



RE-GENERATING METROPOLITAN AREAS OF POSSIBILITY

Theme 2 - Public space as builder of urban fabric.

EURAU'12

ABSTRACT. *At this urban trend of negative prefixes: post-, ex-, sub-, dis-, this Research by Design project is a pedagogical initiative that bets for the re- prefix: re-map, re-create, re-use, re-cycle, re-define, re-program, re-cover, re-design, re-adjust, re-se-ARCH.*

The proposed pedagogical method aims to analyze, evaluate and work with vacant public space (available, underdeveloped or misused) of our metropolises, through a re-mapping of these spaces. The goal is to propose their integration, re-generation and re-use (within the preferential lines related with social goals and "improvement of the welfare along lifetime" of the proposal Horizonte 2020, Marco Program of Research and Innovation 2014–2020 from the European Union). The aim is to expand the discoveries of this teaching and research methodology used in Madrid to other European cities, collaborating with the Edinburg School of Architecture

KEYWORDS: *Regenerate. Metropolitan-spaces. Multi-disciplinar. Multi-scalar. Urban & Social Economy. Non-places.*

Mayka García Hípola* - Maria Beltrán Rodríguez**

**Institución: Universidad San Pablo Ceu.
Dirección de trabajo y correo electrónico: c/Norias, 145, 1B, 28221 Majadahonda (Madrid)
mghipola@post.harvard.edu
Nº Teléfono 655854422*

***Institución: Universidad San Pablo Ceu.
Dirección de trabajo y correo electrónico:
mariabeltranrdgz@gmail.com
Nº Teléfono 607 11 92 59*

1. Introduction

[On the one hand,] there has never been a more propitious moment than now to revisit the question of architecture's social responsibilities, [but on the other hand,] the gap that exists between the specialized discourses of planning, architecture, political process, and the public has never been so great. (La Cecla, 2012. 12)

The current state of the question, this ascendant gap between what professionals do or consider should be done and what the social reality needs, is something to worry about, making the project and approach extremely necessary and relevant nowadays. Recently, *The Economist* claimed referring to Spain: "**The party is over**" (Fig 1, left). We need new urban and economic strategies. On one hand, we have ignored city's possibilities and on the other, due of its rapid growth, there are many non-projected or abandoned places (Virilio, Augé). We have spent more than we could afford. *Re-Map* offers a low-budget with large social potential methodology.

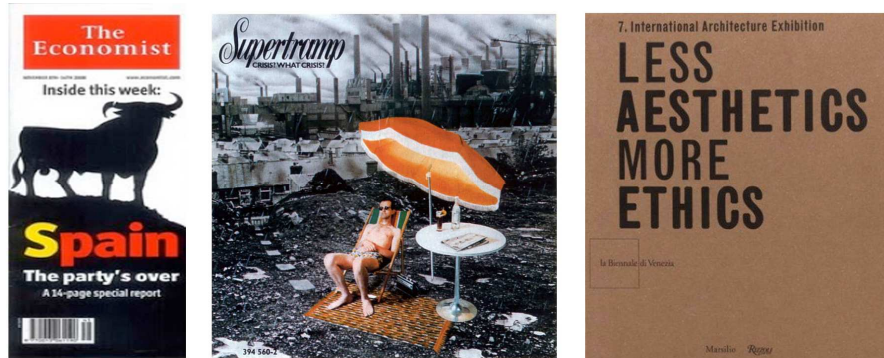


Fig. 1. The Economist (left); Supertramp (center); Catalogue Venice Architecture Biennale 2000 (right).

The culture of the **city** and the urban tradition in Spain has been so far that of the history of **architecture**; and the city is now the result of a large-scale manifestation of architecture. Through this approach, which still prevails in our planning system, many basic factors for the creation of a more livable, vibrant and better resolved city are overlooked. We propose a **multidisciplinary** perspective and not a merely formal one. This view of the city created from architecture confirms once again the need to induce rapid changes in our planning system; to locate, analyze and design the city not based in its **forms** (architecture), but in its **substance** (activity), in its events, movements, connections, etc. There is an urgent need to re-map public spaces in a more contemporary way. This pedagogy aims to address the perceived shortcomings of an **obsolete** model of planning and urban design system in which we thought architecture solved everything and was the spinal cord for the design of the city.

