

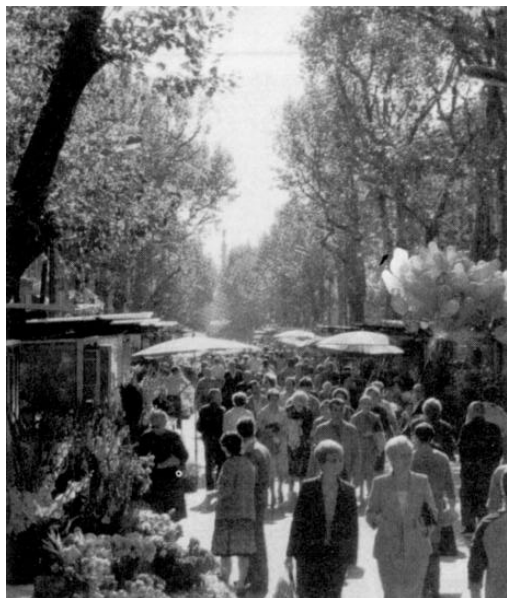


Wide boulevards and eclectic architecture of modern Barcelona. In the foreground, the "Casa de les Punxes" by Domenech i Montaner (about 1900); in the distance, Gaudi's "Sagrada Família".

A LOOK AT BARCELONA

by *ROBIN STRATTON*

Sixty-five years ago, a small delegation came to Lausanne from Barcelona to present the candidature of their city for the Games of the VIIIth Olympiad in 1924, to the twenty-four members of the International Olympic Committee gathered there for their 20th Session. It was the first bid that the Spanish city had made for the Games, but although the IOC, or rather its president, selected Paris that time, it was not the last. After two more unsuccessful attempts, once for 1936 and again, in a joint bid with Madrid, for 1972, a new group of Spaniards, still with the same goal and determination — journeyed to Lausanne this past October for the 91st Session of the IOC. The result is by now common knowledge. Let us take a closer look at the city that will host the Games of the XXVth Olympiad.



The Rambla.

IMPRESSIONS OF A YOUNG VISITOR

I first visited Barcelona as a child dragged about on a whirlwind tour of Europe by my mother, a devout Hispanophile. The images and sensations, however, remain remarkably vivid, in spite of the twenty years and the myriad of memorable scenes that have flown by since then.

Probably still most outstanding in my mind are the folk dancers and musicians performing on the Placa Sant Jaum on a Sunday just after noon. And the crowd of citizens, many of them just emerging from the Gothic cathedral which fronts on the square, who stopped to watch and even to take part. The ritual has gone on for centuries. Also the location of the seats of both the city and regional governments, that very same plot of land was the centre of Barcino, the Roman town established some two thousand years ago, when many say the history of Barcelona began. Ancient Iberians did, in fact, dwell in the area before then, the earliest evidence of settlement dating back to about 3000 BC.

The walled City of Counts, as it is still often called, grew and prospered during the Middle Ages, reaching its peak in the 14th century. At this time, another of Barcelona's greatest delights was born : the Rambla. The word is Arabic in origin, meaning *sandy bed* and denoting just that, the wash of a stream which carried rainwater from the mountains down to the sea. To prevent the water from spilling over into the streets, which occurred often, making them unpassable, channels were dug, leaving the beds completely dry.

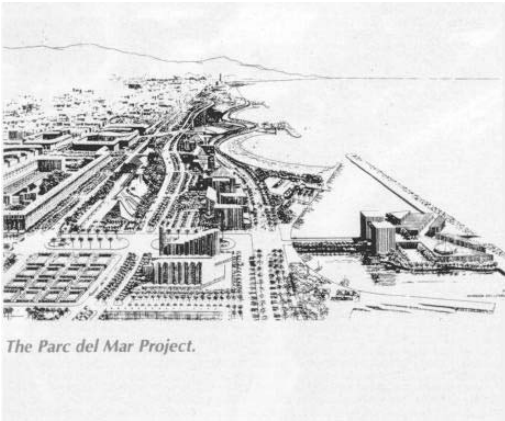
These open spaces became popular gathering places and ideal paths for strolling. On any given day, these boulevards, now paved and lined with trees, are always full of life, of flower vendors, of birds, newspaper kiosks, bustling cafes, shops and theatres.

