted that since she first lived in El Raval in 2010, there are now “more stores, more girls from Pakistan working, and more immigrants” in general—in a period of three years she noted these changes as significant.

During her time living in L’Hospitalet de Llologebrat (a municipality adjacent to Barcelona, in the larger metropolitan area), she noted that life was “more calm, with less noise”. However, her motivation to return to El Raval was that “Here in a neighborhood in the center you can find all the things from our country,
and you don’t spend money on the metro”. During her time in L’Hospitalet, she found work in a restaurant with the help of her uncle. She noted that, “things are clean in this neighborhood too, but in Hospitalet, it was cleaner there.” Ramandeep spent a few months without work prior to coming to El Raval and gaining employment at the fruit and vegetable shop. When considering her move in retrospect, Ramandeep recognizes that “here it is a little more expensive to live, it’s not so cheap. Outside of this neighborhood, in Hospitalet for example, it was cheaper, but there is no work out there.”

Ramandeep’s friends in the neighborhood include people from Pakistan, Barcelona natives, and Italians. She notes a better quality of life as a woman when compared to her life in India: “For a girl it’s better, because in India, for example, in big places like Bombay or Calcutta, girls can go out. But in other parts girls are not so free. Here I can put on whatever clothes I want and I can make my own life. I love that.” Ramandeep still lives with her aunt and uncle, who also relocated to El Raval. Her parents are back in Uttar Pradesh. She describes her place of origin as a small village that was very different from El Raval.

In terms of other quality of life indicators in the neighborhood, Ramandeep noted noise problems, but also a trade-off involving in having the “good social life” that she enjoys: “a lot of noise is because there are a lot of people, so to go out it’s nice—to go out with friends in the afternoon and have a coffee.” She later elaborated on why she finds the neighborhood to be a stimulating place to live: “They put on a lot of parties, there are a lot of clothing shops, and lots of food, I love that.” Her favorite space in the neighborhood is Plaza del Pedró, a historical, triangular plaza directly across from her grocery shop, which contains a large water fountain as well as outdoor café seating, and was renovated in 2012 (El Periódico 2012).

In terms of El Raval as a tourist attraction, Ramandeep sees all of Barcelona as “very famous for tourists… and everyone comes close to the cat [sculpture], where there are many hotels”. Ramandeep enjoys asking tourists what they like about her neighborhood, and said that their answers often involve “the antique apartment buildings, antique things in general in the city center, and the opportunity to take photos”.

Ramandeep notes that there are “plenty of thieves” in the neighborhood, but that in general she is very satisfied with El Raval and does not see a significant need for change. She mentions that, “people throw garbage and cigarettes in the street”. Later, she suggested that “when it rains there is too much dirty water… the dogs pee and poop in the street. El Raval needs a park that dogs can use.” Like Rosey and Imran, Ramandeep expresses that she is disturbed by the presence of prostitutes in her neighborhood: “I see girls doing bad work, I don’t like it. It makes me want to vomit, their eyes and lips are so painted, their clothes are so ugly… I don’t know why they’re doing that work.”

When prompted about sustainability, Ramandeep echoes the concerns of the other immigrant participants, and noting that the crisis has particularly affected her pay at the fruit and vegetable shop: “Now in this shop they are
paying less. When I worked in the restaurant it was a better job, but they couldn’t pay me anymore." She stated: “The crisis is strong, many Pakistani people don’t have work. When there is work its better, we all work and then rest for a while in the afternoon." She seems to enjoy this aspect of life in Spain, elaborating that her favorite neighborhood interactions are “when many people sit in the plaza for a while in the afternoon, eating and talking”.

Ramandeep believes most immigrants locate themselves in El Raval because “I think it’s the most beautiful neighborhood in all of Barcelona, there are antique buildings and churches. But now immigrants arrive and don’t find work, it’s a very big problem.”

In reference to ongoing change in the neighborhood, Ramandeep notices the growth of commercial activity, despite the crisis: “I think there will be more and more stores here… when the crisis ends, this will make a lot of work so that people can earn well." In terms of her own plans, Ramandeep mentions that “At the moment I want to stay here”, but if she needs work she has considered moving to Castelldefels, a much less populous municipality in the Barcelona metropolitan area. She mentions: “It’s beside the airport, there are big houses, it’s very clean, and there’s more work.”