Moreover, the ancient **Agora**, or *Plaza Mayor* is decomposed into a **multitude of non-defined spaces**, abandoned and disconnected, where the social encounter is absent. The metropolitan area of Madrid, for example, has changed greatly in recent decades and one can observe a tentative return from a car-oriented city, to a pedestrian-oriented one. The interventions in Madrid has been concentrated in big locations as Madrid's Rio Project (Fig.2, left). However, much remains to be done in the small scale of multiple unresolved locations. The key strategy of cities such

as **Copenhagen**, which enjoys a network of high quality public spaces, is that major changes have been introduced in small steps, well-planned and affordable. After successfully completing a small change, it has been possible to find support for the following. This policy of intervening simultaneously in many but small areas in the metropolitan area of a city has been implemented as part of a broader vision (Fig.2 right). Through an understanding of research in the School of Architecture and the municipal government of Copenhagen, the city's spatial qualities have been appreciated and it beats at a human rhythm. So one of the innovations that the research project *Re-Map* aims to do is open a dialogue between the political institutions of the city (who make decisions that impact on a global scale, a scale L), "Think Tanks" studying city (universities and research experts, undergraduate and graduate students, at a scale M) and the citizens who live within a citizen-scale, more intimate (at a scale S), in day to day. However, for decades in the city of **Madrid**, remote areas of the city have been developed and improved, without maintaining a global view of all public spaces, connections and relationships. If this multidisciplinary and multi-scalar urban reality (at a scale L) is added to a dialogue with the city / state and students and citizens are added to decision making, we will achieve change and improvement not only on the visual surface of urban spaces, but at a deeper level of transformation. We can't pretend things will change if we keep doing the same. In time of crisis is when inventiveness is born, when discoveries and major strategies happen.



Fig. 2. Master Plan Madrid Rio (left). Pedestrian area in Copenhagen (right).

2. Context & Content

"[...] the characteristics that form the basis for the quality of urban living are radically changing, and the new emergencies require different political strategies and plans. The outskirts are a challenge to the contemporary city, reminding those who delude themselves that they can close themselves off inside the walls of the center that the center itself is in danger of vanishing as the suburbs become more threatening [...] suburbs are seen as utopias of the modern city, made up of grands ensembles, of skyscrapers immersed in greenery, but in reality they have transformed themselves into nightmares of reinforced concrete superblocks in the void outside the city. From the 1970's on, at least in Europe, the historical centers have been re-evaluated and are becoming objects of restoration, wherein is recognized the true city "aura" beyond that of its inestimable monument patrimony. The tabula rasa to which the Modern Movement in

architecture would have liked to reduce historical cities has actually been realized only in the suburbs, places of desolate land and terrain vague, menacing areas of conflict within boundaries.” (La Cecla, 2012. 59)

The project’s “action sites” are related to the **city center** as well as to its **outskirts**, nature, landscape and regional territory, applying at all scales of intervention the criteria of the European Landscape Convention. The places’ sizes are diverse: from small vacant lots or obsolete spaces, to unplanned and underdeveloped urban areas, or abandoned industrial areas and non-places.

Urban studies and interventions to date have three main flaws relevant to this new pedagogic perspective: (1) they have studied cities based in their morphology, (2) they lack dialogue and articulation between the larger scale (XL –mega structures, territorial urban sprawl) and the human scale (S-the street, the public space) and (3) they lack a more participatory and socially inclusive system in the decision-making and project-drafting process (Healy, De Carlo, Freire). *Re-Map* is a project addressing these flaws and proposes a methodological innovation to study cities based in what happens in them, in their strong social (and not formal) issues. The target spaces are studied at different scales (Region, Metro, Neighborhood, Square) (Fig. 3), in the frame of different disciplines (Sociology, Economy, Architecture, Landscape...) and with the mutual collaboration of stakeholders, municipalities, professionals, students and citizenship in general.