At the end of the Rambla stands a monument to Christopher Columbus, a bronze figure posed atop a column, pointing out to sea. It was to Barcelona that he returned triumphant after discovering the New World in 1492. The 500-year anniversary of his voyage will be celebrated, of course, in 1992, the year the Olympic Games will be held in Barcelona.

RETURN TO THE SEA

Oddly enough, I have no recollection of the sea from that first trip; but it has been said a number of times that "Barcelona has grown with its back to the sea". Indeed, when I returned to the city in 1981, I was far more aware of the patterns of expansion, the topography and what seemed to be the negligence of the port area. While the growth of the past hundred years reached inland over the gentle slopes and into the foothills overlooking the Mediterranean, Barcelona seemed to fall apart at the water's edge. This. I can dare to say because the municipal authorities have also





The Parc del Mar Project.

realised the urgent need for redevelopment of the seaside areas and have already begun to improve them.

Part of this renewal will now be included in the preparations for the Olympic Games as the Olympic village will be located along one strip of the shore known as the Parc del Mar. Designed by renowned Catalan architect Oriol Bohigas, the project involves the placement of an existing railway underground and extensive land reclamation operations. In addition to providing accommodation for some 15,000 athletes, the area will house sites for several sports, shops, restaurants and other recreational facilities, including a beach.

The port itself will serve as a base for the Olympic regattas, provided the proper measures can be carried out to allow the boats direct access to the sea without having to pass through the commercial waters. The harbour is planned at the end of a triangular area known as the Barceloneta, laid out in 1753, which is currently enjoying a sort of revival in popularity as a seaside district in terms of both entertainment and living. It is hoped that this trend, as well as new uses of the land vacated by the factories and businesses which have left the area, will lead to an overall renewal while maintaining the special flavour.

City officials have said that being selected as the host of the Games of the XXVth Olympiad would give them a chance to do in six years what normally would have taken thirty. This is but one example.

RATIONALITY AND STYLE

The city's development since the walls were torn down for the last time in 1854 has been attributed to several factors : first of all, the *Eixample*, a Utopian project, one of the few in the world to be actually implemented on such a scale but quickly stripped of the principles behind it in favour of profit. Conceived by Ildefons Cerdà, perfect grids of tree-lined streets, most of equal widths, were attached to the old city with the intention of building on only two sides of each block and creating a Garden City environment. The blocks were filled in on all four sides and the architecture was not as stark as Cerdà would have liked, but what buildings they were !

The Modernista style, first introduced to the world at the Universal Exhibition held in Barcelona in 1888, became the style of much of the Eixample with some seventy-five architects putting their personal touches on its buildings. Even as a child of eleven, I was impressed by the unusual architecture of modern Barcelona, especially the rather eerie forms of Antonio Gaudi's still-unfinished *Sagrada Família* (begun in 1883). I was awed by the creative use, by Gaudi and his contemporaries, of curved surfaces, glass, stone and colourful ceramics. In Barcelona, one must always look up so as not to miss the pleasant architectural surprises which may not be so evident at street-level.

The "Sagrada Família".

