

## Barcelona: An expected attack

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There are many possible scenarios in the world to be used for similar crimes as the one perpetrated in Barcelona. But only a handful of places truly deserve to be called so emblematic to attract the attention of criminals with ambitions for notoriety. Some cities of the old world have been permanently inserted in the memory of systematic voyagers, sporadic tourists, and business people. Paris, Rome, London, Berlin, Athens are some of the capitals that have captured a special place in the European cultural temple. Barcelona had recently occupied a spot in this selected group. Its tragic hour had arrived.

Only some decades ago, the Catalan capital was a passing transit city. Tourists only went there as an exceptional stopover from Costa Brava beach resorts when attending bullfighting *corridas* or taking a look to the Gaudi's Sagrada Familia church. The Olympic Games of 1992 changed all that.

The city's opening to the sea shore did the trick. The new collections of its museums attracted world attention. Its architecture revealed that not all was reduced to Gaudi's works. Its urban design in quadrangles with ample avenues invited leisure walking in a pleasant climate all year round.

While Spain was escalating steps in attracting tourism, with visitors outnumbering the cadres of residents, a feat only surpassed by the United States and France, Barcelona was converted into a magnet attracting diverse sectors. Business conventions multiplied. Local entrepreneurs and multinational companies responded to the demands with the opening of new hotels. Private citizens cleverly converted their apartments into mini-hotels, sidelining zoning regulations. Cruise lines propelled Barcelona into the second destination in Europe and the fifth in the world.

Barcelona, as most of the Spanish shores, benefitted from an outstandingly comparative peace. While terrorism attacked Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia and most of the Mediterranean sea line, Spain was shown as an exception. The country had left behind the deadly attack of 2004 in Madrid where more two hundred train commuters were killed.

The European geography presented a tragic screen populated by criminal attacks: London, Berlin, Brussels, Nice, Paris, Stockholm, even Istanbul. No place was respected. The killing methods became more creative. Traditional bombs were still combined with gun shootings. But a

different and cheaper weapon appeared. Pedestrians were trampled by trucks in a vicious way.

In Barcelona, the killing spot was chosen very carefully: the world's famous Rambla. As a remain of an ancient creek leading to the sea, its run was reconverted into a pleasant avenue, composed of a central walking path and two lateral sidewalks and two narrow car and bus lines. All is layered from north to south.

A sort of friendly joke claims that pedestrians are divided into two groups. Locals go from left to right across the central path, shopping and doing business. Tourists go all the way from North to the harbor meeting the Christopher Columbus monument.

Anyway, all tried to comply with an ancient custom of drinking water from the Canaletes fountain at the north beginning linking to Catalonia Square. The fountain has magic powers. Legend claims that the visitor will be captured to come back to the city and even stay for life. Few foreigners avoid this rite.

The assassins did not stop at the Canaletes fountain. Not even they bothered half way to take a glimpse to the Boquería market. They preferred to follow the terrorist model of 1893 when an anarchist through a bomb to the main section of the Teatre del Liceu, temple of the opera, of world fame. The killing of a handful members of the high society of Barcelona strengthened the Spanish confrontations and massacres that led to the Spanish Civil war of 1936-39.

We hope that this cruel mass assassination will not be a prelude to a past period of the recent history of a Barcelona as gray as it was during the Franco regime. In reality, this is what the terrorists aim to. They want the citizens revert to authoritarian solutions. This task is not going to be easy and it all depends of our efforts to reinforce the well-earned Barcelona fame as an open and democratic society, bilingual, Spanish, Catalan, European and global.

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