

Parish Churches and Public Space in Barcelona: A Catalan Experience During the 1950s and 1960s

ARTICLE

Parish Church, Public Space, Barcelona, Modrego, Sant Sebastià.

/Abstract

This study examines the relationship between Catholic parish churches and urban development in Barcelona, Spain, focusing specifically on the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, a notable increase in church construction was observed, correlating with the city's demographic growth and immigration, as well as the need to reconstruct a devastated Diocese due to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) aftermath.

The significant role of Archbishop Gregorio Modrego Casaus in this post-war reconstruction is emphasized. Under his leadership, many new parishes were established, and numerous damaged or destroyed temples were rebuilt. His strategic approach to restructuring the territory and the urban landscape of Barcelona during his tenure is highlighted.

The methodology of this study involves a comprehensive inventory of the 132 Parish churches of Barcelona, detailed architectural analysis, on-site visits, and the creation of graphical plans that depict the churches' relationship with their urban surroundings. The analysis spans from the oldest churches to the most recent additions, initially offering a chronological perspective, then focusing on the 37 built during the 1950s and 1960s, and finally presenting a paradigmatic case study: Sant Sebastià del Verdum (MBM architects). This temple perfectly embodies the era's changes, initiated by the Modern Movement and accelerated by the Second Vatican Council.

Overall, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the connection between Catholic parish churches and urban development in Barcelona, particularly during a period of significant post-war growth.

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Introduction

Churches, deeply ingrained in the architectural landscape and the collective consciousness of Western societies – particularly those with a traditional Catholic background¹ – play a significant role in the daily life and cityscape of many countries that share this cultural heritage.² Even to those who may not frequent churches these religious structures hold a crucial position in shaping the visual identity of numerous cities, including Barcelona in Catalonia, Spain.³ However, little is known about the role and contribution of its churches in the formation, development, and organization of its diverse neighbourhoods, both at the architectural and urban levels. It is, our understanding of the connection between churches and the urban environment remains limited.

State of the Art

Previous studies have explored Catholic architecture in Spain from different perspectives. For instance, Juan José Arrizabalaga⁴ examined 16 cases in the Basque Country, focusing on the spatial relationship between churches and their surrounding sacred precincts. Ricardo Gómez-Val⁵ conducted a restoration-oriented analysis of 56 parish churches constructed during the latter half of the 20th century in Barcelona, emphasizing liturgical and ecclesiastical aspects. Esteban Fernández-Cobián⁶ investigated the architecture of religious architecture in Spain during the mid-20th century, while E. Delgado⁷ explored sacred architecture in the country from 1936 to 1975. Paloma Gil⁸ highlighted the concept of the church as a temple in 20th-century architecture, and Magda Mària i

1 Jonathan F. Schulz, Duman Bahrami-Rad, Jonathan P. Beauchamp and Josep Henrich, "The Church, intensive kinship, and global psychological variation," *Science* 366, no. 10 (2019): eaau5141, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aau5141> (last access November 2024); Matt Murdoch and Jim Davies, "Spiritual and Affective Responses to a Physical Church and Corresponding Virtual Model", *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 20, no. 11 (2017): 702-708, <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2017.0249> (last access November 2024); Erik W. Carter, "Addressing Accessibility Within the Church: Perspectives of People with Disabilities," *Journal of Religion and Health*, no. 62 (2022): 2474-2495, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-022-01508-6> (last access November 2024).

2 Kathryn P. Derose, "Linking churches and parks to promote physical activity among Latinos: Rationale and design of the Parishes & Parks cluster randomized trial", *Contemporary Clinical Trials* 123, (December 2022): 106954, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cct.2022.106954> (last access November 2024); Meghan Baruth, "Perceived environmental church support and physical activity among Black church members", *Health Education & Behavior* 40, no. 6 (2013): 712-720, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198113477110> (last access November 2024); Robyn Plunkett and Peter Chen, "Supporting Healthy Dementia Culture: An Exploratory Study of the Church," *Journal of Religion and Health* 55 (2016): 1917-1928, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-015-0165-8> (last access November 2024); Rexford Owusu, George Kankan, and Daniel Opoku, "Predictors of church participation in Effutu municipality, Ghana: A marketing perspective", *European Journal of Business & Management Research* 5, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejbmr.2020.5.2.257> (last access November 2024).

3 Alba Arboix-Alió, "Church and City. The Role of Parish Temples in the Construction of Barcelona, (PhD Diss., UPCCommons, 2016) <https://www.tdx.cat/handle/10803/387815> (last access November 2024).

4 Juan José Arrizabalaga, "The Churches with Wooden Galleries in Euskal-Herria. The Labortano Type and Its Sacred Precincts" (PhD Diss., Architectural Department, UPV, 2012).

5 Ricardo Gómez-Val, "The Construction of Parish Churches in Barcelona between 1952 and 2000." (PhD Diss., Department of Architectural Constructions, UPC, 2012).

6 Esteban Fernández-Cobián, "The Sacred Space in Contemporary Spanish Architecture" (Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Architectural Constructions, UDC, 2000).

7 Eduardo Delgado, "Spanish Sacred Architecture, 1939-1975: From the Postwar to the Post-Council" (PhD Diss., Department of Architectural Composition, UPM, 1999).

8 Paloma Gil, *El Templo del Siglo XX* (Barcelona: Ediciones del Serbal, 1999).

Fig. X

Serrano⁹ took an interdisciplinary approach, examining churches between 1545 and 1621 from architectural, historical, and liturgical perspectives.

While there is substantial information available on parish churches from an architectural standpoint, no previous study has comprehensively assessed the significance of Catholic parish churches in Barcelona's public spaces on a broader scale. Furthermore, their relationship with the city's public spaces and urban development remains largely unexplored. If we add this to a period of extensive construction in the ecclesiastical field, namely the 1950s and 1960s of the 20th century, we find ourselves within a very well-defined and unexplored framework. Because several studies showed this relationship to have been clear enough up to the 17th century¹⁰. However, we can see here how, in the case of the Catalan capital, the temples continued to articulate the city over the following centuries, allowing for a better understanding of post-war period and even allowing for a better understanding of today's Barcelona.

Theoretical Framework

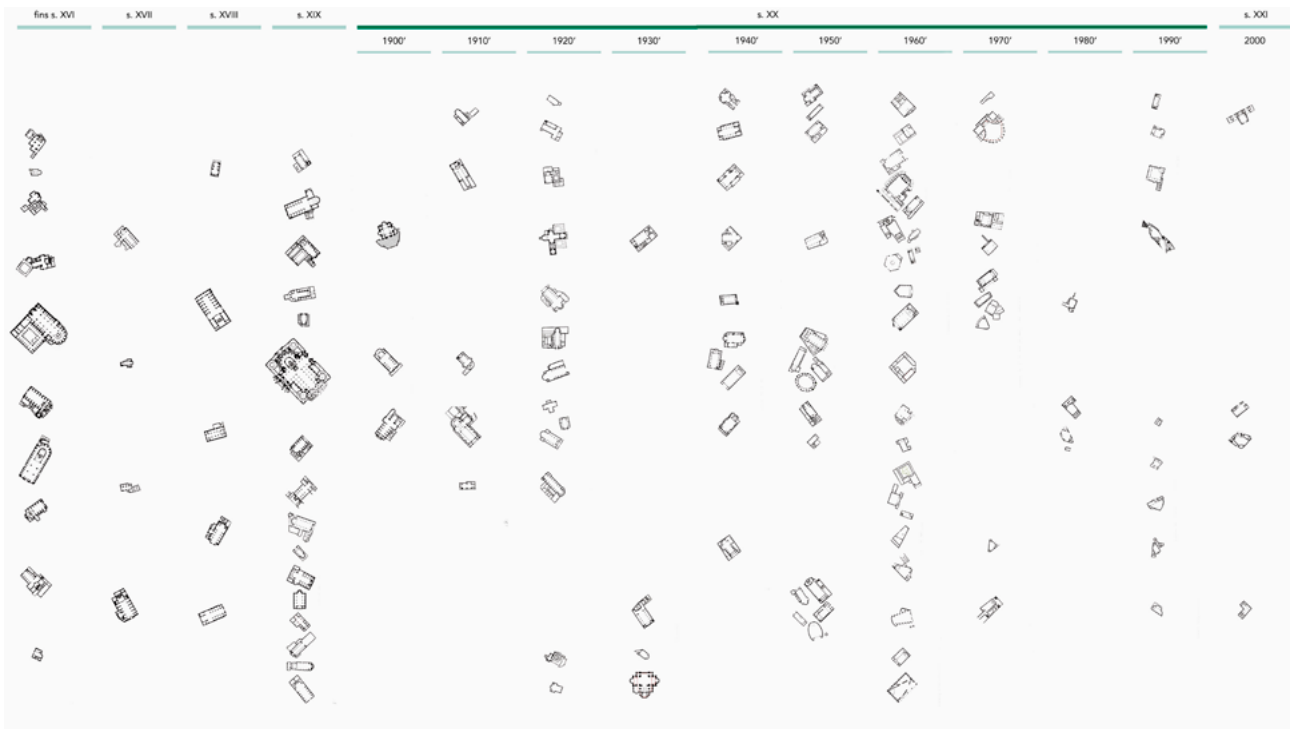
The study focuses on Catholic parish churches, comprising a diverse range of forms and styles. Perhaps no other architectural type exhibits such significant variation, as these buildings were constructed during distinct periods with varying liturgical practices. Broadly speaking, we can distinguish between pre-conciliar churches and post-conciliar churches. The former, often of basilica style, tend to adopt more elongated and linear layouts, while the latter, following the guidelines set by the Second Vatican Council (1965), promote expansive and radial forms that foster a more democratic interior space, with the parish priest facing the congregation (as opposed to having his back turned to them), encouraging interaction among attendees.¹¹

While we possess substantial knowledge regarding the architectural, liturgical, and ecclesial aspects of specific churches in Barcelona (such as *La Sagrada Família* or *Santa Maria del Mar*), as well as churches representing historical styles like Romanesque or Gothic, our understanding of the role played by parish churches as a collective group of architectural objects remains unstudied. Furthermore, even the most iconic churches have not been thoroughly studied from an urban perspective. Therefore, this framework illustrates the relevance of incorporating an urban approach, which allows us to establish connections

9 Magda Mària, "Religion, Society and Architecture: Parish Churches in Catalonia (1545-1621)" (PhD Diss., Department of Architectural Composition, UPC, 1994).

