

# Theatre and Architecture in Palma

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## Abstract

The study of the place of theatre in Palma is research that shows its existing, closed and vanished venues throughout the history of the city. It is a preliminary and ongoing inventory covering 98 performance spaces, some deliberately ostentatious but most modest. A typological system of leisure and culture that raises a series of questions: Why were they built? Who are their agents and what is the nature of their architecture? What is the place of theatre in Palma?

In this historical and urban journey, the study of the space of theatre becomes a means to interpret the relationship of architecture with culture over the centuries. Beyond its architectonic structure, we have started from the theatrical and performance event, with a broad approach, to select and define the theatre venues in which architecture and scenography are seen as the meeting point, at the same time and in the same place, of actors and audience.

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**Keywords:** theatre mapping, typology, theatre architecture, history, urban planning, architecture, performance space, Palma, Mallorca

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## Theatre and Architecture in Palma

### City, Architecture and Performance Space

The evolution of the theatre map of a city parallels its history, in which theatre has seemed to sense growth and urban transformations by adapting the architecture of the performance spaces to the cultural and social representations of each period. Thus, looking at the chronology of theatres located in the urban layout of Barcelona it is possible to establish a route that reveals the urbanising capacity of theatre in the modern city (Ramon, 2011: 52-57). Often, and specifically in the case of Barcelona, we can see how the construction of auditoria anticipated urban development well into the 20th century, when theatre, as a popular show and social function, declined (Ramon; Aloy, 2012).

Theatre, seen from a broad approach and beyond its architectonic structure, has determined the choice of performance spaces inventoried in this study. The place of theatre is broad and ephemeral by definition; it moves halfway between architecture, theatre, music, the visual arts and scenography. The “mise-en-scène” creates a framework for social events and the performance space can become a means to understand the relationship of society with culture and leisure, which embraces events of both high and popular culture. Scenography and the performance space act as the mediating element between culture, performance and its reception by the audience (Pestellini, 2015).

Throughout history, in Palma the design of performance spaces has evolved in parallel to social changes. The performances at the Teatre Principal (Pons, 1955 and Pascual [coord.], 2007), with opera productions for the Palma bourgeoisie; in the cafés providing musical entertainment (Mas i Vives, 1986), with popular performances of zarzuelas; in the headquarters of associations, be it Republican, Catholic, workers, and so on (Santana, 2002); early 20th century private initiatives, such as the Teatre Líric and the Teatre Balea; continuing in the second half of the 20th century with the tourism boom of the island and the auditorium Tito’s overlooking the promenade, known as Passeig Marítim (Quetglas, 1989), designed by Josep Maria Sostres,

can be understood as expressions of social patterns and of both the cultural and architectonic evolution of the city.

Theatre architecture in Palma has also been defined by specific urban and architectonic features. The Teatre Principal was located between the high city and the low city and above the torrent. However, the Auditorium and Tito's, in the new Passeig Marítim of Palma, were located on land reclaimed from the sea, with an architecture, in the case of Tito's, influenced and affected by this environment. However, we have also been able to identify other patterns, such as the lack of theatres in the area of the Eixample, perhaps because the working rather than wealthy classes went to live in this new area of the city beyond the defence walls, with quite a significant exception: La Casa del Poble, the theatre for the workers' associations paid for by Joan March Ordinas (Quetglas, 2015).

The study of the place of theatre in Palma is research that shows its existing, closed and vanished venues throughout the history of the city. It is a preliminary and ongoing inventory covering 98 performance spaces, some deliberately ostentatious but most modest. A typological system of leisure and culture that raises a series of questions: Why were they built? Who are their agents and what is the nature of their architecture? What is the place of theatre in Palma?

When this inventory is transformed into a timeline, we can see that a large number of theatres were opened in the early 20th century, a real theatre boom in Palma and on the island. More than artistic, there could have been another motive for the proliferation of theatres in early 20th century Mallorca, and this might be the vitality of the associations. The social and political aspect explains the boom in the construction of theatre venues in Mallorca.



The circle as a primary and informal performance space. Can Ros, Felanitx, 1917. Pere Xamena collection, Antoni Ramis collection, Arxiu del So i de la Imatge de Mallorca (ASIM).