CHAPTER 7: CONNECTING STORIES

7.1 Clarifications

Culture has been defined as “the ocean we all swim in and cannot sense ordinarily” (Ehrenfeld 2008:20). This may ring true for members of some cultural groups more than others. Yet this is important to consider in the methods chosen for this work, as no participant’s narrative is analyzed with regard to a particular culture. Culture is recognized as essential to the broader context of the perspectives shared, but it is not utilized as a tool for analysis of these interviews. The problems that the interviewed individuals pinpoint and the ideas that they generate about El Raval are fuel to inspire future planning projects for BCNEcología.

In the broader scheme of international labor migration, most migrants are young adults (Skeldon 2008:7) and this was certainly reflected among the immigrant interview participants. With the exception of Alisohe and Valentina, all of the first-generation immigrants interviewed were under the age of 30, and had initiated their adult lives in El Raval, arriving in their early 20s.

Doubt has been expressed about the capability of the planning profession to enact meaningful policy for immigration and integration on the neighborhood scale (2003a:319). To what degree could an agency such as BCNEcología intervene to promote cultural exchange, integration, and cohesion? Certainly the approach must go beyond the physical creation of open space, which was the municipality’s approach in recent decades.

Valentina Maini emphasizes a grassroots approach to change and planning in El Raval, while Pere Cabrera and Salvador Rueda rely on traditional top-down approaches through urban design interventions and transversal public service endeavors. The other participants do not vocalize a strong desire for
change of any sort, other than economic enablement. Yet perhaps this is because they remain in silos within El Raval, and have not claimed the neighborhood as their own. This is not ideal when considering the implications for overall community cohesiveness.

Urban geographer and Barcelona native Jordi Borja describes urban citizenship as a “conquest” that requires individuals to proactively redefine their cities by participating in the daily process of constructing each unique urbanity—in the hopes of collectively addressing divisive tendencies and reaffirming a communal urban identity (2010:262). The young, working-class immigrants interviewed certainly expressed an improvement in their lives upon moving to Barcelona, and seemed hopeful for a future with greater work opportunities. In this sense, their “conquest” of the city must be founded on the capacity to find economic fulfillment in the neighborhood—only then can they begin to focus on other quality of life indicators such as noise, pollution, and green space.

Regarding the noise problem, the Ajuntament released a detailed 2012 report on the issue of noise pollution in the city, exposing that the Barrio Gotic (Gothic Neighborhood) suffered significantly more from noise disturbances than El Raval (“Informe sobre el soroll” 2012). In particular, it was identified that a number of streets on the edges of South Raval have noise disturbance problems, and objectives for action included creating deterrence to noise through stricter business licensing in relation to local non-compliance, increased monitoring of public streets, and more public education to promote more responsible night life (“Informe sobre el soroll” 2012:12)

7.2 Common visions

Among both the professionals and the first-generation immigrants, noise, prostitution, and crime were agreed upon as problems, but the economic crisis seemed to dominate the discussion as a barrier to inclusive sustainability. Yet in the professional interviews, the crisis was downplayed and other disturbances such as noise conflict and tourist pressure were emphasized. Instead, the immigrant participants see addressing the economic crisis and sustainable work opportunities as crucial, prior proposing any future change in the neighborhood. Upon further prompt, the desire for higher quality housing, cleaner streets, and more public green spaces in El Raval was expressed among the resident immigrants.

It is clear that economic indicators are prioritized for the first-generation immigrants, while the three professionals emphasized integration into Catalan culture as a primary concern. Valentina Maini represents a middle class immigrant who has built a professional career in Barcelona, and has thus moved outside of the concerns of struggling economically or learning a new language, into the realm of building on the richness of her community. The other five immigrants remain in the silos of their immigrant social networks, primarily speaking their native languages. There is a need to reinforce language fluency and cross-cultural connections so that these young immigrants may expand their social networks and become participative members of their neighborhood.
The first-generation immigrants also seemed interested in capitalizing off of tourist presence. They seem unaware of the negative reception of tourism experienced by traditional inhabitants of Ciutat Vella—perhaps a good thing. None alluded to the domination of tourists or male groups in the streets, while this was a major theme among the professionals. In fact, the female immigrants were pleased with their freedom in public life. Tourism was seen as a pleasant factor sustaining work opportunities, while the professionals viewed the boom in tourism as an attack on the city with uncertain consequences for quality of life. There is a need to communicate a vision for a diversified, resilient economy in which immigrant and Catalan residents alike can find economic opportunity without relying on the whims of international tourist demand.