10 Magda Mària and Alba Arboix-Alió, "Liturgia y espacio urbano en Barcelona." *Actas III Congreso Internacional de Arquitectura Religiosa Contemporánea*, no. 3, (2013): 132-141, <https://ruc.udc.es/dspace/handle/2183/23042>; Renee L. Ripley and Bharat Bhushan, "Bioarchitecture: Bioinspired art and architecture-A perspective," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society a Mathematical, Physical, and Engineering Sciences*, no. 374 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2016.0192> (last access November 2024); Rudolf Cesaretti "Population-Area Relationship for Medieval European Cities," *PLOS ONE*, no. 11 (2016): e0162678, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0162678> (last access November 2024).

11 Alba Arboix-Alió, "Relevance of Catholic Parish Churches in Public Space in Barcelona: Historical Analysis and Future Perspectives," *Buildings* 13, no. 6 (2023): 1370, <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings13061370> (last access November 2024).



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between the past, present, and future, with a particular focus on the 1950s and 1960s. In this short period of time there had been built the 30% of current Catholic parish churches (without counting restorations and refurbishments because if we were to include them, this percentage would climb much higher).

In Figure 1 is displayed a temporal classification of the 132 existing Catholic parish churches within the municipal boundaries of Barcelona [Fig. 1]. Arranged to the same scale and orientation, they are ordered in columns from left to right. The first four columns show centuries, and the subsequent columns show decades.

While classifications that do not go beyond offering a territorial or chronological cataloguing of the elements in their collection are sometimes criticized, they are also necessary. This is especially true when they serve to present objective data that, although they may seem obvious, could be overlooked. The chronological table presented on this occasion organizes, from left to right and top to bottom, the 132 parish churches currently in the city of Barcelona. In this manner, the spatial axis is fixed, and only the temporal dimension is considered. It is worth noting that the moment of construction is when its spatial structure is determined. Therefore, restorations or expansions that do not substantially modify its formal essence, or rehabilitations that fix specific defects caused by various aggressions over time, are not considered. On the other hand, if a church has had to be completely rebuilt because the preceding one was totally damaged, the date of this last construction is taken, without forgetting that the location as a 'sacred point' or 'genius loci' will have many more years of antiquity.

The first column groups churches from different centuries that are prior to 1600. Except for the temple of the *Mare de Déu del Coll* and that of *Sant Martí de Provençals*, the others correspond to constructions in the city centre. They correspond to the current city centre since the third example, *Sant Pau del Camp*,

Fig. 1
Temporal position of the 132 existing parish churches within the municipal boundaries of Barcelona. Arranged to scale and with the same orientation and sorted by columns from left to right, the first four of which show centuries and the subsequent ones, decades (Graphic by the authors).

was located on the outskirts when it was built and was only surrounded by fields and unbuildable land. The next three columns gather parish churches built during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, noting a significant increase in construction in the latter. Subsequent columns correspond to periods of ten years.

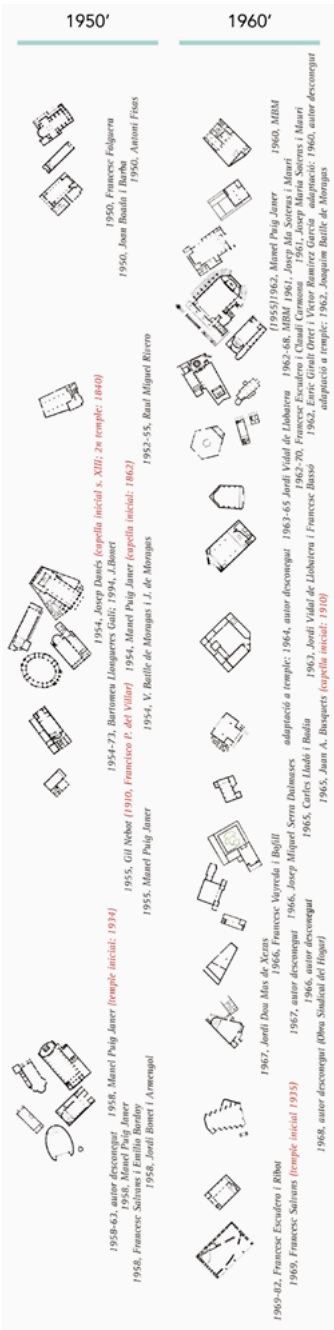
This is where the first ‘ecclesiastical boom’ occurs in the 1920s, graphically confirming the profound and comprehensive void that existed during the years of the last Civil War (1936-39) and confirming the impressive number of sacred constructions built during the 1950s and 1960s. It is during this last decade that Barcelona grows at a rate of more than two churches per year, and the seventies begin with about thirty new parish centres. This article will focus on examining in more detail this particular time frame.

While this data may seem obvious because it is directly proportional to the physical and demographic growth of the city coinciding with key moments of immigration, it is necessary to mention the situation of the last 20 years. During the 1990s and the first years of the new millennium, Barcelona has still contributed to ecclesiastical construction with thirteen new parish churches. At a time when the city’s uncontrolled growth has already slowed down and the trend has supposedly shifted towards secularism, new parish churches such as *Sant Salvador d’Horta*, *Sant Josep Obrer*, *Sant Esteve*, *Patriarca Abraham*, *Sant Marc*, *Santa Bernardeta*, *Sant Narcís*, *Sant Mateu*, *Santa Maria Magdalena*, *Sant Cristòfol*, *Sant Bartomeu*, *Sant Francesc de Pàola*, and *Sant Domènec Guzmán* have been built, some of which are monumental and all fully compliant with post-conciliar regulations.

In any case, the main objective of this research article will be to analyse in more detail and from an urban perspective the 15 churches built in the 1950s and the 22 built in the 1960s [Fig. 2]. This will allow us to better understand these tumultuous post-war years, which, in the Catalan case, were of special intensity due to being clear losers of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). If we broaden our view to Europe, we find ourselves in a similar situation. After a devastating World War II, most cities of Western Catholic tradition focused all efforts on the reconstruction of their damaged churches. Therefore, at this time, the relations established between ecclesiastical hierarchies, politicians, scholars of religious and social sciences, architects, and artists led to the construction of thousands of new churches throughout Europe in a short time, even before the post-conciliar revolution.¹² In the Catalan case, although relatively unknown, it will undoubtedly be so.

Materials and Methods

To answer our objective, it will be necessary to gather comprehensive information on the intricate connections between Catholic parish churches, public spaces, and the urban growth and expansion of Barcelona in Catalonia, Spain.



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Fig. 2
Zoom of the temporal position of the 37 parish churches built during the 50' and 60' in Barcelona. Arranged to the same scale and orientation, the annotations in red alert that a previous version of that temple has already existed and the annotations in black inform the year of construction and the architect (Graphic by the authors).

¹² Sven Sterken and Evan Weyns, eds., *Territories of Faith. Religion, Urban Planning and Demographic Change in Post-War Europe* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2022).

First, by having a general framework of its entirety, that is, considering the 132 parish churches built in the more than 2000 years of history of the city. And then, focusing more knowingly on the 37 built between the 1950s and 1960s of the 20th century. To accomplish this, we will also provide the case study of the *Sant Sebastià del Verdum*. This church showcases the successful solution of a post-conciliar church designed by the prestigious architects of MBM, which is a reference for the modern movement at the European level.

Our study builds upon previous preliminary research conducted by A. A-A for their doctoral thesis, which examined in detail all Catholic parish churches constructed within Barcelona's municipal boundaries (132).¹³ The data presented in this study aims to establish a plausible connection between churches and the city, spanning from the earliest foundational temples to churches integrated into the more recent block neighbourhoods.

Methodologically, we conducted an exhaustive inventory of the 132 existing parishes within the city's municipal limits. Additionally, we meticulously analysed architectural elements, plans, and urban contexts of each church by utilizing both on-site visits (including hand-drawn sketches and current photographs) and extensive research in various archives of Barcelona. This collection of scientific and unpublished research forms the core corpus of our study. The consulted archives and catalogues include the Diocesan Archive of the Archdiocese of Barcelona, Barcelona Municipal Archives, Historical Archive of Barcelona, Archive of the Provincial Council of Barcelona, Historical Archive of the Association of Architects of Catalonia, Photo Archive of Barcelona, Archive of the Excursionist Centre of Catalonia, Archive of the Gaudi Chair, Archive of the Cartographic Institute of Catalonia, Archive of the National Art Museum of Catalonia, Archive of the Museum History of Barcelona, several parish archives, and JM Gavín's inventory of Churches.

Precise drawings of the 132 Catholic parish churches were created using AutoCAD and Photoshop software, based on the hand-written notes and sketches from on-site visits, as well as plans obtained from different sources such as archives and catalogues. These drawings adhere to the graphic style of Camillo Sitte and Nolli.¹⁴ The current plans are self-generated. Using the AutoCAD program, the different sections of the cartographic records from the City Council (<https://w20.bcn.cat/cartobcn/>) were downloaded and meticulously assembled. Relevant layers were selected, line thickness and colours were adjusted, patterns were added, and churches and their surrounding urban spaces were depicted. For the Nolli's style, Photoshop was employed to superimpose the churches and urban plans.¹⁵

Furthermore, we analysed the historical evolution of these 132 parish churches

13 Arboix-Alió, "Church and City. The Role of Parish Temples in the Construction of Barcelona".

14 Camillo Sitte, *Construcción de Ciudades Según Principios Artísticos* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1980); Giovanni Battista Nolli, *Nuova pianta di Roma data in luce da l'anno 1748* (Napoli: Edizioni Intra Moenia, 2016).

15 Alba Arboix-Alió, "Data set of catholic parish churches of Barcelona. Relevance of their architectural characterization as singular buildings," *Data in Brief* 51 (2023): 109630, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dib.2023.109630> (last access November 2024).; Alba Arboix-Alió, "Data collection of Catholic parish churches of Barcelona," *Mendeley Data*, 22 August 2023, <https://doi.org/10.17632/2jvhcg972t.2> (last access November 2024).

in Barcelona. It is worth noting that the location and positioning of buildings play a crucial role in a city's urban growth. While we observe modern or contemporary structures today, many of them are second, third, or even fourth iterations of churches built on the same site, with the original structures dating back centuries. Factors such as forced expropriations by the ecclesiastical government and wars have led to the rebuilding of these sacred spaces. However, for the purpose of our analysis, we adopt a present-day perspective in understanding the city's history, drawing inspiration from Italo Calvino's approach.¹⁶ When gathering data to create our illustrations, we consider the year of the current building while acknowledging the year of the first structure on the site. Thus, our methodological approach combines both deductive and inductive reasoning, ensuring its applicability extends beyond the city of Barcelona itself.

As a result, we have developed an urban layout encompassing the parish churches in Barcelona, wherein the sacred interiors are integrated with the surrounding public spaces, visually representing the relationship between the churches and the urban environment. Combining both macro and micro perspectives, our study aims to offer a rich and layered understanding of the role and evolution of Catholic parish churches in Barcelona's urban and social fabric, particularly during the transformative decades of the 1950s and 1960s. The 37 parish churches built in this period have been designed in the style of Nolli's plan. Additionally, we have also meticulously depicted these urban enclaves following the style of Camillo Sitte [Fig. 3, 4, 5].