*Atles d'arquitectura teatral a Mallorca. Ciutat, arquitectura i espai escènic* (Atlas of Theatre Architecture in Mallorca. Territory, Architecture and Performance Space) is a research project that studies the place of theatre in Mallorca in three acts or approaches on different scales. In a first act, we start from the hypothesis that the location of theatres in the city is not only the result of chance but can follow urban patterns. Theatres are studied as buildings that are not isolated from their context and as a topological system of leisure and culture within their urban location.

In this part of the study, a path through history is described in a sequence of theatre maps of the city of Palma. This theatre mapping is structured according to periods in which there is a conjunction between theatre activity, the construction of theatres, and urban and territorial development. Therefore, in its definition both the events of the history of theatre in Mallorca and those of the urban history of Palma are taken into account.

In a second act the architecture of the building that houses performing, cultural and social manifestations is studied. Both the venues that accommodate performances of what we could call high culture and popular culture are inventoried. The result is a piece of research on architecture in Mallorca, unseen in its field and with the aim of contributing to the study of the built heritage on the island. A heritage that in some cases still survives and in others has vanished or is under threat. Theatre or para-theatre manifestations, such as festivals, processions or cavalcades, are therefore not included; although they would be important indicators to assess the presence of the theatre event in citizen life, they are not when studying the role of theatres in the urban growth of the city.

More broadly, this is research into the architecture of the performance space and its paradoxical definition: it can be any imaginable space except the space that it actually is (Cousin, 2013); because if it were, theatre would stop being theatre. Since the early 17th century and throughout the 19th century, theatre had a clear spatial configuration, both architectural and scenographic: the model known as Italian style theatre. But although this has been the best-known type of performance space, it was not the only one in 19th century Mallorca. Well into the 20th century, the constant tension between the audience and the stage, as well as the changes in the social habits of theatre, also gradually transformed the theatre building and led to venues with new relationships between the production and the audience.

One of the possible definitions of performance space could be that of *temple* and *limit*, as Eugeni Trias points out: “Todo templo es una demarcación: un recorte mediante el cual se deslinda un espacio despejado al que se asigna carácter sagrado” (Trias, 2000). It is a limited space, a “space other” of reality, in the same sense as Le Corbusier’s *boîte-à-miracles*:

Le véritable constructeur, l'architecte, peut concevoir les bâtiments qui vous seront le plus utiles, car il possède au plus haut degré la connaissance des volumes.

Il peut, en fait créer une boîte magique renfermant tout ce que vous pouvez désirer. Dès l'entrée en jeu de la “Boîte à Miracles” scène et acteurs se

matérialisent; la “Boîte à Miracles” est un cube; avec elle sont données toutes choses nécessaires à la fabrication des miracles, lévitation, manipulation, distraction, etc.

L'intérieur du cube est vide, mais votre esprit inventif le remplira de tous vos rêves, dans la manière des représentations de la vieille “comedia dell'arte” (Le Corbusier, 1965: 170).

Therefore, the theatre space could be an empty space, as Peter Brook described: “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” (Brook, 1968: 9). Even so, it is a place full of meaning for theatre, as Louis Jouvet described: “Seul, à mon sens, l'édifice dramatique peut donner une idée du théâtre, seul l'édifice peut permettre de méditer, d'apprendre et de comprendre ce qu'est le théâtre à partir de ce goût, de cette particularité essentielle à tout individu, quelle que soit l'époque ou la civilisation à laquelle il appartient” (Jouvet, 1950: 10).

In the theatre we can read borders or boundaries that, in fact, define and delimit it. Some of these limits are spatial, such as in a painting or a building, and others are temporal, like the end of a musical performance. Throughout the 20th century, the role of the avant-gardes could be understood as an impulse to avoid a limit and set it against the other.

Michel Foucault, in the lecture “Des espaces autres” in 1967, published in Spanish as “Espacios otros: utopías y heterotopías” (Foucault, 1967: 5-9; trans. 1978), defines the spatial concept of heterotopia, which he associates with the strange quality that some spaces have to “disipar la realidad con la única fuerza de la ilusión.” Heterotopias, unlike utopias, which are spaces without place, are spaces that can evoke more than one space in themselves. In this lecture, Foucault identified several heterotopias: the cemetery and the theatre, the museum and the bookstore, the brothel and the colony, the Arab hammams and the Scandinavian saunas.

