

Eco-illa laMercedes in Barcelona

A MIXED, COMPACT AND INCLUSIVE NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE OLD MERCEDES FACTORY

The old Mercedes-Benz factory is an industrial site of 9 hectares located at a key point between the Bon Pastor neighbourhood and the historical centre of Sant Andreu. Established during the 50s as the headquarters of the public company ENMASA and later housing a factory of the Mercedes-Benz car dealership it became since its closure, fifteen years ago, into an impermeable space without activity.

The ongoing transformation foresees the introduction of a mixture of residential (60% of the buildability) and tertiary uses with economic activity linked to innovation and industry 4.0 (40% of the buildability), maintaining historic industrial buildings in a set with high standards of sustainability that becomes the social node of the neighbourhood again.

The old industrial site blocks the connections between surrounding residential areas with very different social and economic characteristics. The proposal makes it the crossing point of two new urban axes: east-west axis and north-south axis, which will unite historically isolated areas despite their proximity. This new centrality contributes to articulate and cohere the heterogeneous urban and social fabrics of the environment.

A HISTORICAL SITE

The historical and patrimonial value that houses the Mercedes lies both in the material value of all its buildings, the result of successive projects during the decades 1950 to 1970 by the architect Robert Terradas, with a rationalist architecture of clear Nordic inspiration, as in the intangible value, testimony of the manufacturing past of the neighbourhood and of which many of its neighbours were participants.

The urban transformation of the Mercedes enclosure recognizes the architectural history and social significance of the place from the reuse of various existing buildings that have degraded and obsolete infrastructures.

The project is based on the conservation of the main industrial buildings, which are intended for cultural and educational facilities, and are complemented by new buildings for economic activities. This set is organized around the existing central nave, of which the structure is preserved to shelter a large public square of approximately 1 ha, which is intended to be the core of activity of the new neighbourhood, and which must also house a large centre for the production of clean energy, with solar panels on the roof of its trusses.

Configured as a first project of the transformation of the enclosure, is the recovery of the building of workshops and offices of the 70s for the implementation of a private educational facility of up to 13,000 m² of buildability, for a school of design and technology, which combines preservation of heritage and uses related to knowledge as a sample of what may be the future of the site.

None of the existing buildings, although of historical and patrimonial value, were protected by any special plan, and with the proposal they are included in the catalogue of patrimonial buildings of the city of Barcelona, with a degree of protection that allows certain flexibility so that the new uses and the desired transformation of the industrial site can flourish within while respecting and adding value to the historical site.

The document specifies the intervention allowed in the industrial heritage which is integrated into the new planning through a process of urban regeneration, allowing to improve its conditions and restart a new useful life by offering new uses, and maintaining an existing buildability of around 22.000 sqm between all of them. Thus, mixing past and future in a unique industrial site, due to its size and historical and architectural characteristics, in the city of Barcelona.

A MIXED USE NEIGHBOURHOOD

To accomplish the transformation of the plot with new life, in an economical feasible way, new buildability was added to the existing and potential one, with new typologies of buildings that could accommodate those uses which could not locate themselves in the historical buildings.

Thus, in La Mercedes a mixed-use neighbourhood is created that combines 116,000 m² of housing (of which 40% social housing), 1,300 homes, with 78,000 m² of services, proximity commerce, industry 4.0 and public , generating synergies between the centres of creation and dissemination of knowledge.

A SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The physical configuration of the plot is defined by the two main north-south and east-west axes and the south-east quadrant where the historic buildings are located, from these the residential blocks are developed, of adequate dimensions and proportions to offer a great environmental quality, orientation and ventilation, and with neighbourhood commercial fronts that energize the pedestrian axes and provide activity to the different squares that are generated, guaranteeing an intensive use of public space and fostering relations of proximity.

The commitment to a neighbourhood designed for sustainable mobility translates into a pacified and permeable public space, with exclusive circulation of pedestrians and bicycles, and with perimetral connection to the metro and commuter network that links the neighbourhood with the entire metropolitan area.

The public space, 50% of the surface of the area, is conceived as a succession of parks, squares and gardens that, with the recovery of the 1ha industrial warehouse as a central element, make up a large park of up to 5.5 ha. This set of squares and gardens links with the Sagrera Park, extending the green towards the new neighbourhood and creating different natural environments, thematic gardens with different types of vegetation.

This treatment of public space is possible thanks to a scheme of underground circulations with entrances from the perimeter streets, which in addition to distributing vehicles to the car parks, will also host logistics spaces for last-mile distribution, loading and unloading operations for shops in the neighbourhood, and spaces for recharging electric and shared vehicles. These underground spaces also house the efficient service networks that allow the area to be considered as a circular system, which will tend towards self-sufficiency and neutral carbon emissions thanks to the energy community to which all its buildings will be connected to meet their electricity and air conditioning needs.

THE URBAN PLANNING DOCUMENT

La Mercedes is conceived as a mixed, compact and inclusive neighbourhood. A place to work, play and live in an industrial and cultural enclosure, prepared to combat the climate emergency.

Even though the transformation is ambitious, the modification of the urban planning has considered multiple factors, and is detailed enough that, once finally approved, there won't be the need to draft any more planning documents and the building and urbanization permits will be directly granted.

The document includes the participation process with the neighbours, and has considered their inputs and insights, its economic feasibility and its effects on the social context and urban mobility. It has been drafted by an extensive group of architects, specialized in various disciplines such as urban planning, landscape and building and construction, taking in to account each point of view so that the final proposal meets all the standards required for the project to be fulfilled accordingly. It has also been drafted by lawyers, that have supervised and assured that it met all legal requirements, ensuring that the private feasibility and the public interest could converge.

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It has also had the collaboration of experts in economic feasibility studies, of environmental engineers to assess the environmental impact of the proposal and implement an environmental regulation to be met in the development projects, being them urbanization or building projects, and of sociologist that evaluated the transformations impacts in its social surroundings.

The proposal has been drafted in the span of approximately 4 years, during which the inputs from experts, neighbours and all parties involved, has been considered to achieve a consensus that concluded with a document that was initially approval by the municipality in September of 2022. In the foreseeable future, the document will be finally approved during this 2023, and the transformation of the site will begin to take place in the next 2-5 years.