Results: Churches and City

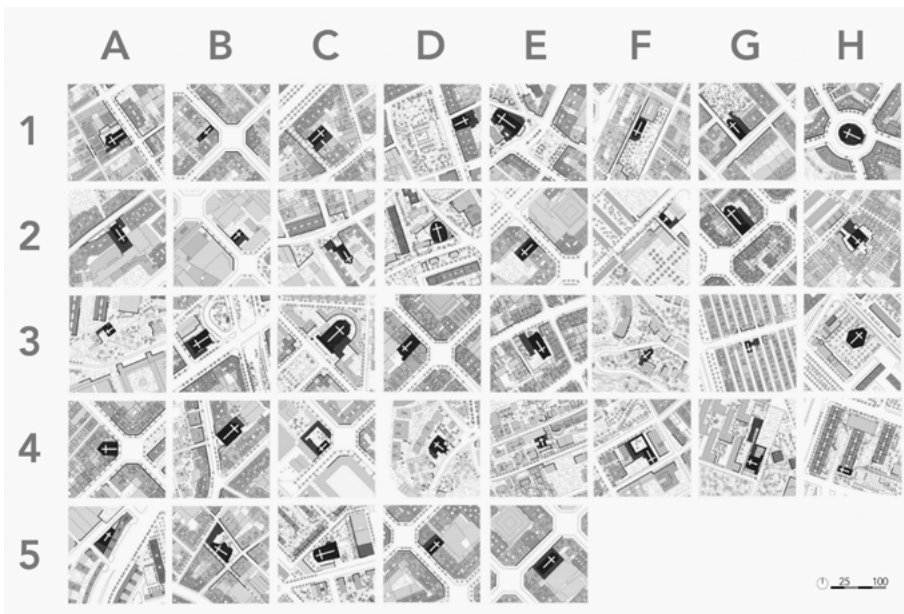
The research findings, presented through maps and drawings, are structured to comprehensively understand the diverse urban relationships that exist between the churches and the city, spanning from the oldest to the most recent churches.

First the Church is built and then the Neighbourhood appears

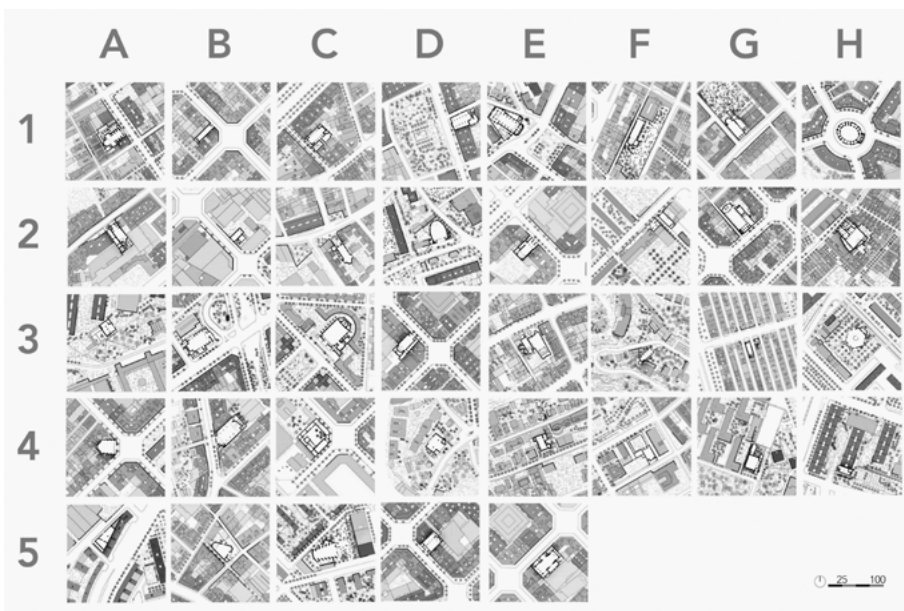
During the Medieval period, ecclesiastical buildings played a foundational role in the formation and growth of Barcelona. Examining a mid-19th century city map showcasing the current parish churches provides a clear understanding of their importance in the contemporary urban landscape. Analyzing the churches' locations in relation to the roads leading out of the medieval city reveals their influence in giving rise to new urban settlements, thus initiating Barcelona's urban expansion [Fig. 6].

These population centres, closer to Roman Barcelona, were already established by the 12th century. However, from the 13th century onward, agricultural centres surrounding slightly more distant churches began to strengthen and grow, such as *Sant Vicenç de Sarrià*, *Sant Joan d'Horta*, *Santa Maria de Sants*,

16 Italo Calvino, *Las ciudades invisibles* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 1998).



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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Sant Miquel dels Sants	Sant Tomàs d'Aquino	Santa Dorotea	Sant Joan Maria Vianney	Sants Gervasi i Protasi	Sant Josep de Calassanç	Sant Ildefons	Sant Gregori Taumaturg
	C. Escorial 163	C. Roger de Flor 245	C. Santa Dorotea 5	C. Melcior Palau 56	Pl. Bonanova 12	C. Joan de Peguera 20	C. Madrazo 92	Pl. St. Gregori Taumaturg 9
2	Santa Agnès	Sant Pançaç	Sant Medir	Sant Ot	Sant Oleguer Bisbe	Sant Pere Ermengol	Espirit Sant	Sant Sebastià
	C. Sant Elies 23	C. Badajoz 130	C. Constitució 17	Pg. Manuel Girona 25	C. Nàpols 133	C. Lluís Borrassà 20	C. Trav. Gràcia 401	C. Viladrosa 96
3	Sant Rafael	Santa Tecla	Sant Pius X	Sant Llorenç	Crist Redemptor	Sant Joan de la Creu	Santa Maria de Cervelló	Sant Pauli de Nola
	Pl. Can Ensenya s/n	Av. Madrid 107	C. Pardo 5	C. Entença 109	Av. Mare de Déu de Montsenat 34	Av. Vallvidrera 75	C. Almirall Cervera 8	C. Alfons el Magnànim 125
4	Corpus Christi	Santa Cecília	Sant Felix	Sant Jordi	Sant Cebrià	Verge de la Pau	Sant Jeroni	Verge de Natzalet
	C. Bailén 175	Pg. Sant Gervasi 66	C. Sardenya 29	Viaducte de Valcarlos 7	C. Arenys 65	Pl. Ferran Casablanques 4	Pl. Mossèn Ferran Palau 3	C. Juan de Mena 29
5	Santíssim Sagrament	Santa Joaquina de Vedruna	Sant Ambrós	Preciosíssima Sang de Nostre Senyor Jesucrist	Mare de Déu de la Medalla Miraculosa			
	C. Santander 18	C. Francolí s/n	C. Conclí de Trento 297	C. Viladomat 76	C. Consell de Cent 10			

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Fig. 3
Urban implementation of the parish churches built in the 1950s and 1960s of the 20th century in Barcelona, with the same scale and orientation. Drawn following the style of Camillo Sitte (Graphic by the authors).

Fig. 4
Urban implementation of the parish churches built in the 1950s and 1960s of the 20th century in Barcelona, with the same scale and orientation. Drawn following the style of Giambattista Nolli (Graphic by the authors).

Fig. 5
Name and address of the parish churches that appear in the Figures 4 and 5 (Graphic by the author).

Sant Andreu del Palomar, Sant Martí de Provençals, or Sants Gervasi i Protasi, popularly known as *La Bonanova*. The dedication of these churches later served as the namesake for the respective neighborhoods that developed around them.

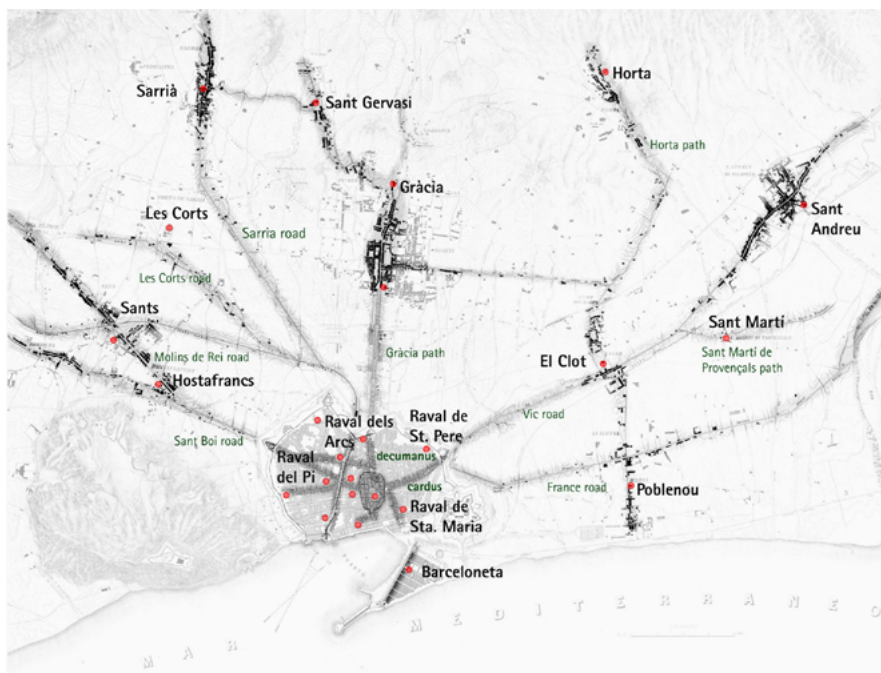
Over the centuries, new settlements continued to consolidate, often with a church as their central feature. Examples from the same map include *Verge de Gràcia i Sant Josep*, also known as *Els Josepets de Gràcia*, *Santa Maria de Gràcia*,

Santa Maria del Remei in *Les Corts*, *Sant Àngel Custodi* in *Hostafrancs*, *Santa Maria del Taulat* in *Poblenou*, and *Sant Martí del Clot* in the ward of the same name. These examples highlight the linear and direct cause-effect relationship between foundational churches and the urban expansion.¹⁷

The relationship between neighbourhoods and churches can be more intricate than the straightforward case of foundational churches, it is, the cases when first the church is built and then the neighbourhood appears around it. After the notable urban and demographic boom in Barcelona during the mid-20th century, primarily due to immigration waves in the 1920s, 1940s/50s, and 1950s/60s, the city witnessed significant changes in its growth patterns. The traditional medieval growth model became obsolete, giving way to the regular layout of the Eixample district, the emergence of neighbourhoods around factories or commercial axes, and the creation of industrial estates.¹⁸

Up until the 18th century, much of the history of Western architecture could be identified and summarized through the Christian temple. Indeed, up to the Baroque period, churches have been one of the paradigmatic architectural types where structural, constructive, and compositional progress of each era is concentrated.¹⁹ In addition to their symbolic, utopian, and transcendental nature, attributes such as monumentality, allegory, and referentiality are added to the sacred building. This results in a society that is predominantly believing to invest all available resources into its construction.