But the space of theatre can also be understood as a refuge. In the article “L'abri ou l'édifice”, Antoine Vitez understood the dual status that theatre architecture can take on, whether a more or less monumental building and eloquent sign that seeks to stand out, “parfaits outils techniques” (Vitez, 1978), or a refuge that shelters theatre activity. Vitez, director, actor and pedagogue of French theatre, then working in an former barn in the town of Ivry, reviewing the experience of the architectural intervention in that space, confessed: “Si j'avais été plus lucide, plus attentif, plus intelligent (au sens propre), j'aurais demandé un aménagement minimal de la grange. A la place de la transformation en un joli théâtre, j'aurais imposé l'utilisation brute.” Vitez regretted: “Nous normalisons un lieu qui avait un intérêt en soi. Nous avons un abri, nous élevons un édifice. Le distingue à son importance. Finalement, il n'y a que deux types de théâtre, l'abri et l'édifice. Dans l'abri on peut s'inventer des espaces loïsibles, tandis que l'édifice impose d'emblée une mise en scène.” It is not by chance that this text appeared in the monographic issue on “Les lieux du spectacle”, which Christian Dupavillon prepared for the journal *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* (Dupavillon, 1978).

In 1999, Hans-Thies Lehmann introduced a new reading of the performance space by differentiating the dramatic, and therefore symbolic, space — i.e., the space of traditional theatre — from the post-dramatic space, which is the performance space where the most important is not the message, the text, but the shared, lived, experience. The post-dramatic space would be the space where the distance between performance and actor is reduced to a minimum: “to such extent that the physical and physiological proximity (breath, sweat, panting, movement of the musculature, cramp, gaze) masks the mental signification” (Lehmann, 1999: 150; transl. 2006). Thus, theatre becomes a moment of “shared energies” and not of transmission of signs. It is the space where the border between reality and fiction is more ambiguous.

As we said, a space other, symbolic, a temple, a refuge, a shelter, a building, an empty space, a monument and a *boîte-à-miracles* could be some definitions of the performance space. Architectures, not only of representation and creation, but also where spectators and actors meet at the same time and in the same space. Meeting places where, without being confused, art and life come together. A “perfect technical instrument” that can evoke more than one space in itself to shelter “a man who walks while another observes.”

Throughout the research the question also arises of architectural *typology*, as described by Rafael Moneo and Aldo Rossi. “To raise the question of typology in architecture is to raise a question of the nature of the architectural work itself,” wrote Moneo; “on the other hand, a work of architecture can also be seen as belonging to a class of repeated objects, characterized, like a class of tool or instruments, by some general attributes” (Moneo, 1978). For Rossi, the concepts of *monument* and *type*, despite the criticism of functionalism, brought him to consider an autonomous scientific corpus for the study of architecture and the city. Rossi’s approach to the city identified the relation between the constructed (permanent) form and the (changing) function of the buildings: “la forma permanecía y determinaba la construcción en un mundo en que las funciones estaban en perpetuo cambio [...]. El material de una campana podía convertirse en el de un obús, la forma de un anfiteatro en la de una ciudad, la de una ciudad en un palacio” (Rossi, 1981: 9; trans. 1984).

