**Tourism, authenticity, and architectural reconstruction: an historic perspective**

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In the history of modern urban planning, architectural reconstruction is usually depicted as a phenomenon linked to Romanticism, Viollet-le-Duc, and the desire of nationalist movements to represent the traces of a glorious past. The role of tourism in architectural reconstruction has normally been acknowledged as a postmodern phenomenon, especially when the history of a site is altered or invented to provide visitors with ‘historic’ experiences (Alsayyad, 2001; Jameson, 2004). In line with Lasansky´s (2004) findings, I will provide evidence, however, to suggest that the role of tourism in architectural reconstruction has a long tradition in European urban planning. Local authorities forged links with tourism entrepreneurs to promote urban centres since the end of the nineteenth century. Importantly, I will show that architectural heritage was central for such a promotion, which involved several reconstructions and, indeed, inventions of historic buildings.

The paper will present the case of the Gothic Quarter in Barcelona, which was re-created as a medieval space at the beginning of the twentieth century (Cocola-Gant, 2014). In fact, its name is also a modern creation as the space was traditionally known as the Cathedral neighbourhood. Although the area is the most ancient part in town, it was deeply reinvented between the 1900s and 1960s, a fact that changed the shape of almost 40 buildings. Not only were medieval buildings restored in thegothic style but also medieval facades were moved stone-by-stone into the area to ‘intensify’ the Gothic character of the place. Also, ordinary residential houses were removed and replaced by neo-gothic buildings. This ‘medievalization’ transformed a degraded neighbourhood into the most attractive part of the city and it provided the space with a historic image that it did not have previously.

Although it is true that the idea of re-creating the Gothic Quarter had nationalist origins, the reconstruction actually took place as a way to promote Barcelona as a tourist destination. The works were mostly undertaken in the context of the international exhibition that took place in Barcelona in 1929. Importantly, local entrepreneurs were aware that in order to promote Barcelona as a tourist destination it was necessary to have a monumental historic centre. As a local politician said in the 1920s, ‘it is an illusion to attract tourism because the majority of our monuments do not contain, or we did not still give them, the spectacular character that tourism requires’.

In sum, the paper will show that the tensions noted by Wang (1999) between the authenticity of tourism experiences and toured objects are not simply contemporary phenomena but are inherent to tourism development. Wang states that ‘even though the tourists themselves think they have gained authentic experiences, this can, however, still be judged as inauthentic, if the toured objects are in fact false, contrived, or part of what MacCannell calls staged authenticity’ (Wang, 1999, p. 351). In Barcelona, local authorities were aware that tourists sought historical experiences and, consequently, understood that what the city needed to attract tourism was to exhibit its monuments in a spectacular way, irrespective of whether the objects were original, re-constructed or even invented.

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