But during the 18th and 19th centuries, in Catalonia, a process of secularization began, which continued into the 20th and 21st centuries, creating a predominantly secular dominant thought. Nevertheless, despite it is claimed that



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Fig. 6
Plan of the existing churches in Barcelona in 1855, which are now the main churches in the neighborhoods they connect. Graphic by the author on base "Plan of Barcelona and its surroundings in 1855" (source: Arturo Soria y Puig, Cerdà. *Las Cinco Bases de la Teoría General de la Urbanización*. Milan: Electa, 1996).

17 Arboix-Allió, "Church and City. The Role of Parish Temples in the Construction of Barcelona".

18 Manuel Solà-Morales, *Deu lliçons sobre Barcelona: Ten Lessons on Barcelona* (Barcelona: COAC, 2008).

19 Kenneth Frampton, *Historia crítica de la arquitectura moderna* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2007).

Barcelona is one of the most secular cities in Europe according to the Secularist Spanish civil association “Europa Laica”, at the same time it is found that the relationship between the church and the city remains highly intense. This is because, no matter how much society and the democratic state have secularized, parish churches continue to be closely linked to popular culture. They continue to exist, shaping and uniting the city of Barcelona to the point of still forming a recognizable entity between the church and the city.²⁰

This is particularly evident when studying those cases where it is not the church that establishes the urban core, nor the already settled population that demands the erection of the parish church. Rather, it occurs on those occasions where the religious building and the urban fabric are planned together on paper and are simultaneously constructed in the city. It is in these comprehensively planned neighbourhoods that the church is discovered to be one of the



7

key pieces for articulating and symbolizing the whole ensemble. In Barcelona, various developments of this type can be located, which can be grouped into three distinguishable strategic lines, the third of them occurred during the 1950s and 60s.

Church and Neighbourhood built at one same Time

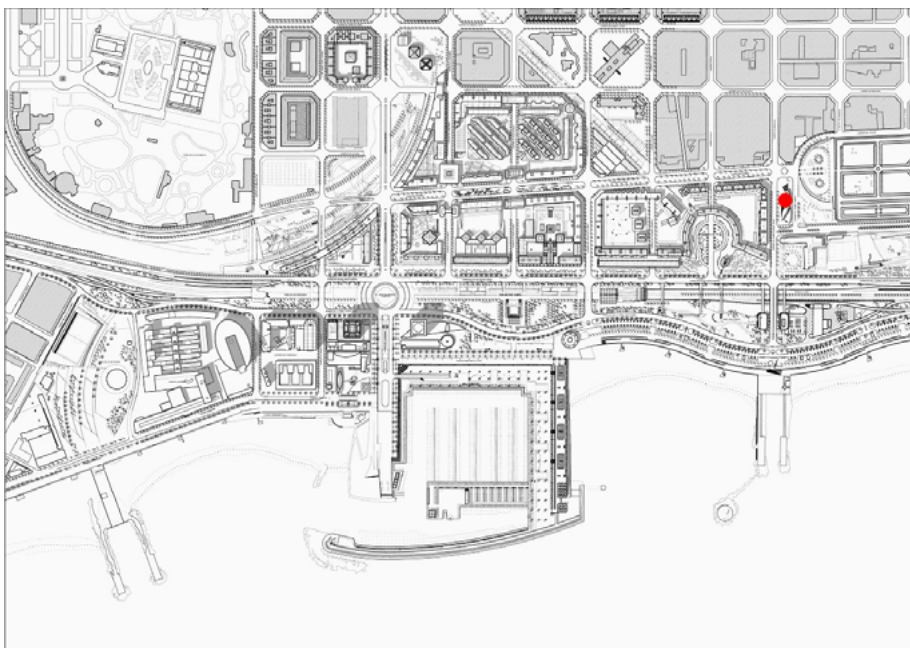
Church and city go hand in hand, initially, when contemplating the first territorial expansions near the older fabrics of foundational Barcelona. The neighbourhood of Barceloneta with its parish church of *Sant Miquel del Port* is the best and the first example. Its construction, in 1753, carried out by the engineer Juan Martín Cermeño, corresponds to a project of military conception and neo-classical regularity, and represents the first public housing complex conceived from the parcel module. The proposal consists of a stretch of equal, parallel

Fig. 7
Location of the parish church of Sant Miquel del Port on a manuscript map by Antonio López Sopena, 1801. Graphic by the author on base “Digital Collection of the General Archive of Simancas” (Ref: sig MPD, 29, 057).

20 Arboix-Alió, “Church and City. The Role of Parish Temples in the Construction of Barcelona”.

streets, running southeast, intersected by others at right angles. The blocks of houses obtained in this layout, elongated and of shallow depth, are arranged in the same orientation, except for those that turn 90° to form the two unique squares of the neighbourhood [Fig. 7]. One of them, the smaller, more directional and delimited one, is the atrium of the parish church of *Sant Miquel del Port*; the other, of greater surface area, more isotropic and dispersed, shapes the current market square.

Planning on paper and the construction of the church alongside a fragment of the city also proceed in parallel because of special occasions. Certain social and large-scale celebrations drive the urbanization of entire sectors of the city, with the sacred building serving as a distinguishing element. A relatively recent example is the event of the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. In celebration of the sporting event, the Vila Olímpica neighbourhood was built, and the *Patriarch Abraham* temple was erected as a symbolic monument. The design of the sports city complex and its subsequent transformation into a residential neighbourhood was carried out by the same team of MBM Architects (Josep M^a Martorell, Oriol Bohigas, and David Mackay), together with Albert Puigdomènech, and incorporating projects from architects and urban planners who had won FAD awards [Fig. 8]. The church, now the parish of the neighbourhood, was born as a place of worship with the intention of being an ecumenical centre for interfaith dialogue among the various Christian denominations participating in the Olympic Games. It is the work of Josep Benedito and Agustí Mateos, who designed a standalone building, more like a sculptural monument, perhaps more significant for what it represents as an urban landmark than for the architectural quality of the whole. Its shape is that of a large fish, recalling the maritime history of the area and alluding to the early Christian symbol representing Jesus, a symbol shared among various Christian users of the centre. The church is in



8

Fig. 8
Location of the Parish Church of the Patriarch Abraham on the planning map of the Vila Olímpica of Barcelona in 1992. Graphic by the author on base "Tempus Fugit Visual Projects through Architects for Architecture" (source: <https://arqxarq.es/el-exito-de-la-vila-olimpica/>, last access October 2024).

the elliptically shaped body, leaving the tail for the parish facilities, which are currently largely empty as they were sized for a time of much attendance and have not yet been adapted to accommodate new uses. The main entrance is through a large staircase and an atrium, leading to the entrance gate, under the choir of the church. The floor plan is symmetrical along a northeast-southwest axis but is liturgically poorly oriented. Being a standalone building, without changing its shape, the sanctuary could have been projected to the east, towards the rising sun, as Christian liturgy dictates. There is a second, ground-level entrance on the higher part of the street responsible for overcoming, with its natural slope, the unevenness of the plot. The temple is situated at the end of Avinguda d'Icària, on a boundary plot between Vila Olímpica and Poblenou, which due to its shape and dimensions, allows for the autonomous placement of the ecclesiastical piece. Finally, the parish church is planned on paper and built in the city in parallel with the construction of the urban fabric when, due to a housing shortage, new neighbourhoods of apartment blocks must be rapidly created in areas farthest from the historic and geographic centre of the city.

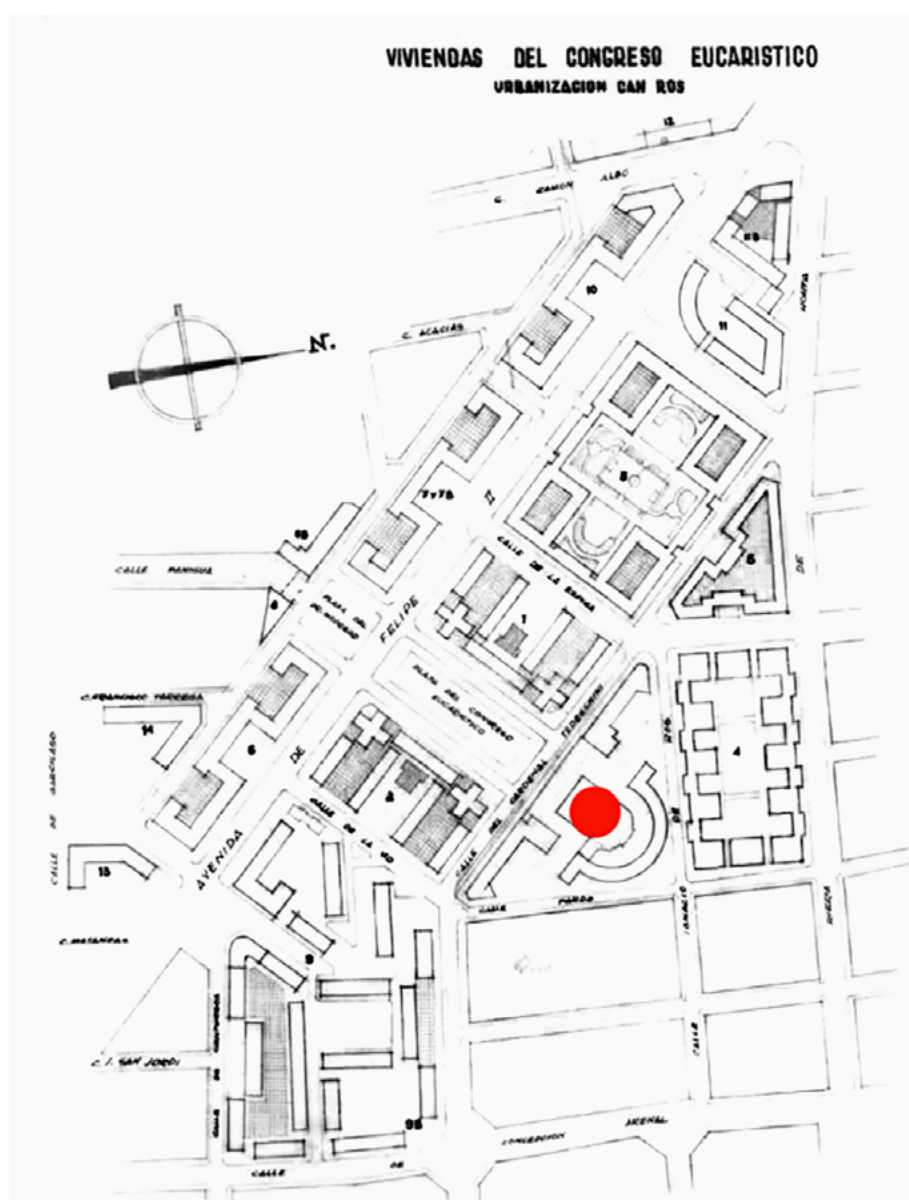
All three strategies, despite responding to very different moments and causes, correspond to the type of urban growth known in Spain as *polígons* (which can be translated literally as polygons or as 'block development'). In this type of neighbourhoods there is always unity and parallelism in the entire process of project planning, execution, and ultimately, material definition. From the Urbanism Laboratory of Barcelona, efforts are made to pedagogically explain this phenomenon. In fact, not just to elucidate urban fabrics formed as blocks, but also all the various forms of city growth. The research group from the School of Architecture in Barcelona, led by Manuel de Solà-Morales until his death in 2012, discovered a third parameter to the classic tandem of 'morphology-typology' that is very useful for studying the city: that of 'structure.' Any type of urban growth can now be explained with the triad: urbanization, parcelling, and construction. That is, the relationship between the infrastructure for distributing services, the morphology of land occupation, and the typology of building construction.²¹ These three parameters, added to the factor of time, create all the existing urban forms in the current, heterogeneous cities.