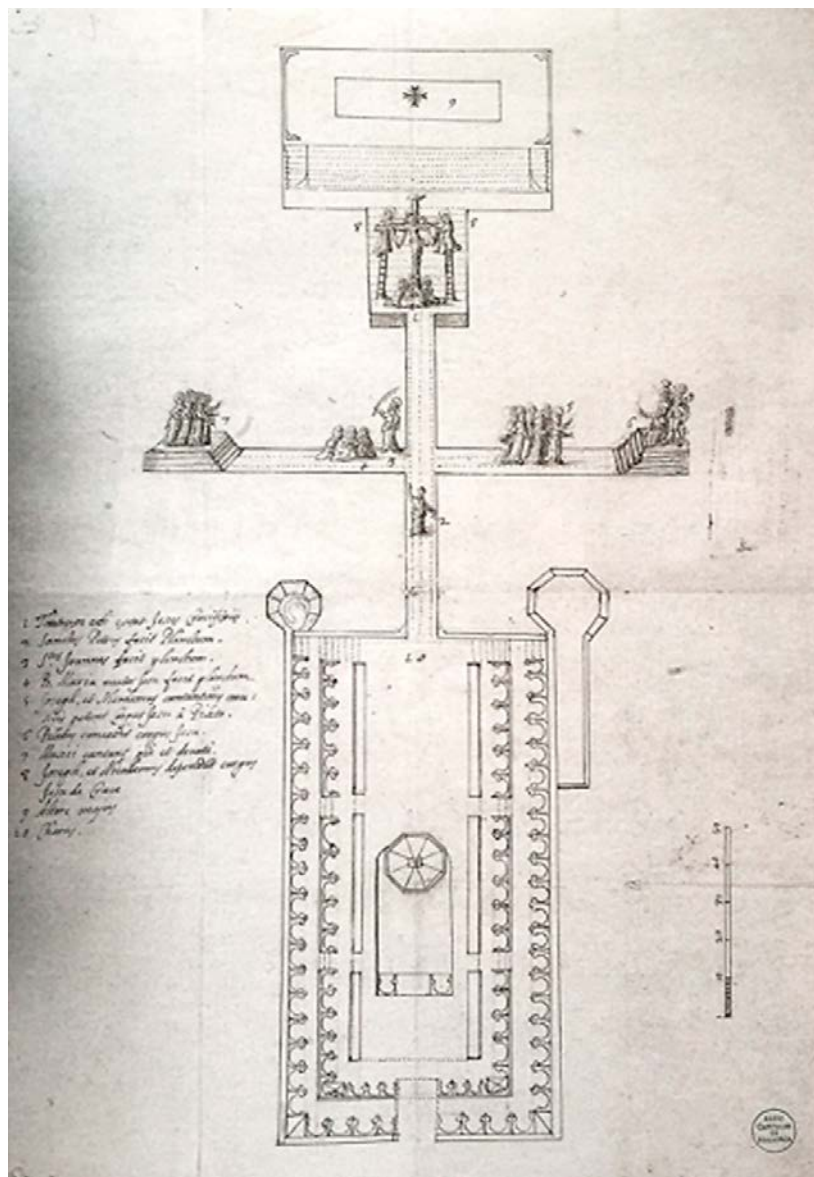
Also of interest to this research as we enter the third act is the study of the social implications, linked to the urban implications, of theatre. The meeting at the same time and in the same place of actors and audience is an object of study of the research. The scenography and the scenographic space are understood as the mediating element between culture, performance and its reception by the audience.

The main result of the work outlined in this article is the development of a historical and contemporary mapping of the theatres in Palma that encompasses the urban, architectural and scenic dimensions of the theatre place; as well as an exhaustive study of the theatre building: its agents and architects, including the plans, elevations and sections of the theatres drawn to the same scale in order to determine their importance. Thus, the major venues such as the Teatre Principal and the most humble such as the associations are represented in the same way, which enables the value of all the facilities beyond the best known and biggest cases to be enhanced.



The architectural drawings presuppose two readings. In the first, the conventional drawing in plan, section and elevation represents the building. In the second, the drawing can be definitive in itself and transmit an autonomous message about architecture. A mapping, architectural plans and archive photographs make up the graphic part of the theatre atlas of Palma that accompanies the descriptive part, which is a compendium of articles and citations about the venues studied.

With the aim of understanding the theatre building as part of a system, a delimited time period is not established for its study. Aware that each of the theatres might have been the topic of a doctoral thesis, what is intended is an overall analysis rather than a study of the individualised building: to understand the urban, architectonic and social patterns of the path of theatre in the city.



Performance of the *Davallament* at Mallorca cathedral in 1691. Arxiu Capitular de Mallorca CPS-15804, box 32, no. 21, bundle 17. *Apud* Gabriel Seguí i Trobat, *La consuetud de sagristia de 1511 de la Seu de Mallorca. Volum I: estudi crític*, Mallorca cathedral collection 11-1, 2015.

### Spaces and Performances before the Casa de les Comèdies, 1481-1667

In the city of Palma, before the Casa de les Comèdies (1667), we have proof of performances in temples such as the cathedral (1481-1563) and Montision (1603-1749), attended by the viceroy, the bishop, the juries, the *Reial Audiència*, religious men of all orders, and knights; in the courtyard of the Estudi General (1647 and 1658) — “A una de ellas asistió el príncipe D. Juan de Austria con la nobleza mallorquina y la que vino con su escuadra” (Raimundo, 1972); in public spaces such as El Born; in the house of D. Pedro Santacília (1658-1663) or in the hall of the guild of shoemakers (1658-1663 and 1812). The theatre space during the Middle Ages could be ecclesiastical, urban or private.