Of the six first-generation immigration participants interviewed, only Valentina Maini was fluent in Catalan, and Ramandeep was building a working knowledge. Yet Ramandeep and the four other first-generation immigrants (excluding Valentina) still faced a significant language barrier when attempting to express their full thoughts in Spanish. Their comments referred to a significant network of compatriots in El Raval, and it is logical to assume that their need to speak in Spanish or Catalan does not extend much past their daily interactions at work. Certainly, they appeared to have rich and satisfying social lives with fellow immigrants and colleagues from their home countries, feeling comforted by the presence of foods and goods from their homeland and the ability to live day-to-day speaking their native language.

Leonie Sandercock asks questions that are crucial to the recommendations of this work, based on “the problem of coexisting in the share spaces of cities of difference (2003b:127). These questions include: “How [do] societies establish civility, then conviviality, across difference?” and “What might it mean to ‘manage difference’ in ways that could be transformative rather than repressive?” (2003a:321; 2003b:127). She proposes that: “becoming a multicultural city… requires the active construction of new ways of living together,
new forms of spatial and social belonging.” (Sandercock 2003b:136). This is where BCNEcología’s task lies: in using El Raval, a microcosm of potential multiculturalism, as a model for the city of Barcelona in the face of continued immigration.

CHAPTER 8: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Inclusive sustainability in planning

Among literature for planning amidst cultural diversity, there is an emergent dialogue around “interculturalism”, which not only acknowledges and protects the side-by-side existence of multiple cultures, but also encourages cross-cultural interaction (Sandercock 2003a:321). Sandercock juxtaposes the “melting pot” model of the United States, which has historically aimed for cultural assimilation of immigrants, to more recent forms of bicultural or multicultural societies that choose to recognize and allow the perpetuation of cultural differences (2003a:319).

Why is culturally inclusive planning necessary, and will it be in the future? As a starting point, immigration creates a more rapid evolution of models of urban citizen identity (Aparici 2001). In Leonie Sandercock’s overview of best practices for planning in ethno-culturally diverse cities, she summarizes that in the 21st century we will live in “mongrel cities”: increasingly multicultural, approaching the proportions and challenges faced by countries with over a century of continuous immigration, such as the United States—resulting in a daunting “21st century multicultural project” (2003a:319,321). In contrast to multicultural integration approaches, the historical assimilation approach threatens cultural and linguistic diversity worldwide, as is particularly recognized in the field of anthropology. Thus, the need for culturally sensitive, inclusive planning derives from an ethical stance, as well as from the need for political stability an increasingly urban world.

With such a future in mind, the idea of sustainability, or sustainable planning, must be reframed for its meaning in diverse cultural contexts. Just as the concepts of poverty and development have been incubated in a Western context and then exported outward, the word sustainability represents a normative, Western understanding of long-term planning, with a very specific modern connotation: that of ensuring economic, social, and environmental resources for future generations.

Yet non-Western cultures certainly have different approaches to the task of intergenerational equity, perhaps dividing or categorizing different tenets of value, or attaching different moral significance to these tenets. In other words, the division of sustainability into just economic, ecological, and social value sets can result in the marginalization of certain traditions or value sets. Or, the scientific or technological methods lauded as effective in transitioning toward sustainability can be alienating to some groups. Or, the political and social processes by which the entire paradigm is meant to unfold may need to be reworked to fit within the decision-making frameworks of particular cultures. With increasing attention to indigenous worldview in post-colonial settings, there is
certainly recognition that the idea of “sustainable development” may shift significantly, whether in process, practice, or content, when considering historically marginalized worldviews (Thaman 2002).

One example of the foggy territory of inclusive sustainability is the recent attachment to the phrase “inclusive green growth” by the World Bank (World Bank Group 2012). This appears to be a chain of buzzwords that fits into the current sustainable development paradigm. Yet it essentially asks how the modern economy can become more ecologically sustainable while involving and serving more people, with an aim to eliminate poverty. It is still based on the paradigm of economic growth. It also hinges upon Western definitions of poverty and the need to bring everyone along on an exodus from poverty, in the first place. In fact, the opening phrase of the World Bank document on the topic is “Inclusive green growth is the pathway to sustainable development”, italicization stressing that there are no alternative perspectives (World Bank Group 2012:xii). The document then goes on to describe how economic growth has “lifted” people out of poverty (World Bank Group 2012). Without using further details to evince that the current sustainable development paradigm can be marginalizing, some more inclusive perspectives can be presented:

To approach a universal meaning for sustainability, writer and industrial ecologist John Ehrenfeld calls for a radical approach to recovering the full meaning of the term (2008:6). He establishes the idea of “flourishing” as key to what we are all searching for, and sets a more universal meaning of sustainability as: “the possibility that human and other life will flourish on the planet forever” (2008:6). He even separates the modern capitalist paradigm of “having” sustainability from a more universal need for “being” sustainable—in other words, sustainability is not about owning the earth, but about belonging to it. This certainly derives from the dominant paradigm of humanity being separate from nature, and of a need to systemically ensure equitable resources for our continued “development”. For another example along this continuum, sustainability has been posed as a religious duty akin to fulfilling humanity’s role of stewardship over God’s earth (Calvin College 2008).

In approaching sustainability in the context of Pacific Island nations, author Konai H. Thaman summarizes the need for holistic, culturally inclusive sustainability: a transition towards sustainability requires a cultural shift, so the ideas behind sustainability must be effectively translated into the language, both literally and metaphorically, of their particular cultural context (2002). While Thaman approaches the problem as a task for universities to approach, this paper proposes inclusive sustainability as a paradigm for BCNEcología to embrace in its ongoing work in the city of Barcelona, and its future work in the uniquely diverse neighborhood of El Raval.

8.2 Interculturalism through mutual learning

Sandercock describes a normative ideal of urban citizenship in which society is open to being redefined in the process of adaptation to immigration (2003b:151)—essentially, a form of resilience towards social sustainability. This openness to cultural redefinition suggests mutual learning. Mutual learning in
El Raval can take many forms, as there is such a diversity of cultures to be learned from. In view of what BCNEcología can do to spur mutual learning, unidirectional public education efforts can be a launching point.

The term sustainability, as it is understood in Western culture, may not translate directly into other languages and cultures. Among the first-generation immigrants who were interviewed for this study (with the exception of Valentina), none had come across the term sustainability (sostenibilidad) in their learning of the Spanish language. If sustainability is part of the vision for the neighborhood of El Raval (as it appears to be when referencing BCNEcología’s mission for Barcelona as a whole) there is a need for widespread education around the term.

In her study of the immigrant use of public spaces in El Raval, social anthropologist Isabel Aparici describes the North African boys who play soccer on the street wearing Futbol Club Barcelona t-shirts, speak Arabic to each other, switch into Spanish when interacting with elderly neighbors, and learn Catalan in school (Aparici 2001). These children embody the human capacity for adaptation.

People’s perspectives cannot be fully understood without mutual language fluency in an exchange—this was a challenge as well as a partial failure of this study. Thus, there is a need for BCNEcología to hire dual language speakers who can communicate fully with immigrant residents in El Raval, accepting the limited knowledge of Spanish and Catalan as a current and ongoing reality. Community consultation cannot be sought without a fair opportunity for community members to express themselves in a language in which they consider themselves to be fluent. One recommendation for the agency is thus to develop more holistic community consultation, in consideration of a diverse urban context. This could mean engaging people through non-linguistic means, such as through public mapping events or visioning sessions that rely on tangible or visual forms of communication.

On the other hand, it is also the responsibility of the new immigrant to equip themselves with the language skills required to work and to participate successfully in their new territory. This could be encouraged through the recruitment of elderly Catalan residents to serve as private language tutors, since the Ciutat Vella has a concentration of elderly residents. Catalan has been widely promoted as a common language for social cohesion in Barcelona, yet more effort is needed to connect adult immigrants with opportunities to learn the language (for their children, school is taught primarily in Catalan). Until mutual language fluency is achieved between neighbors, it is difficult to imagining meaningful friendships forming and cooperation flourishing.

Another approach would be to increase cultural sensitivity within the organization. This is akin to what Sandercock proposes as “a profound reconsideration of different qualities and skills that might be required if planners are to work in cross-cultural contexts” (2003b:134). The expansion of cultural sensitivity could take place through consultation with immigrant communities simply for the purpose of exchange, so that planners and technicians at the agency have a broader sense of perspectives and experiences among the community that they serve. A more progressive approach would be to seek cultural diversity in the organization’s hiring process, so as to employ qualified
members of local ethic-cultural groups, thus building the capacity for consultation and dissemination of project information in other languages.