Following this discourse, block developments or polygons constitute a form of urban growth that arises from confronting all three parameters – plotting, urbanization, and construction – at the same time and with the presence of a single agent. It is an operation, responding to a very specific need and where, usually, available economic resources are scarce. In general, this type of growth leads to homogeneous, geometric urbanizations that appear suddenly in delimited areas and with the ad infinitum repetition of residential blocks. Upon taking a closer look, however, focusing on parish churches, it is discovered that in most cases, the church building is one of the key pieces that articulates the predominantly residential ensemble. It is the piece that is associated with the appearance of open space – often defining what represents the only square in

21 Manuel de Solà-Morales, *Las formas de crecimiento urbano* (Barcelona: Edicions UPC, 1997).



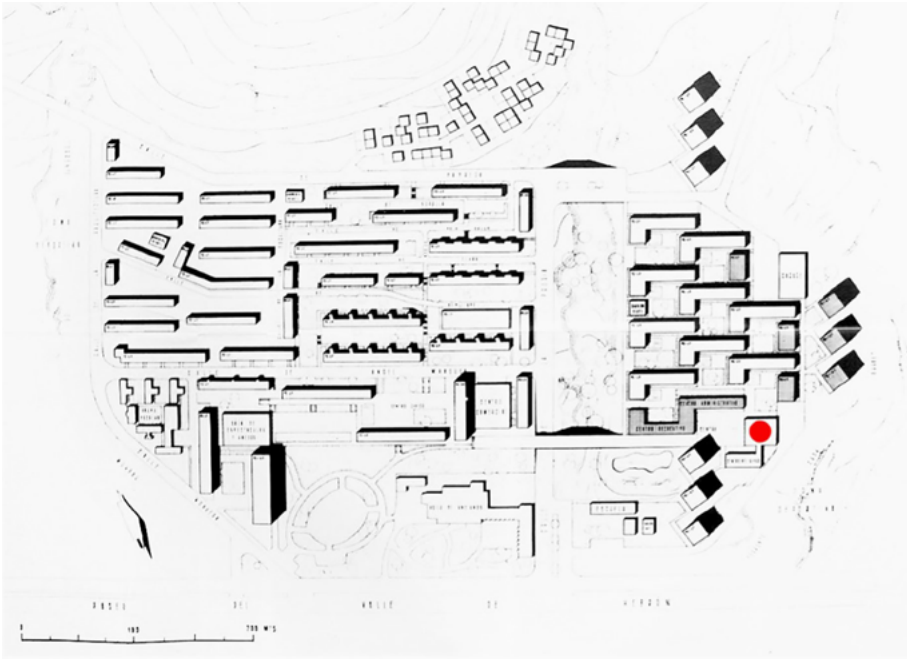
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Fig. 9
Location of the Parish Church of Sant Francesc Xavier on the map of the neighbourhood then known as Ramon Albó. Graphic by the author on base "Web Memory of the Neighbourhoods, Graphic History of the Neighbourhoods of the Horta-Guinardó District" (source <https://memoriadelsbarri.blogspot.com/2011/11/historia-del-barri-de-can-peguera.html>, last access October 2024).

Fig. 10
Location of Pius X on the urbanization plan of Can Ros, the initial name of the Congrés neighbourhood. Graphic by the author on base: Les Vivendes del Congrés Eucarístic de Barcelona. 1952-1962. Barcelona: Edicions UPC, 2011, 40.



the settlement; it is the landmark placed at the point of greatest visibility; it is the building that tends to be set back from the established alignment; and it is the element that forms the unique urban enclave of the whole due to the symbolic and structural role of the church building itself.

In the growth of the city of Barcelona, three periods are identified where, in response to housing demand to accommodate demographic growth, the construction of *polígons*, is resorted to.²²

In an initial phase, during the second decade of the previous century, groups of 'Affordable Houses' emerged. Following laws specifically enacted for the purpose, low-density clusters featuring single-family homes were built. A prime example is the affordable houses of Can Peguera in the district of Horta, with the Parish Church of *Sant Francesc Xavier* serving as a focal point. Another is the neighbourhood of Fargues in Guinardó, with the Church of *Sant Antoni de Padua*. These residential clusters feature very simple urban forms and highly austere architectural types, designed to provide decent housing to meet the minimal needs of their inhabitants [Fig. 9].

In a second phase, spanning from the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 to the year 1955, despite a slowdown in the construction sector due to a lack of building materials, more complex urban forms with a greater variety of housing types were realized. Within a new legal and institutional framework, the housing cluster of the Congrés neighbourhood stands out, with the Parish Church of *Sant Pius X* playing a central role. This is a development of greater dimensions compared to those of the previous period, introducing isolated blocks and opting for a diversity of architectural types. Public services and facilities assume more importance, affecting the overall design of the cluster [Fig. 10]. The church, designed by Josep M^a Soteras i Mauri, although not constructed

Fig. 11
Location of Sant Jeroni on
the urbanization Montbau.
Graphic by the authors on base
image made available through
courtesy of Arxiu Municipal de
la Ciutat de Barcelona).

22 Aixelà Ferrer, *Els polígons de Barcelona* (Barcelona: Edicions UPC, 1996).



until a few years later, is a focal element from the inception of the project. St. Pius X presides over the large square of the cluster and, with its tall reinforced concrete bell tower, serves as a landmark for the entire neighbourhood.

A third phase occurs in the decade from 1955 to 1965, marked by a significant increase in the promotion of public housing, facilitated by a series of enabling laws. It is in this period when most polygons have been built. A paradigmatic example is the Montbau development with the Parish Church of *Sant Jeroni* [Fig. 11]. Above all classifications, if we examine all the cases of block neighbourhoods built in the city of Barcelona, we find that the majority (11 out of 15) were constructed during our study period, between the 1950s and 1960s. Of the 37 parish churches built during this period, 11, or 30%, are churches within these block developments [Fig. 12].

Archbishop Gregorio Modrego Casaus

The presence of Catholic parish churches scattered throughout the layout of Barcelona in a homogeneous and regular manner facilitates their interpretation from a collective and series perspective. Indeed, when the churches are highlighted on a contemporary map of the city, the equidistant nature of their positioning becomes evident. Distributed throughout every district as distinctive buildings, they generally stand as recognizable urban landmarks. This distribution enables an analysis of the entire city as a whole revealing a comprehensive urban strategy [Fig. 13]. Thus, regardless of whether the sacred building predates, postdates, or exists concurrently with the population centre that surrounds it, this mapping aids in understanding the relationship between the parish churches and the city, as well as the historical relationship between ecclesiastical bodies and municipal and state powers. And normally, the name of a Bishop stands out. Cardinals Josef Frings in Cologne, Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira in Lisbon, Giacomo Lercaro in Bologna or Jozef-Ernest Van Roey in Mechelen. Discussing this matter in Barcelona leads to mentioning a significant

Fig. 12

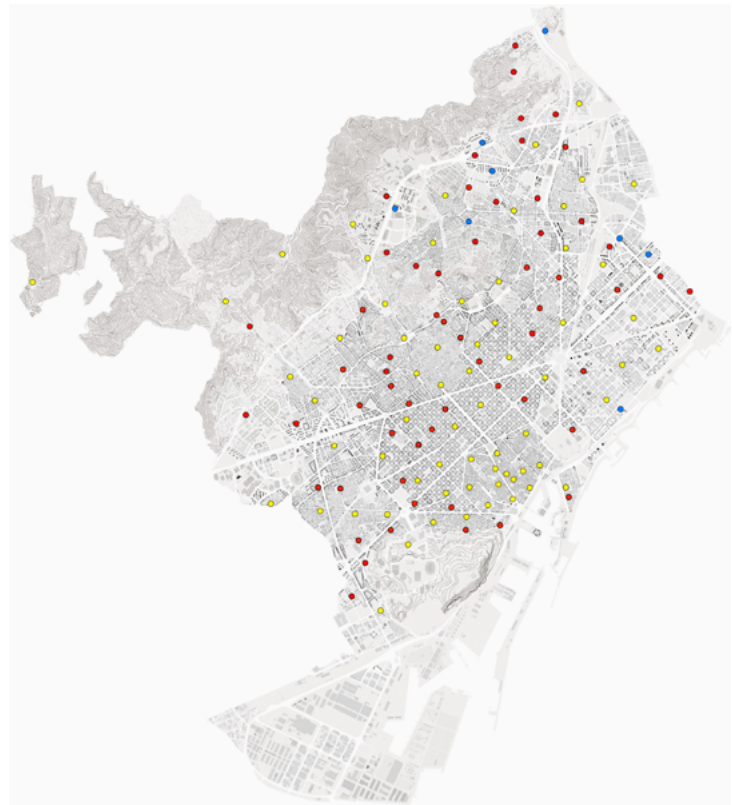
Urban layout of the churches that articulate polygons in the city of Barcelona. Except from the first four, the other 11 examples are built during the 1950s and the 1960s. From left to right and from top to bottom using the following nomenclature: Church name, neighbourhood name (if different from the church name). Year of neighbourhood construction, year of church construction (if different from the year of neighbourhood construction). In addition, there are sometimes different churches because in many cases, when the neighbourhood is built, liturgical celebrations are held in a provisional church that is nothing more than a warehouse; years later, the definitive church is built, and in some cases, after some time, a second church is built that replaces the previous one. Sant Miquel del Port, La Barceloneta, 1753. Sant Antoni de Pàdua, La Font d'en Fargues, 1925. Sant Francesc Xavier, Can Peguera or Ramón Albó, 1929. Sant Pius X, El Congrés, 1953; 1961. Sant Cristófor, La Marina de Port or La Seat, 1956; 1966; 2000. Sant Lluís Gonçaga, Sant Martí de Provençals, 1956; 1969. Sant Jeroni, Montbau, 1957; 1966. Sant Paulí de Nola, Besós Maresme or Sud-oest Besós, 1960; 1962. Sant Bernat de Claravall, Ciutat Meridiana, 1964; 1973. Sant Ambrós, La Verneda i la Pau or La Pau, 1966; 1968. Sant Ambrós, also in the district of La Verneda i la Pau or La Pau, 1966; 1968. Verge de Natzaret, La Vall d'Hebron, 1966. Sant Rafael, La Guineueta, 1970; 1960 and finally, the ecumenical center for the Olympic Games which, once the Games were over, became the parish of the Patriarca Abraham neighborhood, La Vila Olímpica, 1992. Graphic by the authors.