In this period, Palma did not have a specific space for performances, and theatre arranged other spaces more or less temporarily, because medieval theatricality was a “theatre without theatres”, a symbolic performance space. Any space could be used for theatre, but the historical documentation has prioritised the memory of ecclesiastic and urban theatre and has left no record of profane and rural theatre (Massip; Kovács, 2017). The interior of temples — in front of the main altar or between it and the choir when the temple was important, or rather in front of a secondary altar — and the urban exteriors were the real place of theatre in this period. In reality, the whole holy building could be used for staging and throughout the 16th century the temples in which performances were held, even after the Council of Trent (1545-1563), had to be expressly authorised, which did not prevent them from being carried out.

When analysing the *Consueta dels Set Sagraments*, Joan Mas i Vives describes how these ephemeral architectures might be, the scenographic space of this period in Palma, which as Mas notes “s’ajusta força a la tècnica escenogràfica medieval, basada en l’espectacularitat externa” in which the space, costumes and music are described in detail:

Es representava a l’interior del temple, i s’hi havien de bastir dos cadafals, segurament un rere l’altre, amb dues altures diferents, com a la *Consueta del Juy*: un era el “lloc” del vell malalt que jeia en el seu llit, acompanyat pel diable i la mort, i l’altre, el Calvari, on es feia inicialment la crucifixió i on restava, durant tota l’obra, el Crist, potser substituït per una imatge. Al costat de la creu, hi havia una “roca” d’on havien de sortir successivament els diversos sagraments. A més d’aquests dos cadafals, hom també utilitzava força el sòl de l’església: diversos personatges s’havien d’apropar als “bancs” i Jesús havia de “córrer la vila”, motiu que devia constituir una autèntica processó. A la mort de Crist, s’havia de simular un terratrèmol, “amb remor d’arcabussos i tenebres” i la resurrecció dels morts. (Mas i Vives, 1993: 275)

### Casa de les Comèdies. Theatre within the Defence Walls, 1667-1836

The architecture of the Casa de les Comèdies (1667-1853), today’s Teatre Principal, is defined by its context. It was located at the point between the high and low city and above the former torrent, in a location that defined the architecture and urban relation of the theatre. In 1662 Juan Barceló, *paborde*





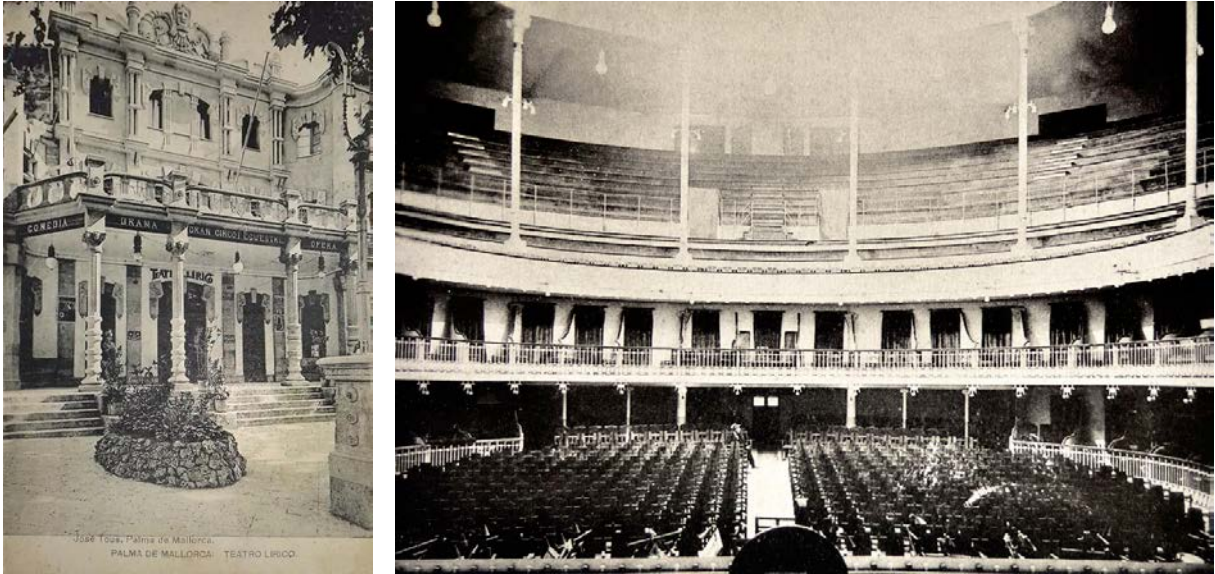
Teatre Principal, c. 1880. Andreu Muntaner archive.

of the cathedral, donated to the Hospital land to build a Casa de les Comèdies and between 1667 and 1853 was the real place of theatre in Palma. The descriptions of the theatre of the period mention that it was well received by the people despite the simplicity of the building and lack of elegance.

