In Sant Martí de Provençals the Industrial Revolution arrived in the first third of the 19th century. Its proximity to Barcelona and its port, the abundance of water and the low cost of the land made the area an attractive place for the Barcelona industrialists.

From the 1870s the building of factories speeded up, accompanied by an increase in population due to the demolition of the walls, the disappearance of the Ciutadella military fortress and the expansion of Barcelona according to Ildefons Cerdà’s Example plan.

In the Poblenou district industries, especially textiles, were established, and so were a large number of flour mills and factories from many other sectors (food, chemicals, metallurgy) and a host of small workshops and stores. With that great industrial concentration in the district Poblenou began to be called by the nickname “the Manchester of Catalonia”.

At the same time a rich social fabric was woven there, promoted above all by the workers’ cooperatives and associations. The aim of those organisations was to improve the workers’ harsh living conditions, while providing them with recreational spaces, opportunities for training, health services and reasonably priced food. Crucial to all that was the consolidation of the trade union movements, which reached their peak in the years of the Second Republic.

Nevertheless, under the Franco regime the economic downturn forced many large industries to close or move into the outskirts of the city. Many buildings were left empty and with little activity, whilst others were subdivided into smaller spaces for subletting. At that time many small workshops sprang up, textile mills where work was still manual and small companies from the black economy. But in the 1970s the crisis in the textile sector dealt the death blow to the productive activity of Poblenou and left hundreds of workers unemployed.

Years later, with the impulse of the Olympic Games in 1992, the whole area began a long, profound transformation that is still going on today. First came the construction of the Olympic Village and later other areas of Poblenou also changed, largely thanks to the thrust provided by initiatives such as 22V or the Forum in 2004.

From a town planning point of view the outstanding actions of these last decades have been the development of the lower end of the Meridiana – between Glories and the Ciutadella Park -, the opening of the Diagonal from Glories to the sea, the consolidation of the new seafront between the Olympic Village and the Besòs, the construction of the Forum and Diagonal Mar and the redesign of the Glories area with the demolition of the intersection and the new town plan for the surrounding area.

Many of those transformations, especially the first ones, failed to respect the valuable industrial heritage of the district and therefore, except for a few isolated chimneys, most of the industrial buildings were demolished. In recent years, however, social awareness of their historical and architectural importance has significantly increased and their preservation is now more protected by law.

Therefore, despite the irretrievable loss of some buildings which would have been preserved today the important industrial heritage that is still standing in Poblenou allows us to tell the story of a vital period in the history of the city, while showing the adaptability of those typologies to new uses such as public amenities, offices or dwellings.

For the first three categories maintenance is obligatory (therefore declared as in good condition), whilst industrial use is allowed after the subservient agreement of the technical and historical studies.
The transformation project, designed by Jordi Badia, was conceived in 1999 to become the way into the art centre, a filter for speed and time which dings. At the entrance a leafy wood, with poplars, oaks and narrow paths, offers a rigorous architectural language, close to the Manchester style of the complex. The restoration project by Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats emerged from an experiment, which since 1989 had carried out its activity in a charming T-shaped factory where the buildings adapt to the existing network of streets.

The Can Girona metal factory became one of the largest industrial schools, a theatre, a chorale, a library, an excursion centre, a bar and a school, a library, and an excursion centre, a bar and a sports complex, a restaurant, a shopping centre, a cinema, and an educational facility.

As regards the general organisation, the architect's proposal envisages a broad and harmonious whole, the newly built volumes use the main features of the old factory, and the Can Girona workers' cooperative was founded in 1895 and wasted a number of its edifices. In 1924 the two-storey building in Carrer de Sant Joan de Malta closed definitively in the 1980s and it was not until 2011 that the Can Girona workers' cooperative was founded and used in the 1980s.

The Can Girona metal factory became one of the largest industrial complexes in the world, where the company had its original factory. The Can Girona complex is formed by wooden frameworks and finished with Moorish tiles. The Can Girona workers' cooperative was founded in 1895 and wasted a number of its edifices. In 1924 the two-storey building in Carrer de Sant Joan de Malta closed definitively in the 1980s and it was not until 2011 that the Can Girona workers' cooperative was founded and used in the 1980s.

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