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Rua Xic in Poble Sec, Barcelona

Nov 30, 2014

On Saturday February 22 the streets of the district of Poble Sec in Barcelona, were occupied by people of different ages wearing blue, red, purple, and white attires and holding cardboard-made archaeological objects such as ancient Greek pottery and antique Iberian swords. Dancing and walking towards the Museum of Archaeology of Catalonia people followed a Roman arch, two Greek columns and a Phoenician boat (picture 1) also made of cardboard. The dress colour and the objects had been chosen as items to represent four ancient Mediterranean cultures that more than 2000 years ago inhabited the lands of Catalonia: Iberians, Romans, Phoenicians and Greeks (picture 2) This street performance, named [Rua Xic](#), was the final show of a process that since May had put together the Cultural Association [Marabal](#), some of the members of the “Grup d’ Arqueologia Pública i Patrimoni” (GAPP) from the University of Barcelona, [the Enfilant association](#) and [the Catalan Museum of Archaeology](#) in order to create a project of social inclusion that had heritage as a central element.



Picture 1: By Apen Ruiz



Picture 2: By Apen Ruiz

The neighbourhood where this event took place, Poble Sec, is illustrative of the multicultural face of the entire city of Barcelona that since 2001 has received a large amount of immigrants from outside Spain. The district of Poble Sec has about 41,000 inhabitants living in an area of 0.9 square kilometers. Around 30% of the neighbours are of foreign origin, mostly coming from Pakistan, India, the Philippines, Dominican Republic, and Morocco. In turn, the local population is made up in part by migrants who in the 1950s and 1960s arrived from other parts of Spain. Certainly, the experience of migration defines the development of this community. In addition, the income of the area is below the average of the city and a rapid and problematic process of gentrification currently affects the district. The diverse character of Poble Sec as well as the menace of social exclusion specially for immigrant families has attracted several associations, NGO's, and city council offices that develop social and cultural projects aiming to encourage the well being of citizens and foster a good cohabitation among the neighbours. It is in this context that the project Rua Xic emerged, and probably for the first time in this type of intervention programmes, archaeological heritage became an idiom through which conflicts and misunderstandings among neighbours could be talked and discussed.

Besides its multicultural profile, Poble Sec has its own particularities, different from other neighbours of the Barcelona metropolitan area with also high numbers of immigrant communities (such as Fondo and El Raval). Spatially, Poble Sec lies just below the mountain of Montjuic, an area of the city with a high concentration of museums, among them the Archaeology Museum of Catalunya. Nevertheless, most of the people who live in Poble Sec are not frequent visitors of the museum and, in many cases, they are unaware of their existence. When seven months ago members of the GAPP team began to participate in this project and met some of the neighbours who will later became the participants of the final

performance, we learned that they had never visited the Archaeology Museum and still worst, despite the fact that it is located just at a 10 minutes walking distance from their homes, most people were unaware of its existence. On the other hand, the Museum of Archaeology has shown a strong interest to attract more visitors and was willing to participate in the Rua Xic project (picture 3).



Picture 3: By Marga Diaz-Andreu

Probably, it would be important now to explain what were we doing in this project of social and cultural inclusion as members of GAPP, a Heritage Research group? First of all, despite our interest in the so-called Public Archaeology, this was not a project of this type, neither of Community Archaeology, but a project initiated and designed by a cultural association with deep roots in the neighbourhood and with an interest in using theatre and the arts as tools of empowerment. Heritage came later on the project. Indeed, this was the fourth edition of the XIC Project and in this occasion, the underlying topic of the project was a reflection on intercultural coexistence and migration with the aim to link the personal experiences of participants who live in a highly culturally mixed neighbourhood and who some of them are migrants themselves, with a critical historical perspective that brings the issue of interculturality and migration of peoples from past societies. For this reason, the play represented in the Museum on Saturday 22 November addressed the issue of conflicts that arose among the four ancient societies (Romans, Greeks, Phoenician and Iberians) who hypothetically lived in a context of mixture and good conviviality.

The entire project that began last May consisted of weekly meetings, workshops and rehearsals with a group of around 30 regular participants (an important group of young people between 13 and 18 years old, from different national backgrounds and also second generation immigrants, and also older members of the community, the oldest being 65 years of age). The script of the play was written during the summer. As members of GAPP some of us were involved since the early stages of the project and as heritage researchers our primary role was to furnish with archaeological information the central theme of this socio-cultural project, not only the script but also the attire the actors used, the decoration for the play and the objects that defined the four cultures in the street parade. Above all this was a process of participation and community engagement, in which archaeological heritage became a language to talk about many other aspects of social concern for the mostly young group of people that participated in the Rua Xic. In this sense, this project was different from other Museum outreach activities that open the Museum rooms and collections to different public activities. In this case, the Roman room was used and therefore resignified to host a theatre performance (picture 4 and 5).



Picture 4: By Qian Gao



Picture 5: By Qian Gao

Blog By Apen Ruiz, University of Barcelona

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