figure who led the diocese of Barcelona for nearly twenty-five years: Archbishop Gregorio Modrego Casaus (Aragón 1890 – Barcelona, 1972).²³

Gregorio Modrego was born in Aragón, educated in Rome, and adopted by Barcelona. He arrived in the Catalan city after the Spanish Civil War to succeed the previous bishop, Manuel Irurita Almandoz, who was notably close to National Catholicism and opposed to the Republic or any liberal or progressive currents. Modrego did not intend to lead with a spirit of renewal. In fact, the motto engraved on his shield is 'unity'. Modrego sought unity within the clergy, the country, the people, and, above all, he proclaimed unity as paramount. Despite this, the populace placed puzzling expectations on him, especially considering the city had supposedly ended the tenure of the previous bishop. Nevertheless, both the pontificate of Gregorio Modrego Casaus and his personal legacy are remembered in the history of the Barcelona diocese for their prolific activity.

The archbishop ordained 657 priests, organized multiple congresses – the most notable being the XXXV International Eucharistic Congress of Barcelona in 1952 – and promoted the construction of housing in the Congrés district. Although some say the pinnacle of his pontificate was the aforementioned congress or that his greatest gift to the Catalan capital was the construction of an entire neighborhood, from an urban planning perspective, he is credited with another significant accomplishment: the complete reconstruction of the city's religious heritage. Indeed, Gregorio Modrego must be recognized for the monumental task of restructuring and reorganizing the Barcelona diocese during the early postwar period in Spain, a time when he established a total of 118 new parishes. Of these, 63 are within the municipal boundaries of the city of Barcelona, and 59 of which have survived to the present day.²⁴

The Aragonese native arrived during a tumultuous period, and without prejudice or excuses, managed to coordinate the teams needed to rebuild the demolished or partially destroyed temples and to establish new parishes wherever necessary. The severe damages caused during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), combined with the rapid growth of the city due to a massive influx of immigrants, made the need for churches a palpable reality, and undoubtedly, his



13

Fig. 13
Urban layout of current Catholic Parish churches. In red, the ones erected under Modrego's mandate. In yellow the previous ones and in blue the post ones. Graphic by the authors.

23 Francesc Muñoz Alarcón, *Gregorio Modrego Casaus: obispo del XXXV Congreso Eucarístico Internacional de Barcelona: documentos y notas históricas* (Barcelona: Claret, 2002).

24 Alba Arboix-Alió, "Reconstructing the Dioceses of Barcelona. Parish Reform and Church Building under Monsignor Modrego Casaus from 1943 to 1967," in *Territories of Faith. Religion, Urban Planning and Demographic Change in Post-War Europe*, ed. Sven Sterken and Evan Weyns, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2022).

response was unyielding.

Among the damages to the sacred architecture of the Barcelona diocese, 160 temples were burned or looted, 74 were partially mutilated, and 35 were completely destroyed. Within the municipal boundaries of the city of Barcelona, virtually all parish churches were desecrated and damaged, with 12 of them being utterly destroyed: *Santa Maria de Sants*, *Sant Josep i Santa Mònica*, *Sants Gervasi i Protasi*, *Sant Francesc de Paula* – which was eventually torn down during the expansion works of the Palau de la Música Catalana, ceding its name to a newly built church in the Poblenou district –, *Santa Maria de Jesús de Gràcia*, *Sant Cugat del Rec* – now vanished –, *Santa Anna* – the modern church adjacent to the ancient 12th-century temple which was preserved –, *Santa Maria del Taulat*, *Mare de Déu de Port*, *Sant Antoni de Pàdua*, *Sant Francesc d'Assís*, and *Mare de Déu de la Medalla Miraculosa*.²⁵

During the period from 1943, the year of the bishop's arrival in the diocese, to 1967, the year he departed, Gregorio Modrego Casaus inaugurated a total of 154 buildings, distributed as follows: 93 newly constructed temples (35 in places where existing temples had been completely destroyed and 58 in areas that previously had no church), 43 reconstructed temples, and 18 further restored.

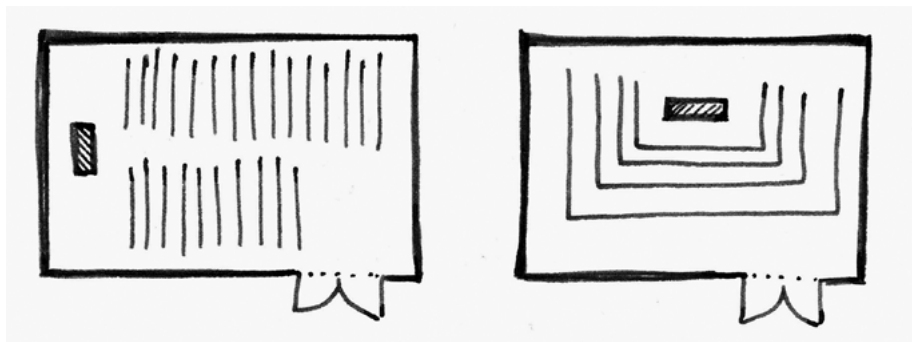
It's important to distinguish between the canonical erection of a parish – a juridical act through which a new parochial demarcation is created – from the act of placing and blessing the foundation stone and the construction and dedication of the temple. Ideally, one would follow the other naturally and fluidly, but often periods of years or even decades pass between the different phases. In this regard, Modrego consecrates parishes that had been established in previous pontificates, especially during Irurita's. Likewise, churches established by Modrego are not constructed until subsequent pontificates. Yet, in this case, the initial decision is what's most important, not necessarily how or when the ecclesiastical building is completed. The merit of the Aragonese's pontificate lies in the strategy of reorganizing the territory and the initial decision to elevate a temple.

Thus, within the municipal limits of the city of Barcelona alone, during the years Gregorio Modrego Casaus heads the diocese, 62 new parishes are canonically erected. This not only represents a significant restructuring of the diocese but also a substantial contribution to the city's urban form. In 1945, thirty-six new parishes are established; between 1955 and 1959, six; in 1961, nine; and between 1962 and 1967, eleven more. In subsequent pontificates from 1968 to the present day, eight more are added. Nevertheless, some of the erected parishes are never built, and some are later annulled. *Sant Isidre* is never built; *Sant Tarcisi* only functions while the priest is alive; *Sant Bernat Calbó* is later removed and merged with *Santa Maria del Taulat*; *Sant Ignasi de Loiola* is initially erected as a parochial holding, which is why the number of parishes established in 1945 sometimes fluctuates between 35 and 36; and *Santa Maria de Cervelló* ceases

²⁵ Josep M. Martí Bonet, *El martiri dels temples a la Diòcesi de Barcelona (1936-1939)* (Barcelona: Editorial Museu Diocesà, 2008).

to be parochial during the course of the investigation and merges with the parochial demarcation of *Sant Miquel del Port*.²⁶

As observed in the three periods outlined in the previous figure, indicating the parishes existing before Gregorio Modrego Casaus's arrival to the diocese of Barcelona (65, in yellow), those erected during his 24-year pontificate (59, in red), and those appearing afterward (8, in blue), the bishop acts with a meticu-



14

lously studied strategy. In any case, the churches built during Modrego's mandate represent almost 50% of all existing parochial churches. And, focusing on those constructed in the 50s and 60s, it's 73% (27 out of 37).

Furthermore, out of the 37 churches built in the 50s and 60s of the 20th century, 8 already follow non-directional architectural provisions, thus anticipating the directives that the Second Vatican Council would dictate. Specifically, there are 4 radial-shape and 4 expansive. One of the latter is *Sant Sebastià del Verdum*, a paradigmatic case we have taken as a case study because it represented a great opportunity to build modern architecture. MBM (Martorell Bohigas Mackay architects) know how to take advantage of this, both when designing the actual and definitive church, as well as when they design the initial temple that operates for a few years on a provisional basis.

Case Study Church: *Sant Sebastià del Verdum*

Sant Sebastià, final Church

The parish church of Sant Sebastià, in the neighbourhood of Verdum, in the Nou Barris district of Barcelona, is very appropriate to study the paradigm shift that the Second Vatican Council entails for the essence of architectural space. When the council is approved, this church is still in the drafting stage. Retaining the main ideas, which are strongly akin to the liturgical reform in the sense of a modern, restrained temple, the architects adapted it completely and, wherever possible, they abode by the Council texts' chapters which referred to church building. Leaving the container intact, they rotated 90° the position of the altar and they moved it from one end to the centre of the nave [35]. With this simple gesture the space's hierarchy became completely changed, the benches could be arranged in a U-shape surrounding the altar and it resulted in a general sense of the space that was more flat and democratic, instead of the earlier distribu-

Fig. 14
Croquis of the spatial organization of the church before and after the Second Vatican Council. Graphic by the authors.

26 Gregorio Modrego Casaus. *Labor pastoral de un gran pontificado* (S.A.D.A.G., 1962).

tion which was longer and directional [Fig. 14].

This decision led to the alteration of the nave's floor level, building it with steps in the shape of an amphitheatre. The altar is located at the lowest, more central place, dignified by a podium elevating it, and causes all glances to converge towards the priest's position. Josep M^a Martorell, Oriol Bohigas and David Mackay, founders of the renowned MBM study, are the authors of this Barcelonan church that is a benchmark at an international level [Fig. 15].

The Sant Sebastià temple is ground-breaking and modern, but also simple and austere. The entire complex is built honestly, without cladding, exposed brick walls, steel rafters, concrete main beams, Catalan vaults and solid woodwork, combining tradition with innovation seamlessly. From its interior a very remarkable transversality of space can be felt, since the temple's volume is read as a single rectangular space covered with a spatial structure made of metal mesh which, along with covering large spans, bestows a very effectist aspect on the higher level of the church. Sant Sebastià is built inside a street block in carrer Viladrosa. Its location makes it inconspicuous, a position emphasised by a not too explicit use of religious imagery. Because this temple makes a point of forgoing the near entirety of traditional religious imagery in pursuit of a bare, austere space, which makes protagonists out of the gathered community, completing the sacred interior. Only a small wrought metal cross above the entry fence, painted in garnet like the whole fence, timidly indicates the use given to its interior. The access is through a yard built with reinforced concrete, brick and steel gateways; the very same materials used in the construction of the temple.

