

REGENERATION OF "EL BULLON": A CONFLICT BETWEEN TWO DIFFERENT VISIONS OF THE CITY

Posted on 10/02/2010 by Naider



Last week, as **I was leaving home to work and found a demonstration on the doorstep of the City Council**([Santurtzi](#) - [Basque Country](#)) coinciding with January's plenary session going on inside. Meanwhile, one of the demonstrators came to me and gave me the following piece of writing:

"NO to the destruction of the Bullón Neighborhood"

"Today, Thursday 28 January the Council will approve an amendment to change City planning to make way to its regeneration plans: Destroy the entire neighborhood. The City Council argues that "The Bullón will be one of the areas with better quality of life of the municipality". The truth is that the Bullón is a unique neighborhood in Santurtzi: Its streets, its gardens, its gaztetxe -cultural centres for youth-, his life ... **There are in this neighborhood a lot of things we consider of great value that would be destroyed if the Plan of the City Council takes place.**

Moreover, In the name of development would destroy everything to build a modern neighborhood, a neighborhood tailored to THEIR interests, and that behind this plan reveals the use of urbanism as a money making tool. As the newspaper El Correo has announced: "The City of Santurtzi will knock down 180 houses in the neighborhood to start a thousand new flats within three years".

We will be here to say NO to speculation disguised as urban surgery. Say NO to the destruction in the name of growth.

The City Council said that "The Bullón will soon be history". We say that despite his threats, it will continue to write his own story."

What says the Council

On the other hand, we have [the Council](#), which insists arguing it has been a continuous relationship with local residents, making all the efforts to involve them on the project since the ruling party ([PNV](#), [Basque Nationalist Party](#)) won the local elections in 2007.

The plenary eventually approved the amendment of the Planning tools. Meanwhile, City Council and the mayor of the municipality, [Ricardo Ituarte](#), stated that "**the current legislation makes it unfeasible economically and socially the regeneration of the district**, and now, with this amendment are initiated legal steps that will lead to comprehensive reform of The Bullón". For the first mayor, "if there is a need of regeneration in the town, that is The Bullón, which presents a lack of infrastructure to which, after two years of serious work and constant liaison with the neighbors of the area, has been given a solution".

But, let's have a look to the **regeneration plans**:

The plan will demolish the existing 180 housing units to raise a thousand new flats, 75% of them affordable. Wider streets; new roads; sewage management system and lighting; the transfer of the Iberdrola electric substation and two new parks will be some elements that define the project."*In total, 87,508 meters square of land in three years could be taken by bulldozers*" as a local newspaper

highlights. In the meantime, residents are expected to be housed in other parts of the town. *"It will be one of the parts of town with the best quality of life"* promised City Mayor, Mr. Ituarte.

Is this a conflict between two different visions of the City?. Is it new?

Those plans remind me the ones implemented in [mid-XIX century Paris](#), perhaps the pioneers in this type of transformation processes, which supposed dramatic changes in the structure of the city that became a role-model for many other cities of the time, like London or Moscow.

It was [Napoleon III](#) who commissioned [Georges-Eugène Haussmann on June 22, 1852 to "modernize" Paris](#). **He hoped in hiring Haussmann that Paris could be transformed into a city with cleaner, healthier and safer streets and housing. At the same time though, as critics would argue, urban surgery would also make streets too broad for rebels to build barricades and revolts easy to bring under control with modern military means.**

Those transformations were made possible by improvements in techniques and also the adaptation of laws allowing eminent domain at a time when traditional liberal laws conceived private property as an unlimited right. Haussmann removed many old narrow and winding streets and apartment houses were demolished. He replaced them with wide boulevards lined with trees and created extensive gardens for which Paris is famous today. Haussmann's plan also included a uniform height of buildings and benchmarks as the Arc de Triomphe and the Grand Opera House.

Haussmann actually succeeded in improving sanitation and transport, and the political ends of his plan were especially welcomed by the high classes, whereas some of the Parisian people felt that the works of Haussmann destroyed their roots and social connections.

Anyway I would not mean with this, that is the case of "The Bullon". **What those both examples** (The Bullon, and XIX century Paris) **may have in common is the conflict between two different visions of the city.** The one perhaps more concerned about beauty, cleanliness, order and the other, shared by those who may not be willing to put at risk their roots and sense of belonging to a place or community.

The need of more explanations and a comprehensive regeneration plan, including social and economic policies

I do believe that the current mayor and his team is working to improve the living conditions of his neighbors and I am sure that is the only motivation for those regeneration plans. However, **it seems that there is still work to be done in order to involve the whole community in the project**, explaining why, as I quoted before, *"the current legislation makes it unfeasible economically and socially the regeneration of the district"*, and, as a result, makes the demolition the most reasonable option. Residents also would require clear information on where will be accommodated during the works and in what terms will be relocated later.

However, I would suggest even more. In my opinion, **the Council ought to be proposing a holistic perspective of the regeneration of 'El Bullón'**. Regeneration is not only about building new streets and homes for those evicted, though they may be necessary. Social and economic policies also need to be launched if we do want to change the community, 'El Bullón', for the better.

Picture: [EL Correo](#)

There are no comments yet.