Finally, there is a need for further research into the perspectives and needs of the immigrant community. This study was substantially limited in its capacity to generate a complete picture of existing perspectives. While a statistically significant poll could be useful for certain projects, more creative forms of gathering information could be considered. For example, technicians and planners at the agency could be required to carry out professional immersion in the neighborhood prior to developing quantitative research or project drafts. This is a technique practiced by Valentina, which was not mentioned by the other two professionals.

8.3 A multicultural built environment

Sandercock points out the phenomenon of ethnic residential clustering that often arises out of immigration networks—and the untapped resource of, for example, “Muslim builders who know about [...] gender-based spatial separations, or the spatial requirements for praying” (2003b:133). This connects strongly to Valentina’s ongoing efforts for encouraging traditional construction techniques in El Raval. Currently, she has hosted a number of straw-bale construction workshops, and her long-term vision is to harness traditional building materials and methods from the richness of cultures within El Raval, transforming the built environment with people and culture as context. Valentina’s work exemplifies the vision of “forging new hybrid cultures and urban projects and ways of living” (Sandercock 2003b:127).

The consideration of other cultural approaches to the built environment may address the concerns for domination of public space expressed by all three professionals that were interviewed. In fact, the domination of male immigrants in public spaces has been noted for over a decade (Aparici 2001). Yet I also noted the simultaneous presence of drug users, partyers, and homeless youth in the same Rambla del Raval, during both night and day. These groups were certainly segregated, but they were occupying the same plaza. One perspective in addressing this cleavage in activities is to invite in more types of diversity, thus creating a spectrum of activities as opposed to a dichotomy. Particularly, women and families are being excluded from these spaces.

The strategic development of public events can certainly shift the dynamic in use of public space. Parties are powerful in uniting people. I experienced a street party in South Raval at the end of September 2013, in which people of all ages (including some children) gathered together to dance to live music in a neighborhood basketball court. From the balconies, elderly residents watched and cheered on the party. These types of activities could be extended to immigrant residents simply through invitation, or could be co-planned through the leadership of local neighborhood associations.

Shifting habits in the use of space is possible through zoning ordinances as well as the promotion of specific cultural and recreational events, such as markets or outdoor festivals. Yet more permanent, long-term efforts should also be made to ensure that the urban form creates equitable opportunities for use by
all neighbors. By creating a diversity of adaptable public spaces, the dominant presence of foreign men in the Rambla del Raval may become more dispersed. With more options, certain areas could be promoted for use by Muslim women or families with children, for example, where they may be less likely to encounter the prostitution and bohemian activities that offend them.

The Rambla del Raval and other existing plazas are wide, open spaces in which one can see and be seen—through which hoards of tourists can cross. The development of finer grain in the neighborhood fabric (as smaller squares, gardens, and enclosed parks) could be useful for the elderly, women, and families to venture out without encountering large groups of men, tourists, or partyers. The smaller and more hidden nature of these spaces would make them more exclusive, known primarily by permanent residents who reside deeper in El Raval’s streets. Perhaps shaded by trees or enclosed by shrubs, and equipped with benches and playground infrastructure, these spaces would constitute nooks in which Muslim women feel more comfortable taking their children.

Gardens and small green spaces would also create oases within the neighborhood, buffering noise and generating economic benefits for growers who enter into garden co-ops. The Hort del Xino represents an opportunity to link “green” youth with immigrant residents who have experience growing food (such as Alisohe). In my research, it was unclear whether the garden is currently maintained—some residents noted that its gates had been locked for months. Surely, the creation of more urban gardens would be embraced by the entire

Figure 5: The painted walls of the Hort del Xino in South Raval, depicting outdated information on events and hours. Image captured by Megan Ahearn 2013.
community and could be promoted by alluding to the neighborhood’s historical roots in agrarian production for Barcelona.

8.4 A future of immigration: planning in many directions

The transience and mobility linked to recent immigrants is also key to approaching communal visions for a diverse neighborhood: immigrants will change jobs and housing much more quickly due to the nature of their recent arrival, which burdens them with uncertainty and short-term solutions—and permanent residents can feel disturbed by uncertainty and frequent change in the population around them (Aparici 2001).

It is important to recognize that aside from the permanent immigrant presence in El Raval, there is also the presence of increasing, sometimes uncountable numbers of circular migrants in any given country (Hugo 2005). Thus, there may be a number of temporary residents who are not truly invested in the neighborhood or in any form of cultural integration—and they are well protected by the current immigrant network.