Sant Sebastià, a bit of History

The history of this parish is closely linked to the Verdum neighborhood, today a densely populated territory in the geometric centre of the Nou Barris district within the municipal boundaries of Barcelona, but until the beginning of the last century, an entirely uninhabited space formed only by forests and vineyards. It is from 1917 that, due to the waves of immigration that the city suffers, the vineyard barracks begin to be inhabited and many others are built, leading, in the framework of the International Exhibition of Barcelona of 1929, to the first spontaneous population of this area [Fig. 16].

The celebration of the International Eucharistic Congress in 1952 represents a turning point for the incipient neighbourhood. The main event takes place in Pius XII square, at the end of Diagonal avenue, which at this moment is occupied by barracks residents. To clear the location where the closure of the massive event

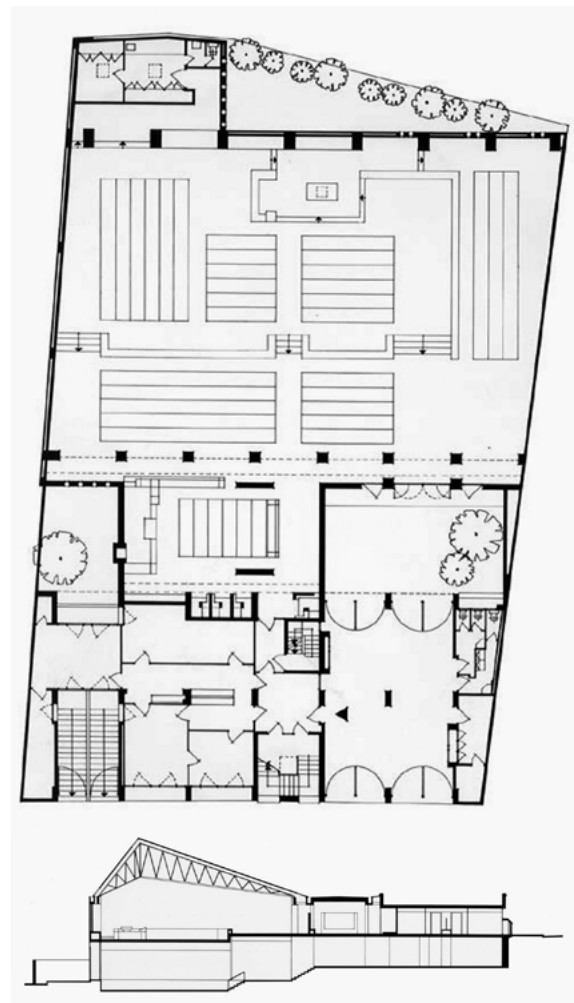


Fig. 15 Floor and section of the parish church of Sant Sebastià. Drawings courtesy of MBM architects.



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is planned, the then civil governor of Barcelona, Felipe Acedo Colunga, orders the construction of residential blocks between the neighborhoods of La Prosperitat and Les Roquetes, next to the vineyard barracks. The thousand projected dwellings occupy the perimeter delimited by Viladrosa, Joaquim Valls, Seixanta Metres (now via Favència) and de la Fuente de Cañellas (currently, Almansa) streets. These constructions, known as ‘Governor’s Homes’, are promised as temporary, without providing them with running water – the houses have cisterns on the roof and there are public laundries on the street – or the minimum sanitary parts. They are fragile constructions and of the most extreme precariousness in the materials used and the chosen construction systems. However, and as suspected, they end up standing almost fifty years, offering a sad image of permanent provisionality and vertical slum.²⁷

The housing project funded by the government contemplated three phases to accommodate both the relocated shack dwellers and the large number of immigrants who were continuously arriving in the city. In the end, they only took charge of the first – which the locals mockingly called “paper houses” – ceding the rest of the lands to the ‘Sindical Home Work’ (OSH) to complete the most western plots on both sides of Via Favència. Thus, the Verdum neighborhood was finally born [Fig. 17].

Simultaneously and on a private initiative, the Congrés neighborhood was built on some land in Sant Andreu. To understand the different context in this case, the architects of the plan had the wisdom and skill to design a hierarchical urban space rooted in the existing traces of the territory, fostering from the project the complicity between uses and buildings. The central axis, Felip II Street, is attached to one of the directives of the Cerdà plan and continues it up to Virrei Amat Square. It is over this square that a large plaza presided over by the parish church of Sant Pius X, which articulates the whole set, is projected. Unfortunately, none of this happens in the Verdum neighborhood. On the con-

Fig. 16
Aerial photo of the Verdum neighborhood in 1960. Graphic by the authors on base “ICC, Foto-plànols de ciutats catalanes (1945-1966)”.

Fig. 17
Verdum neighbourhood recently inaugurated (source: Nou Barris Archive).

27 Joan Cuadrench, *Sant Sebastià de Verdum. Mig segle d’una parròquia de barri. 1958-2008* (Barcelona: Ed. Tecfa Group, 2008).

trary, it is a relatively small polygon with a very high density where a single model of residential block with a ground floor and three stories is repeated, with 12 homes of between 20 and 50m² per landing, with a single access and corridor. In fact, everything seems left to the criteria of arbitrariness, as neither the block is well oriented, nor does the empty space created function as a square, nor does the perimeter building solidify the corners closing the set. With the completion of the plan by the OSH, the situation does not improve, but rather the conflicting disposition of the houses becomes even more evident.²⁸

Sant Sebastià, the provisional Church

The construction of this modern church with an industrial appearance has a clear precedent that serves as a trial: the provisional church that the same Bohigas and Martorell – then very young and newly graduated – designed in 1958 for the first neighbours of the neighbourhood. This, located west of the group at the intersection between the current Favència route and Artesania Street, is completed in 1959 and is one of the first public and social constructions in the area. However, the parish as a spiritual entity had already begun to function a year earlier in an old bar and dance hall, with many of the Sunday masses and the most crowded ones being celebrated in the middle of the street. Indeed, the religious acts of the Verдум neighbourhood, as happens in other cases where the parish is founded before the temple, begin to be carried out in the open air, without any building, occupying the free spaces adjacent to the median walls. These, as an austere but efficient background decoration, serve as a plane on which to support the altar table and collect the space by delimiting its visuals in the direction of the gaze of the attendees, neighbours of the neighbourhood who bring their own chairs from home to sit. This emergency and provisional situation recalls the true meaning of the word *ecclesia*, which comes from Greek and etymologically means assembly, referring to the action of the meeting and not to the building itself, thus prioritizing use and function over the protective building [Fig. 18].

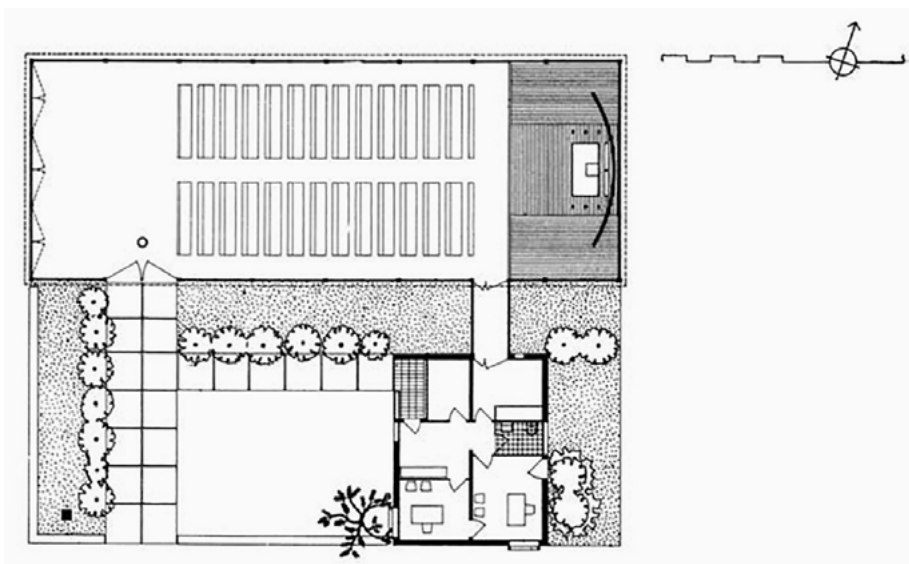
As has been seen on other occasions, and this case is no exception, the parishes of peripheral and more marginal neighborhoods play a role that goes far beyond providing spiritual service to the community. The churches of the new cores created with a conflicting social mix and a total lack of resources, must articulate neighborhoods born suddenly and somewhat forcibly, both urbanistically and socially. Thus, Sant Sebastià becomes the civic center where, in addition to the church piece, there is also a nursery, a recreational center for children



18

28 Historic Archive of Verдум: <http://arxiuhistoric.blogspot.com/2013/09/historia-del-barri-de-verдум.html> (last access November 2024).

Fig. 18
Images from different
celebrations in the street when
the church has not built yet
(Courtesy of Parish Church
Archive).



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and young people, an adult education center, a medical dispensary, a neighborhood cinema, and a football field.

In addition, the provisional church of Sant Sebastià represents the ecclesial construction that summarizes the situation of the changes that are taking place in different fields during these years. On the one hand, there is the constant echo of the precariousness and the social urgency of the neighbors who live in these neighborhoods. On the other hand, a series of liturgical changes are taking place, dictated from the Vatican, which change the physiognomy of the temples and the way they are used. Finally, these are years of affirmation of a new modern architecture in Catalonia which, once the initial isolation suffered in the country during the first years of the post-war period is overcome, begins to be recognized and emerge with its own brand. Therefore, it is precisely at the moment when favorable social, religious, and architectural concerns come together when the provisional church of Sant Sebastià can be built in the Verdum neighborhood, simultaneously responding to all of them.

The final project of the provisional church – which has two previous proposals – is composed of two rectangular bodies, the largest of which houses the temple itself and the other the sacristy and the parish offices. Both bodies are joined by a glass passage closed by lattice works of precast concrete pieces. The nave of the temple is rectangular, light, clear, and is built with prefabricated

Fig. 19
Floor plan of provisional church
(drawings courtesy of MBM
architects).

Fig. 20
Provisional church of Sant
Sebastià del Verdum. Català-
Roca.

materials. The parish dependencies, in contrast, are materialized in a smaller but solid and heavy volume, with plastered brick walls painted with lime. A large four-armed concrete cross presides over the access and finishes composing and symbolizing the provisional parish complex [Fig. 19].