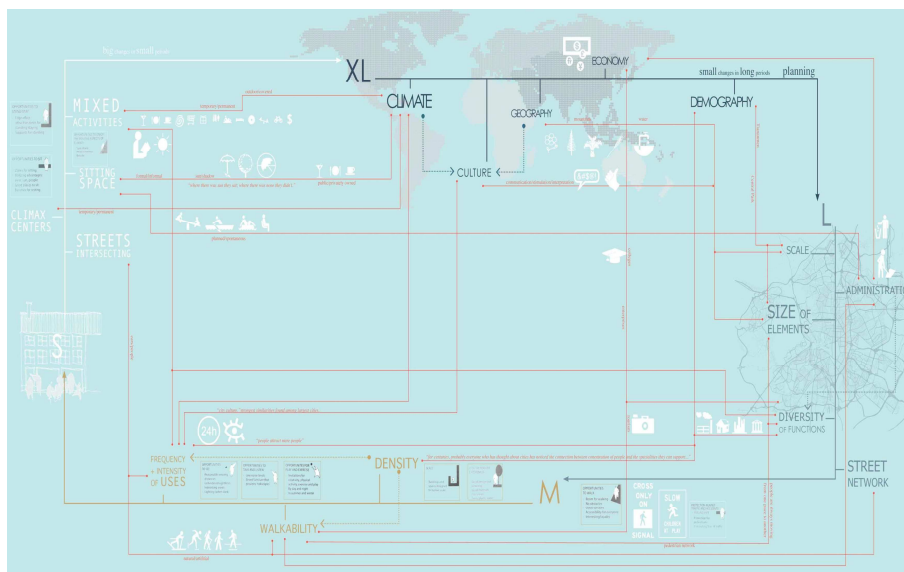


Fig. 3. The different scales used in *Re-Map*.

This project aims to study vacant spaces from a different angle than the ordinary, a more multidisciplinary and multi-scalar one, that take into account the social, economical, environmental and sensorial phenomena, as well as the purely formal. The ultimate goal is to propose new ways of intervening in the city, at different scales, to develop appropriate design strategies locally, at various dimensions or variables (quality, environmental, social and economical) important in the maintenance and management of these spaces. At the same time it aims to raise awareness and to educate the society, unifying the efforts of university research

with the social realities of our cities so that students can learn about the actual situation and motivate them to find creative but realistic solutions.

The first case study is **Madrid Metropolitan Region** (Madrid Areas of Possibility MAP), claiming the need to re-map the vacant spaces of Madrid, to be evaluated and re-used. This new concept emphasizes the need for a re-mapping, a change in the planning processes, and in the way we design our cities, which has led to this situation of urban crisis and lack of character, identity and vitality in the public spaces of our cities. We live in a *post industrial city*, in the *post housing bubble*, and we therefore need different approaches, in order to be able to re-use obsolete areas (Fig. 1, center).

The scientific and technical **references** are (1) **Landscape Urbanism** (Harvard University, Charles Waldheim, school of thought where the landscape becomes more important than the architecture in the city: the landscape first); and (2) various currents of thought that claim the **recovery of the social component** of the city: the human first). The latter should be emphasized by some studies that affect the human dimension in the city and secondly, the free areas are, or non-places, increasingly common in cities around the world. But the actual result of scientific and technical knowledge is not so much in books but out there in the same city. The last decades have been "fruitful" for architecture (and especially in Spain, with the "fever" of the brick). Our cities have grown more than ever and now they are the best laboratory of ideas to learn from mistakes and to improve the spaces. The traditional model of planning has become more of a political tool than a social one. This project is not intended to make an inventory of existing forms but to map a series of possible actions. The existing "sick" spaces of our cities are the testing ground of the proposed project, from an ethical and aesthetic approach as it was defended in the Venice Architecture Biennial in the year 2000 (Fig. 1, right). Today, many urban interventions that seek for the improvement, recovery or regeneration of public space planning occur before, or despite it. This phenomenon deserves, at best, a re-examination of the system and an analysis of such urban processes. **Citizen participatory** initiatives are vital for changes to occur in our planning systems and processes (Freire, 2009). Many spontaneous citizens' interventions can be found in the urban context, from the occupation of public space temporarily (Plaza del Sol, Movimiento 15-M), to the occupation of obsolete or underdeveloped areas by neighborhood organizations as it happens in El Campo de la Cebada (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Citizen participatory Intervention: El Campo de la Cebada, Madrid.
<http://elcampodecebada.org/>

Although Europe (specially in the North) has introduced Deliberative and Communicative Planning Systems (to promote citizenship participation in urban planning decisions), there is still a lack of collaboration between the Municipality, the Stakeholder and the Citizenship in Spain and other Mediterranean countries. Socially constructed ideas are obtained as a result of collaborative work and

communicative acts aims these principles: comprehensibility, sincerity, legitimacy and truth. These ideas "*focus on ways of reconstructing the meaning of a democratic practice, away from the paternalism of traditional representative notions, to more participatory forms based on inclusionary argumentation.*" (Healey, 1996).