Uncertainty and rapid change can be addressed through integration policies that reinforce neighborly support networks, but also expand networks that currently act as closed systems along ethnic divides. As described by Maini, there is already richness in El Raval’s networks, which should be harnessed rather than viewed as a symptom of segregation. It is important to forge connections between longer-term immigrant residents in El Raval and Catalan neighbors.

There is a catalogue of best practices in immigrant integration schemes throughout the EU, found on the European Web Site on Integration by the European Commission (“Integration practices”). BCNEcología, through its consulting work with other municipalities, could certainly collaborate with cities in the best practices search index in order to grow new ideas out of existing programs, or to adapt projects from other urban contexts.

In terms of addressing the phenomena of tourism and gentrification, there are varying perspectives. Yet one idea that emerges is the opportunity to let immigrant residents harness the tourist demand not only through their shops (which may be unsustainable in the long term, as gentrification fueled by tourism makes the rental market much more competitive). The development of first-generation immigrant-led street tours could be a niche sector for income generation. As El Raval has historically and contemporarily been recognized for its immigrant presence, such a tour would make sense in terms of selling the local experience from a local perspective. This strategy has been successfully harnessed by the marginalized street art community, which offers tours daily during the peak tourist season.

8.5 Conclusions

Coexistence entails native residents of Barcelona feeling comfortable living and working in El Raval, and immigrants feeling comfortable with their “host society”. This coexistence should leak out of El Raval: as immigrants feel comfortable with the native society around them, they are no longer restricted to
the bubble of El Raval, in which their community has historically been concentrated. Following true integration with local culture, as well as true acceptance of their own culture within the “host society”, immigrants can successfully move out of the bubble of El Raval, and a rich multiculturalism throughout Barcelona becomes a reality.

Figure 6: A neighborhood basketball court surrounded by residential buildings in South Raval, Carrer Aurora, where I experienced an outdoor street party in September 2013. Image captured by Flickr user D. Cork on 26 March 2011.
APPENDICES

Map of El Raval (Google Maps):
GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

• What is your name, age, and job?
• Where are you originally from?
• What is your opinion of the general well-being (environmental, social, and economic) of El Raval?
• What are the merits of El Raval, in terms of its urban environment?
• What are areas that need improvement in El Raval, in terms of its urban environment?
• What would a more sustainable El Raval look like to you?
• In your opinion, is there a part of the city that is still ignored by public powers?
• Do you think that the economic crisis is affecting the city of Barcelona morphologically? In what areas and in which ways?
• In your opinion, what are the reasons that immigrants enter Barcelona and stay in El Raval?
• What do you think about the potential gentrification of El Raval?
• Are you aware of any other municipal projects to alter or improve El Raval in the future?
• Do you consider El Raval to be a healthy neighborhood? This question pertains to both environmental and social health.
• Do you consider El Raval to be a welcoming neighborhood for visitors to Barcelona? Why or why not?
• Do you think community members who live in El Raval are satisfied with their neighborhood? Why or why not?
• Do you think El Raval needs to be “cleaned up”? Why or why not?
• Can you please list any projects that you know of, have worked with, or have heard of, which sought to improve sustainability (based on your prior personal definition) in El Raval?
• Have social interactions and activities in the neighborhood changed, in your opinion? If yes, how have they changed?

IMMIGRANT ONLY QUESTIONS

• When did you first arrive permanently in Spain?
• How long have you lived in El Raval?
• In the time that you have lived in El Raval, has the neighborhood changed? How?
• Have you lived in other parts of Barcelona? If yes, where?
• Can you list countries where your friends in the neighborhood come from?
• Can you describe some daily social interactions that you see or experience in El Raval?
• Do you feel that you have a better or worse quality of life in El Raval in comparison to your neighborhood in your native country?
• Can you describe the differences in your quality of life between your life in your old neighborhood (in your native country) and your life here in El Raval?

PROFESSIONAL ONLY QUESTIONS

• What is your professional background/training/education?
• During what years did you work with the municipality of Barcelona?
• Did your work cause you to be involved with the neighborhood of El Raval? If yes, how so?
• What was your role in the rehabilitation of Barcelona?
• In your opinion, what connection does the urban image of El Raval have with the renovation of the historic city center in the 1980-90s? How has the image changed?
• Do you think your professional work has influenced the neighborhood of El Raval? If yes, how so?
• Can you please list any projects that you know of, have worked with, or have heard of, which sought to improve sustainability (based on your prior personal definition) in El Raval?
• Based on your expert position, what would improve El Raval (environmentally, socially, and/or economically)?
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