The entire complex is modulated on an isotropic grid of 1,5x1,5 m, and the church nave is constructed with prefabricated materials in the swift period of three months. Its structure is made of wood, the gabled roof is made of fibre cement, and the walls, assembled dry, are made of lightweight prefabricated panels with wood chips and cement. As for the floors, they are made of mechanical brick and the ceiling is made of wooden slats. The presbytery is materialized by the presence of a wooden platform raised on the floor of the nave, a curved brick wall as an altarpiece, and a visible concrete altar. The baptismal font and the large four-armed cross that signifies the ensemble are made of the same heavy stone material. The lightness of the temple barracks contrasts with the volume of the parish dependencies and the characteristic cult elements of the church, among which the concrete cross stands out for its plastic force and sculptural verticality. This, free-standing, becomes the symbol that still endures in the memory of the neighborhood today [Fig. 20].

Sant Sebastià, an exemplary Case Study

The provisional church of Sant Sebastià and, in the same vein albeit with an increase in complexity, the definitive one, are two true lessons in functionality, economy, austerity, and modernity, also exemplifying, when looked at together, the paradigm shift that the new liturgy means for the ecclesial type. In reality, Oriol Bohigas and Josep Martorell on the first occasion, and the complete triad Martorell-Bohigas-Mackay on the second, propose two very dignified minimum constructions as they understand that all sacred buildings should be. For these architects, and paraphrasing words that Oriol Bohigas says on the third day of the Conversations on religious architecture in 1963, a temple is, above all, a good work of architecture in any sense; a building that values the tectonic, constructive, economic, programmatic, and temporal laws of the discipline, optimizes them all through the craft, and sublimates them through poetry. Therefore, what is needed is for a good architect well rooted in his time to build a temple, because the problems of ecclesiastical architecture – continuing with Bohigas' idea – are exactly the same as those of any other architectural work, and it is not worth making so many differences.²⁹

Sant Sebastià, similarly to those churches which arose around the 60s of the last century in the city's more outlying neighbourhoods, had the chance to meet the stipulations of the time. On one side, the prerequisite of building temples at a minimum cost and in the shortest possible time, and on the other, conforming to the model of a neutral, raw, noble and sincere architecture the Council called for [38]. Therefore, it's due to the need to make worship places available urgently

²⁹ Barcelona (Catalunya). Patronato Municipal de la Vivienda, *Conversaciones de arquitectura religiosa: Barcelona del 8 al 11 de octubre 1963* (Barcelona: Patronato Municipal de la Vivienda, 1965).



and that the post-Concilium aesthetic styles were not that far removed from the Modern Movement's, that a generation of young architects were able to transpose avantgarde rationalist architecture into sacred buildings [Fig. 21].

Fig. 21
Final church of Sant Sebastià
del Verdum. Català-Roca.

Discussion, Limitations and future Lines

This research underscores the profound impact of Catholic parish churches on the public realms around religious edifices and Barcelona's urban growth. Such impact can be seen in both ancient churches and newer structures, particularly in neighborhoods established in the 1920s and even more prominently in the 1950s and 1960s.

It's crucial to emphasize that our examination centered solely on Catholic parishes within Barcelona's city limits, omitting religious structures from other faiths. The study encompassed all 132 Catholic parishes, irrespective of their architectural style, as depicted in the initial image. This thorough consideration reinforces the evaluation of the 37 parishes erected in the 1950s and 1960s, aiding in fulfilling the research's goals.

There's a discernible link between foundational churches and urban territories. In such churches, the building often becomes the bedrock of urban communities, a trend dominant in Roman and Medieval urban centers. Consequently, our findings highlight that in Barcelona's foundational instances, the church was the precursor, with urban development flourishing around it. The connection between neighborhoods and churches, however, might be multifaceted. We discovered that churches were instrumental in strengthening new neighborhoods born from migration and population surges. This insight offers a renewed view of Barcelona's urban past, an area extensively explored in Urban Studies by distinguished scholars like Manuel de Solà-Morales and Joan Busquets [39, 40].³⁰ The objective is to introduce a novel urban research approach that enriches urban historical explorations, as illustrated in works such as 'The Forms of Urban Growth' and 'Ten Lessons on Barcelona'.

It should be pointed out that churches aren't merely central during the inception of cities. They also mirror the technological and cultural strides across timeframes, acting as indicators of urban metamorphosis. Before the integrative vision proposed by Ildefons Cerdà, churches were pivotal in shaping Barcelona's core, its nascent towns, and adjacent suburbs. This trend persists in towns later incorporated into Barcelona.

To our understanding, our research is the inaugural effort highlighting the church's central role in molding neighborhoods in Barcelona across the 1920s to the 1970s. This establishes an evident link between all parish churches and Barcelona's urban evolution, covering churches from ancient to modern times.

Barcelona is distinguished by its prominent parishes in a city with a rich tapestry of Catholic edifices, some currently under restoration, perpetuating a medieval legacy. This characteristic differentiates Barcelona from other urban centers where a nearing completion Catholic structure, like the famed Sagrada Família by Antoni Gaudí, might be the prime cultural attraction.

30 Sergi Lois, "Una església d'urgència. La construcció del passat imperfecte de la perifèria de Barcelona," (Master thesis, Universitat Ramon Llull – Barcelona, 2014); Joan Busquets i Grau, *Barcelona: La Construcció Urbanística d'una Capital Compacta* (Barcelona: LUB-UPC, 2018); Joan Busquets i Grau, Dingliang Yang and Michael Keller. *Urban Grids: Handbook for Regular City Design* (Novato: ORO Editions, 2019).

Our research also elucidates that during his extensive service as bishop and later archbishop of Barcelona, Gregorio Modrego Casaus initiated a major diocesan transformation. A glance at today's city map reveals the parishes form a remarkably consistent pastoral network – a legacy largely credited to Modrego, especially considering the limited new church constructions post his 1967 retirement. It appears he established a robust system aiding both the Church and state in their ideological endeavors.

The momentum to transform was expedited post the Spanish Civil War, spurring many emerging architects to reimagine church designs. This shift wasn't just a response to the global architectural inclination towards minimalism; it primarily symbolizes the Spanish Church's evolution. Primarily, the Second Vatican Council's resolutions, championing human rights and freedoms, challenged Spain's religious and political foundations. Additionally, backed by the grassroots clergy, lay Catholic groups began mirroring the role of trade unions, thus challenging the Church's upper echelons.

Significantly, churches like Sant Sebastià del Verdum were pivotal in this paradigm shift, offering a haven for these progressive movements. With mounting Vatican pressures and as the older, conservative church leaders passed away, societal consciousness began its upward trajectory.

One interesting future perspective is to replicate this study in other cities (within Catalonia, such as Girona, Tarragona, or Lleida or even abroad). However, it is important to note that although this is a possibility, there has not been a conclusive investigation on this topic to date. Thus, it represents a potential area for future research in parallel and comparative lines. The methodology employed in this study to analyze Catholic parish churches could also be applied to evaluate other unique buildings, irrespective of their religious or secular nature, and their relationships with the surrounding urban spaces.

Another interesting future perspective is to broaden the study including churches from other religions built in Barcelona. Although other religion had no impact in ancient times, it is true that has gained a lot of importance in the last decades. Including them could proportionate a new layer of information to the understanding of the current city.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the study has not employed space syntax analysis either other approaches such as theological, sociological or anthropological. While the primary focus of our research was a basic urban and architectural perspective, the inclusion of complementary analysis could offer valuable insights for future research, complementing the present findings.

Conclusions

To conclude, this study highlights the significant relationship between Catholic parish churches and the expansion of Barcelona focusing on the 1950s and 1960s. Key findings include:

1. Churches, including those beyond the medieval period, have served as the starting point for the development of newly created neighborhoods in Barcelona and play a crucial role in explaining the city's growth.
2. The rapid construction of Catholic parish churches in the 1950s and 1960s highlights the dynamic expansion of the city during that period.
3. A significant percentage of Catholic parish churches built during this time were located in block neighborhoods (polygons), which corresponds with the urban development trends of that era.
4. The leadership of Gregorio Modrego Casaus had a lasting impact on the diocesan transformation of Barcelona, resulting in a robust pastoral network of churches that still exists today.
5. The architectural shift in church design during this period, including the move towards non-directional architectural provisions, reflects the influence of the Second Vatican Council and changing societal consciousness.
6. *Sant Sebastià del Verdum* represents a prime example to transpose avantgarde rationalist architecture into sacred buildings as well as to explain the evolution of society's mindset and the architectural developments in the sacred typology promoted by the Second Vatican Council.
7. The methodology employed can serve as a valuable tool for studying the connections between churches, public spaces, and urban development in other cities with a Catholic tradition and scattered temples.
8. Future research possibilities include replicating the study in other cities, including churches from other religions in Barcelona, and employing additional analytical approaches such as space syntax analysis and theological, sociological, or anthropological perspectives.

In conclusion, we can confirm that during the mid-20th century, a significant period of change and development occurred due to the interaction between churches and urban growth of the city. The impacts of these changes were observed across various sectors, reflecting broader social, economic, and political transformations characteristic of this era. The detailed analysis provided in this article though the relationship between the Catholic parish churches and the public space that surrounds them together with the urban growth of the city sheds light on the complexities and nuances of this transformative period, offering new insights and perspectives that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the mid-20th century's legacy and its lasting effects on contemporary city.

Annex

Name of Churches Built between 1950 and 1969 in Barcelona

1. Sant Miquel dels Sants
2. Sant Tomàs d'Aquino
3. Santa Dorotea
4. Sant Joan M. Vianney
5. Sants Gervasi i Protasi
6. Sant Josep de Calassanç
7. Sant Ildefons
8. Sant Gregori Taumaturg
9. Santa Agnès
10. Sant Pancraç
11. Sant Medir
12. Sant Ot
13. Sant Oleguer, bisbe
14. Sant Pere Ermengol
15. Esperit Sant
16. Sant Sebastià
17. Sant Rafael
18. Santa Tecla
19. Sant Pius X
20. Sant Llorenç
21. Crist Redemptor
22. Sant Joan de la Creu
23. Santa Maria de Cervelló*
24. Sant Paulí de Nola
25. Corpus Christi
26. Santa Cecília
27. Sant Fèlix
28. Sant Jordi
29. Sant Cebrià
30. Verge de la Pau
31. Sant Jeroni
32. Verge de Natzaret
33. Santíssim Sagrament
34. Santa Joaquina de Vedruna
35. Sant Ambrós
36. Preciosíssima Sang de Nostre Senyor Jesucrist
37. Sant Lluís Gonçaga

*This church was deconsecrated during the course of the study, but we maintain it in the collection due to its interest from an urban point of view.

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