3. *Manifesto* / Objectives

O-1 Raise awareness and educate, unite and bring the teaching and research efforts at universities, with the social realities of the citizens and regulations and ordinances to institutional or municipal level. Suggest new ways to intervene in the city, at different scales, to develop design strategies appropriate to each context, BUT regenerating, maintaining and enhancing those already existing qualities. Open a question and a new pathway for future developments, at global and local levels, taking into account various **dimensions** (quality, environmental, social and economic) and **scales** in the maintenance and management of public spaces in Madrid.

O-2 Locate and **map information**. Make visits to places of interest, gather information at street level and libraries (photos, videos, surveys), to study the general concepts related with urban landscape and to collect examples of successful urban regeneration actions done at national or international locations. Synthesize information and select the keys for the development of rules under which to perform the new maps. Making tables, graphs, diagrams, charts, parameters, variables, formulas, etc., and make a stock of the new maps of spaces of possibility, *Re-Map* at the various scales (S, M, L, XL) of vacant space using social, economic, environmental, usage, mobility and connectivity parameters.

O-3 Critical analysis and mapping information. Publishing a **blog / web**, interdisciplinary **meetings**, seminars, workshops groups.

O-4 Create specific strategies to be used. Promote real projects directly associated, neighborhood groups or organizations, collaboration with other research groups.

O-5 Dissemination of the results (publishing).

4. Innovative Methodology

"Classic experimental science for the past three centuries concentrated on discovering cause-and-effect relationships by excluding all but two, or at most three, variables [...] a cause and effect that incorporates even four or five interacting variables is formidably complex [...] if only all the different interacting variables in a web-like relationship could actually be tracked, then multi-variable interactions would be predictable, as well as more understandable (Jacobs, 2000, p.127-128).

This research by design perspective is involved in a web-like relationships of variables and actors. It aims to create a productive and effective dialogue outside the university's "laboratory", involving public institutions (as the affected Municipalities) and citizens, in order to achieve a real change and to incorporate other disciplines, such as economics, to the study of the city, using new ideas / concepts / techniques in the current planning system and urban design standard. An innovative method is proposed, in which the theory and practice are in the same plane, in a symbiotic relationship, for optimum results, realistic and possible to improve the city of Madrid. Following the theme of PhDesign (incorporating urban

design, more practical, doctorates compared to most common ways to investigate and classical), leaving the mode 1 of research (which is often left in the universities, in theory, paper), a more innovative way will be used: **mode 2 "research by design"**, which involves contemporary urban reality and participatory methods. Outlines the following specific **tasks** (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5), related to the objectives (O1, O2, O3, O4, O5) previously exposed.

5. Conclusions / Benefits of *RE-MAP* and future actions

This project will redefine (**re-Map**) and understand the current complexity of urban spaces in Madrid, understanding **network** as a whole and different scales intertwined, territorial (XL), metropolitan (L) of neighborhood (M) and street (S). This should be taken into account in the current planning system, including not only the two-dimensional plots and limits of use, but other urban processes more spontaneous and increasingly more abstract that shapes our city and public spaces. It aims to address and analyze urban spaces through new media, using the map "as a **tool** to explore uncharted territory, "the maps have never been innocent." (Rem Koolhaas). The **map** of the public space is not only that of what can be drawn. The developer, the architect, can not be guided by a single map, because if he does so, with his fat pen, he removes the bank where every day someone sits down to read or the space on the sidewalk where dozens of children play every day. The maps also should reflect intangible elements (sensations, activity, and density of life). This requires adding **different disciplines** to the study of the city. For this reason the disciplines around *Re-Map* include professors specialized in graphic expression, architects, historians, urban planners and landscapers. (Fig. 5)