Work on the defence walls of Palma ended in 1805. The city remained delimited and, inside, a layout of irregular narrow streets was set out in which Les Rambles and El Born were the free areas. Despite the creation of the Casa de les Comèdies, other performance spaces emerged as an alternative to it: the Corral del Xicolater (1765), the hall of the guild of tailors or the bullring (1817-1933), where all kinds of performances were held.

### **Teatre Principal. Liberal Airst and Ecclesiastical Confiscations, 1836-1900**

The Teatre Principal was built in 1854 in the same location as the Casa de les Comèdies. The original theatre was in a very poor condition, which, along with the new liberal airst, led to the demolition of the original auditorium and the construction of the new building in 1853. Given the impossibility of creating an autonomous building — the topography did not allow this — and the impossibility of an axial axis made up of entrance, foyer and auditorium, the building was arranged and unified with a screen façade in order to give it an urban character. Its life was short, because as early as 1858 a fire completely destroyed it. The same team of architects and decorators rebuilt the theatre, the architect Antoni Sureda Villalonga and the decorator Fèlix Cagé, and it was reopened in 1860, also with the ephemeral name of Teatro Príncipe de Asturias, until in 1868 it took the definitive name of Teatre Principal.



Teatre Líric, c. 1915: outside (left) and inside (right). Andreu Muntaner archive.

A multiplicity of stages began to appear in this period: “Por todas partes pululan los teatros caseros” (Lindoro, 1842), announced the press of the time. The ecclesiastical confiscations law led to the emergence of the Teatre de la Mercè (1835-1873), located in the refectory of the former convent of La Mercè, and the theatre of Sant Francesc (1836-1927), which had different names and in which a hall in the former convent of Sant Francesc d’Assís was adapted as a performance space, or the Gran Café del Universo (1860-1872), later Republican Casino in the former convent of the Sisters of Mercy. All of them were simple venues that made use of the existing structures. In contrast, in the confiscated land of the former convent of Santo Domingo, the Círculo Mallorquín was created — of aristocratic character — that between 1855 and 1860 was the alternative to the Teatre Principal, which was being reconstructed.

Social mores were changing and other spaces appeared such as the “casinos”, where a little of everything took place. An example might be the Casino Palmesano (1841-1871) described by Joan Cortada on his trip in 1845:

El Casino es una grande casa antigua en que se han hecho obras considerables para destinarla al objeto que tiene. Compónese de una sala de lectura, tres salas para mesas de juego, una con dos billares, otra de descanso, un cuarto de juntas que en las noches de baile sirve para tocador de las señoras, y un gran salon de baile, de gusto árabe, y por cuyos costados corren dos filas de canapés muy bajos cual corresponde al gusto del salón. (Cortada, 1845).

The place of theatre, although it did not create an urban system of venues, spread through the city thanks to popular theatre, the main form of entertainment of the time, such as the Cafè Recreo (1857-1867), El Recreo Social (1868-1937), which adopted different names, and the Cafè del Racó de Plaça (1859-1913).

## The Modern City. Demolition of the Defence Walls and Association Movement (1900-1936)

In 1885 Eusebi Estada announced the need to demolish the walls to turn Palma into an industrialised and modern city. The tender for the development of the Eixample was won by the engineer Bernat Calvet i Girona. The project was drafted in 1897 and definitively approved in 1901. Between 1902 and 1935 the walls were demolished and space was left for the ring roads, while preserving the remains in the area along the sea. The libraries, courts, theatres and museums had to be located in these open spaces. However, the exact location was not indicated because the Ministry of Defence reserved the right to choose the best land in this area for the construction of military buildings.