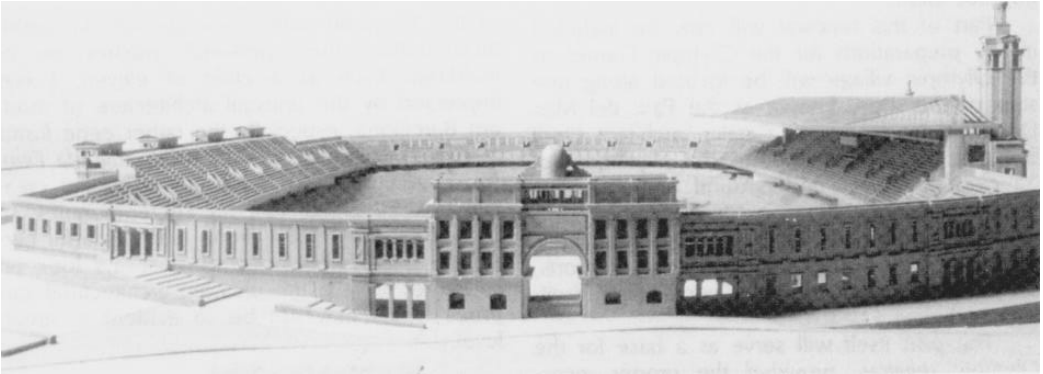


URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE OLYMPIC VENUES

Cerdà's plan included several transportation arteries, one of them the Diagonal which, after it was extended in the 1950's to reach the outlying wealthy suburb of Pedralbes, remains Barcelona's longest and widest street. The extension passed through what had been natural parkland dotted with stately private homes and landscaped gardens. When the area became more accessible, it saw the development of many of the city's sports facilities, led by the huge stadium of the Barcelona Football Club, built in 1957 (capacity 120,000). The Royal Tennis Club of Barcelona moved to the Diagonal in 1954; an exception, the Royal Polo Club had been there since 1932. In the past few decades, a wide range of facilities have followed, including those of the University



The "Olympic Ring" on Montjuïc and a model of the Olympic Stadium.

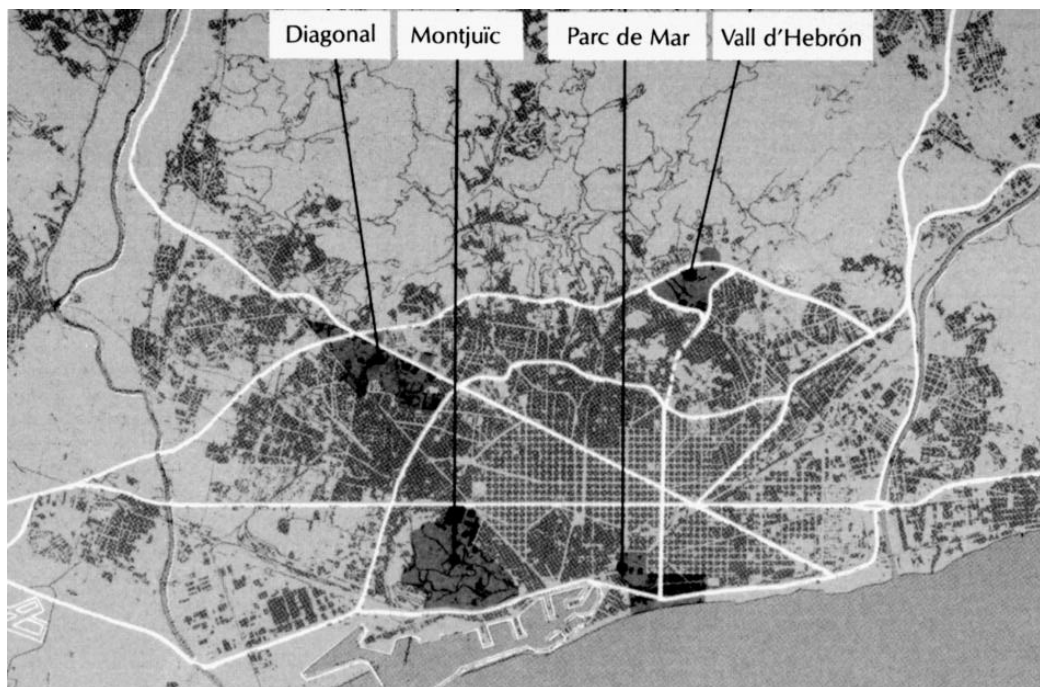


which also relocated its campus to the new area, making the Diagonal an ideal major venue for the Games of the XXVth Olympiad. Competitions for football, equestrian sports, judo, the Modern Pentathlon, tennis and volleyball will be held there.

A second important event for the modern city, with particular significance for its candidature for the 1992 Games, was another International Exhibition, that of 1929, which centres around the hill of Montjuïc, just to the southwest of the old sector. Like the Diagonal area, the 173 m « mount » began the century as a natural park and cemetery site; before then, it had been used for defense purposes, given the view it commanded over both sea and city. Planners of the 1929 Exhibition began at the Placa d'Espanya,

which they laid out at the tip of the Eixample and continued up the hill with gardens, fountains and palaces to the Olympic Stadium built for Barcelona's unsuccessful attempt to host the 1936 Olympic Games. That stadium, currently undergoing major renovation, will serve its original purpose in 1992.