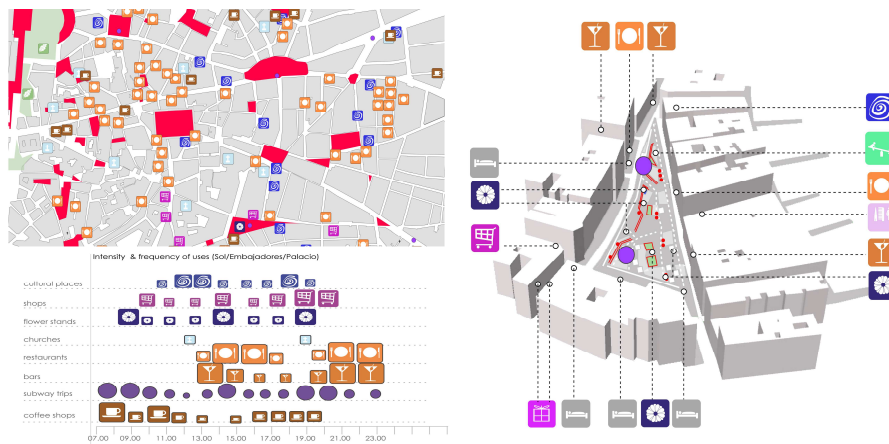


Fig. 5. Maps, graphs and 3d's representing intensity, density and frequency of uses, activities and urban life settings in Madrid's center.

This project will be extrapolated to other European Universities and cities. As immediate expected results at the level of transfer of results are those related to the Community of Madrid, affected municipalities, industrial heritage associations, neighborhood associations and citizens. At a long long-term, the affected community may be the European. Therefore this project addresses three different areas or potential **beneficiaries** of the project: (1) the academic / university (exchange of ideas between teachers and students, seminars, conferences, workshops), (2) the street or citizens (the objective is to engage people who "live"

in sites to be studied) and (3) the institutional and political forces (the Madrid City Council, which controls the interventions that are nowadays carried out).

As mentioned above, there is a possible future application of the results of this project to other European cities at a **university** level in this field of study. Therefore, the impact of the project is both national and international. The benefits in teaching and research may also extend across the municipalities, encouraging to other **agencies** or regions. We also want to highlight other different kinds of benefits of this project: **social**, **economic** (tourism) and **technological** (experimental techniques of urban spaces, leisure space). Madrid starts to be known internationally due to its urban interventions (see recent article on Rio Madrid in the *NY Times*), and *Re-Map* promote this transfer and impact line, stating, for example, the results obtained in conjunction with the Community Madrid (EPO) in different fairs, promotional campaigns (Madrid 2020), etc.

The **methodological advances** of this pedagogy of the project *Re-Map*, are reflected in issues as innovation in urban planning (ideation, planning, design), innovation in the techniques (maps, plans, views, concepts used in the field of urban design, landscape architecture) and innovation in the use space (exchange and light). The results of the project are not only affecting regular teaching and research activities at the university but also summer courses and international conferences. In addition, the research team will incorporate to international networks that promote "the Implementation of the European Landscape Convention" as UNISCAPE, "Network of Landscape Architecture Schools European"-ECLAS (<http://www.eclas.org/>) and "Thematic Network of European Landscape Architecture" LE NOTRE (<http://www.le-notre.org/>). Inclusion in all these international networks, closely related to the project proposed here, is significant due to the interaction with what is happening at an European level in our schools of Architecture, Urbanism and Landscape. Another unique feature in this project is directly related to its training capacity, is its **international**, **multicultural** and **multi-lingual**, with the publication of articles in various languages (English, Spanish, Italian, German, French) and the ability to train students in these languages.

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Blogs and webs

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Cities for People / *Ciudades para las personas* (www.citiesforpeople.net/home.html)

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Raons Public Castelló / *Concurso para el Diseñno de Espacios Públicos* (raonspublicscastello.com)

Stadistics

www.ine.es

www.madrid.es

Maps

www.openstreetmap.org

Google Earth

www.nasa.gov

7. Biography.

Mayka García Hípola is **Associate Professor** at the Department of Theory and Design in Architecture & Urbanism DTPAU, Politechnical School, Universidad CEU San Pablo, Madrid. **PhD**, Extraordinary Price, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM), European Doctorate. Thesis: "Transformation of the Architectural Action in the Territory through Peter Eisenman". **MDesS**, Master in Design Studies with Honors, Harvard University. **MResA** Master in Arquitectural Restoration, UPM. Her work and resaerch interests cover Architecture, Landscape and Urban Projects. **Director of the research group Re-MAP.**

Maria Beltrán Rodríguez is **Second Year PhD candidate**. Department of Theory and Design in Architecture & Urbanism DTPAU, Politechnical School, Universidad CEU San Pablo. Madrid. **MA** in Architecture, EPS CEU Madrid & **M.Sc.** Urban Planning and Design, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm. **Member of the research group *Re-MAP***.