Nevertheless, from 1900 private initiatives emerged, and the Teatre Líric (1900-1967) — by the architect Jaume Alenyar and reformed in 1910 by Gaspar Bennàssar — was built in the Hort del Rei, as well as the Teatre Balear (1909-1980) — by Manuel J. Raspall, the architect of the theatres of the Paral·lel in Barcelona — between the new railway station and the Market, on land freed up by the demolition of the walls and away from the new avenues. Ephemeral or summer theatres were also established in the spaces left free by the demolition such as the Olympia (1928), on the corner of Via Roma with carrer del Bisbe Campins, and the variety pavilion (1908, future Cine Ideal until 1919), off plaça de Sant Antoni.

Despite the lack of theatres in the area of the Eixample in Palma, perhaps because the working classes went to live in this new area outside the walls, there is quite a significant exception: La Casa del Poble (1924-1936), the theatre for workers' associations designed by Guillem Forteza. The association movement, on the social and political rather than artistic side, also fostered the emergence of a series of new venues spread throughout the city. We are referring to associations such as La Protectora (1886-closed); the Teatre Mar i Terra (1898-...), by the architect Josep Segura; the Assistència Palmesana (1901-closed); the Cercle d'Obrers Catòlics (1878-1929), later Saló Mallorca (1931-1937); and the Foment del Civisme or Saló de Belles Arts (1925-1934).



Tito's, c. 1970. Planas archive.



Tito's, c. 1960. Rul-lan collection, Arxiu del So i de la Imatge de Mallorca (ASIM).



### **Tourism Boom. The Expansion of Recreational Architecture in the Passeig Marítim and Gabriel Alomar's Urban Reforms, 1940-to Date**

In 1940 much of the Calvet Plan was not yet developed and some parts were more densely built up than others. In 1941, Gabriel Alomar drafted the General Alignment and Reform Plan, which was the second Palma expansion plan, definitively approved in 1943. The Alomar Plan also proposed the improvement of public spaces in the centre of Palma. The Hort del Rei was recovered as a public garden, which involved the demolition of the Teatre Líric: “emplazado actualmente en el solar del antiguo ‘Huerto del Rey’, del cual debe retirarse al volver a destinarse éste a jardines, mejora que todos los ciudadanos unánimemente deseamos” (Alomar, 1950; ed. 2000), although Alomar suggested another location for the theatre that was not carried out.

In the 1950s the Passeig Marítim was opened on land reclaimed from the sea, which had not been provided for by any urban plan of Palma, either Calvet's or Alomar's, and that became a new recreational and cultural area in the city. The difference in levels again determined the urban layout and the architectonic structure of these spaces.

The Auditorium (1969-...) — a personal initiative by Marc Ferragut Fluixà whose ambition was to build a state-of-the-art performance space, designed by the architect Luis Feducchi and managed by the Ferragut family — or, earlier, Tito's (1957-...), with an open air architecture over the bay of Palma, a project by Josep Maria Sostres, reflect the social and economic change of Mallorca and the displacement of leisure and culture to the area of the Passeig Marítim.

As an epilogue, the theatre mapping emphasises lines, areas, venues and goals within the city. The centre is the area with most venues and where, along with the historical auditoria, there are other municipal and more modern places such as Ses Voltes (1983-...), by the architect Elias Torres, and the Teatre Xesc Forteza (2003-...), a project by Tono Vila, along with the Cercle d'Obrers Catòlics, La Protectora and the Assistència Palmesana — currently closed or disappeared — and the refuges of an avant-garde theatre among which we could mention the Teatre del Mar (1993-...) in the area of El Molinar, on the outskirts of the city.

The neighbourhood of Santa Catalina has lost all vestiges of its theatre past apart from the Teatre Mar i Terra (1898-...), reformed in 2010. Some new venues also emerged in the areas freed by the demolition of the walls. The most outstanding are the Teatre Balear and, later, the Teatre Catalina Valls (1965-...).

A line or urban area historically stands out that links El Born with Les Rambles, although weakened and blurred by the closure and demolition of historical places such as the Teatre Líric and the Sala Born (1931-1988), by the architect Bennassar, but strengthened by the possible location, next to the current plaça de Joan Carles I, of the Roman theatre of Palma (Moranta, 1997). Another urban area is the aforementioned Passeig Marítim.

With qualifications, in Palma we would find examples of buildings that seek to become a benchmark, such as the Teatre Principal and the Teatre

Líric or even the Auditorium. Another benchmark, but in the sense of the void it leaves, is La Casa del Poble, of which, as a result of its demolition in 1975, only the land remains.



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