



B-TEAM
BROWNFIELD POLICY IMPROVEMENT TASK FORCE

BROWNFIELD DAYS IN SEVILLE/SPAIN
31 May, and 1, 2, 3 June 2011

WORKSHOP 2 “Re-imagining Production Spaces: the Real Fábrica de Artillería, Seville”

SPECULATION AND GENTRIFICATION IN THE SAN BERNARDO DISTRICT
A MANIFESTO FOR SAN BERNARDO

The San Bernardo, 52 Neighbourhood Association

<http://sanbernardo52sevilla.blogspot.com/p/manifiesto-por-san-bernardo.html>

From the 19th century until almost the 1990s, San Bernardo was separated from the centre by railway tracks. The Eduardo Dato and Enramadilla avenues, to the north and south also acted as barriers which isolated the district and had a levelling effect on it. This fact gave San Bernardo a marginal role within the city until the 1990s. In the wake of the area's restructuring, the district became a central location within Seville in every respect. Not only is it a geographically central district, it is also located between one of Seville's key financial and commercial centres, Buhaira-Viapol, and the historical and administrative centre.

In principle the district is separated from the city because of its location beyond the city walls and because of the Tagarete stream, for which a culvert was not built into 1859. When the San Bernardo station was built in 1861, it was the railway that now cut off the district from the rest of the city. The railway's arrival brought no improvements, nor did it improve access to San Bernardo. It made things worse by cutting off the district which was also suffering from the poor hygiene of the apartment blocks. Its isolation and distance from the city made the district the site for locating dangerous and contaminating industries.

San Bernardo's consolidation as a working class area went hand in hand with the creation of major work centres around it, mostly as a result of public-sector initiatives. San Bernardo had excellent benefits for industry, given the ample availability of land, the proximity of the railway, an essential factor for the large iron and steels industries. In 1782, the artillery factor was built. It occupied as many as five district blocks. It was followed in 1848 by the Military Explosives Factory. These were the two main factories in the area. At the end of the 19th century, various cement factories, such as "El Porvenir" and "La Rosa" sprung up around the explosives factory. The proximity of all these manufacturing businesses and the municipal abattoir implies that these were the workplaces for most of the district's residents.

The decline of San Bernardo is explained by factors shared by the rest of the historical city: the natural aging of the housing stock, rent control, the flight of private and public capital to the outskirts and the creation of new working class neighbourhoods. In addition to these, two specific factors combined to make the district decline faster than the other areas of the historical centre. The first was the 1961 flood and the second, the equally disastrous 1963 general urban plan. The first was the result of overflowing by the Tamarguillo stream, which at the time was channelled above the modern-day Ronda del Tamarguillo and markedly accelerated the deterioration of much of the housing. The 1963 General Urban Plan froze new-build permits. Based on the assumed natural displacement from the urban centre to San Bernardo, redevelopment of the area was planned to include the building of department stores. This did not happen since the department stores finally opted for sites within the city walls and settled in places like the Plaza del Duque and Plaza de la Magdalena. The damage done to San Bernardo because of these two disastrous events was enormous. For the

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residential area, station and neighbouring factories, a clean-slate operation was envisaged whereby the structure of the district would disappear so as to give rise to a major new commercial district which was pivotal for the city. This would stretch from Menéndez y Pelayo to a new avenue coinciding with modern-day Buhaira and from Menéndez y Pelayo to La Enramadilla. Even though the plan was not put into action for almost two decades, no building permits were granted in this commercial district that were intended to be developed.

In the 1940s San Bernardo's population reached a high point. It then began its demographic decline. Depopulation escalated from the 1970s, which registered the sharpest decline despite efforts to halt it. One of these was the Housing Co-operative created in 1968. It clashed directly with the official position which remained in place until the 1980s, preventing permits being issued in the district. It was only after the second half of the 1980s that several apartment blocks begin to be built. Some streets, like Portaceli, were completely uninhabited during this time. Meanwhile, the population grew older with the average age increasing from 30 in 1935 to 39 in 1986. The district therefore became a marginal area in the 1980s.

In 1971, changes were made to the general urban plan and the district's requalification as a commercial district was removed. Meanwhile any actions or permits were put on hold until after completion of the project for the interior renovation of the district, as the co-operative proposed. However, the project fell behind schedule and eventually nothing was done. It was only in the 1980s that permits began to be issued in San Bernardo, 20 years later when it underwent a first, modest urban renovation between 1983 and 1987.

The 1987 General Plan included San Bernardo in the legislative process and gave it a similar protection to the rest of the historical city. A special plan for the district of San Bernardo was drafted and was processed together with the general plan. The main amendments to the general urban plan affecting San Bernardo were however those concerning the surrounding areas and which shifted the relative position of the district within the city, making it more central. The railway that had been throttling the city was removed. The section that ran through the district was replaced by a new avenue, Juan de Mata Carriazo-Cabestany, which became one of the city's main thoroughfares, as part of a north-south axis from Pueblo Saharaui to Borboya and Manuel Sirout. The district was consequently reconnected with the centre of the city. The removal of the railway led to the remodelling of La Enramadilla district to the south of San Bernardo and the creation of an underground section at Avenida de la Buhaira where many new tertiary-sector buildings and green spaces were created, in between residential buildings, offices and hotels, which extended the Viapol-Avenida San Francisco Javier financial and commercial centre of the city.

The district was no longer cut off and surrounded by unstructured land when it acquired a strategic location. The land freed up by the railway was taken up by apartment blocks with the highest prices in the city. All this produced a revaluation of the district's land and there was a surge in property transactions. In the space of barely a decade the district underwent a huge change; traditional buildings were demolished en masse and were replaced by smart, new luxury buildings. The humble residents, who had suffered in the district until then and were in rented homes for the most part, were gradually displaced. Contributing to the process was their age and vulnerability and the fact that they had scant financial and intellectual means and in many cases were living in buildings close to ruin. Traditional families therefore saw



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themselves pushed out of the district, while the district was losing its residents. The identifying features were being lost and the district became a residential area for the élite.

Conclusions.

The traditional residents of San Bernardo and its way of life have been extinguished in recent decades. Recovering what has been lost is unfeasible. Even so, residents who have lived there all their lives, still remain. It is a moral obligation and one of justice to demand the upkeep of the district and its protection from landlord harassment. It is not a utopia: the tools required to make this a viable situation are in place, provided there is strong political will.

Little can be done for the district and little effort is required. It is up to the administration to compensate the district's still-remaining historical residents. The obligation is greater given that the administration's actions were a decisive factor in the abandonment of the district and the poverty that its people have suffered.

Any evictions should be paralysed in this small district which has suffered so much. Housing to resettle San Bernardo's residents exists and depends on the political will to expropriate empty and abandoned buildings and to set them aside as homes for these people at a fair and stable rent.

QUESTIONS

1. How might the revitalisation of the Royal Artillery Factory contribute to the regeneration of the district of San Bernardo?
2. Can you describe similar cases in your own countries and comment on the strategies that were adopted?
3. What are possible citizen participation tools for residents in historical industrial areas to avoid gentrification and achieve better social cohesion and improvements in the urban environment?