Crowned by what is now known as the Olympic Ring, the Montjuïc area has been designated as the primary group of competition and practice facilities for the 1992 Games. Existing buildings constructed for the 1929 Exhibition will house the main media centre, as well as the fencing, table tennis, volleyball (except for the finals) and weightlifting events. Just across the street one finds the Las Arenas bullring, built in 1899, where all boxing matches are to be held.



The design of the Olympic Ring itself is the result of a competition organized by the Governing Council of the Candidature Committee which invited eight teams of architects to present proposals for the area and its individual buildings. They chose only one project to act as the basis of the overall plan, but incorporated elements of the others into it. Laid out on a fairly level ground, the Ring will contain the stadium, the main swimming and diving venue, the new campus of the National Institute of Physical Education, site of the wrestling competitions, and the Olympic Palace, currently under construction.

Also in the area is the Municipal Swimming Pool, where the Olympic water polo title will be contested, and a number of playing fields and tracks.

The urban fringes are just now encompassing the Vall d'Hebrón which is nestled in the foothills about 7 km inland. The abundance of previously undeveloped land has made it ideal for the construction of new sports facilities. The first was the velodrome, built in 1984 for the World Cycling Championships held in Barcelona in the same year. A pavillion for handball competitions will follow shortly, as will an archery field and other multisports centres.

All of the four main areas (the Parc del Mar is the fourth) lie within a five kilometre radius of the city centre and none is more than nine kilometres from the Olympic village; ninety-five percent of all venues will be less than 35 km

from the village. Ideally, only the rowing on Banyoles Lake will exceed this distance with 118 km between it and the village; additional housing will be available on site. A possibility exists, as well, that the yachting may take place on the island of Palma de Mallorca, rather than the port of Barcelona, thereby requiring those concerned to take a short trip by airplane.

THE PEOPLE

We cannot conclude a discussion of Barcelona without speaking briefly of Catalonia and its people. To begin with, the language is different. Still Latin-based, Catalan, which appears everywhere — on street signs, in newspapers, in businesses — is used and taught alongside and often instead of the more familiar (probably to most of the world) Castilian Spanish.

Always more oriented towards the Mediterranean, be it as the conquered or the conquerer, Catalonia did not fully become incorporated into Spain until the 18th century, although it joined with the kingdom of Castile in the 15th century through a marriage between the two ruling families. Traditionally self-governing, with strong wills, the Catalonians gradually gained power economically, demographically and culturally in the 18th and 19th centuries and eventually recovered their autonomy in 1932 with the re-establishment of the Generalitat, or government, which was originally founded in the 13th century.

Culturally, the people of Catalonia have much to be proud of. Although the centuries have left us many examples of architecture, art, crafts and folk traditions, the greatest artistic period, in the eyes of the world, would surely be in the past one hundred years. During this time, we have seen the likes of Joan Miró and Salvador Dalí, who, at the age of 87, continues to create. Pablo Picasso spent much of his youth in Barcelona, living very near the port, and kept it close to his heart throughout his life. The city boasts many museums which bear testimony to its fascinating cultural heritage, including the Picasso Museum, the Miró Foundation and the Art Museum of Catalonia.

In the world of music, probably the greatest cellist the world has ever known, Pablo Casals, was a Catalanian; a street in Barcelona has been named after him.

After the Modernists who shaped and decorated the urban landscape at the end of the last century, a new generation of architects has emerged to enhance the city even further. Many of them will leave their marks on the facilities for the Olympic Games, as mentioned above; many on the redevelopment work and other new con-

struction that will come as a result of this event; some, even, on the course of world architectural history. As for the older works and monuments, a number have recently been or are currently being restored.

When we speak, however, of the Games of the XXVth Olympiad, we must speak of Spain, for beyond the metropolitan area, beyond the region of Catalonia, Spanish people everywhere have supported Barcelona's bid for the Olympic Games. Their slogan, « The Games, the objective of all », expressed the unanimity of the support which is even more tangibly demonstrated in the number of people — already some 40,000 — who have declared that they wish to volunteer to make the Games the best ever. Hats off to all of them, from the bottom to the top. And I look forward to visiting Barcelona again.

R.S.

