

## URBAN IDENTITY OF BORDER SPACES. CONSTRUCTING A PLACE IN THE BORDER CROSSING BETWEEN SPAIN AND MOROCCO IN CEUTA

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### ABSTRACT

It can currently be perceived that differences are enhanced between different territorial realities and their own identities, although dialogue between them is encouraged. The need to clarify the relationship between political areas or various territorial units is multiplied. In this context, the geopolitical borders are those places where exchange is displayed and multiple character flows are concentrated. The pressure existing over them is leading to prioritize economic and political roles, over the adaptation of spatial configuration.

The boundary condition can lead, depending on spatial, social, economic, morphological, etc., factors, to spaces of both conflict and relationship between the borders systems; hosting activities related to the concentration of flows and favored by the exchange; overlapping scales, etc. The mixture of the features of the bordering territories gives a certain identity to the border space which may also simultaneously form a new hybrid identity. Responding to the urbanity of these environments is a pending task, and discovering the "spaciality" and livability through multiscale projects is a necessity of contemporary architecture and urbanism.

The border between Spain and Morocco is of an ambivalent nature. It both separates a limit and acts as a physical connector between both countries. The geographical enclave of Ceuta and its relationship with the coast of Tetouan force us to think in very different scales and use long-term approaches. It is a territorial node subject to global dynamics (migration, tourism, movement of goods, etc) which greatly impact local behaviors. This research proposes a 'border system' which transcends the conflict of the place to respond to the multitude of points of activity and infrastructure which bring together the Spanish-Moroccan and reflects on frontier life.

**Keywords:** Urban Design, Identity, Territorial Cohesion, Borders, Architecture

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## 1. STARTING POINT OF THE INVESTIGATION, HYPOTHESIS AND OBJECTIVES

The existence of territorial identities imply the existence of positions that, from a spacial point of view, can be as much points of encounter as points of conflict. They are tagged with different names: frontiers, limits, borders, passes ... and often consolidate barriers, walls, marginalized zones, unattended spaces, etc. The need to study their territorial positions is observed, finding in this diversity or casuistic a repertory to reflect on its organization or improvement.

This article treats two lines that are simultaneous yet of completely different scales, within the ample spectrum of possibilities that "border" spaces provide us. On one hand, conclusions are derived from the doctoral investigation on the southern growth of the city of Granada, the group of slowly constructed neighborhoods over a traditionally agricultural structure. On the other hand, and in the same departmental line, the results of a final thesis from the final project on urban-territorial spaces around the Spanish Moroccan border that propose a new building of multiple services are presented.

As can be observed, the work is centered in appropriate scales and specific focal points, however, it is also interesting to observe how the border space's common characteristics are studied; grade of indetermination, multiple relationships, diverse scales that converge at the border, etc. Furthermore, the orientation towards the project is demonstrated in the present article moving towards attitudes and considerations of the same nature.

In the practice of European urbanism, the common attention to environments with homogeneous forms and identities is converted her into a tangent look to the contours of the true focus of the study: the area of passage. It could be said that to attend the urban borders necessarily implies the incorporation of a study of various identities, of more than one urban system, that only through a multi-scale vision and from an integrated territorial perspective can it be recognized as a space with its own common identity. Studying the urban from this conceptual idea of borders implies considering the common of what is apparently different or contrasting, and identifying traits that make territorial cohesion possible in the space.

### Hypothesis and objectives

Just as Saskia Sassen (1998) points out, "the global economy is materializing into a network of strategic places at a global scale". Thus, we can say that the territory is becoming characterized by increased connectivity between distant positions, requiring better articulation of networks in specific places. The urban space is understood to be polarized between spaces of cultural, economic, and social intensity in which interexchange, melding, the encounter, the functions, etc. are favored. These fundamental "pools of interexchange" are becoming more and more dynamic and favor both mobility and the convergence of diverse natural forms. The result is, paradoxically, spaces without form or negative functioning spaces with respect to classic centers.

We could say that the borders, seen through this wide lens, are the possibility in our territory to materialize and visualize the resulting reality of the networks. The cities are the principal spaces where this spatial transformation can be observed. These spaces jump from concentric forms of growth, present in many metropolitan archipelagos, and discover new urban configurations with limits that adopt multiple positions: Intervals between urban fragments of a different nature, separations between urban, industrial, infrastructure, commercial fabrics or organizationally different groups, in which the characteristic urban function is maintained but structure, landscape and typology is substantially altered.

The theoretical proposal that we present here sustains the hypothesis that the borders, whatever their origin, have a uniquely urban identity and therefore a social connection regarding this border condition added to the morphology that gives it meaning. In this same sense, the philosopher Eugenio Trías defined the existence of a "border being" as characterized by two identities: its own,

which give it the properties of its existence, and another relative to its surrounding, which maintain an external position (Trías, 2001).

Our objective is to define criteria of interpretation of the urban space situated in the border areas, as a foundation for proposing models of urban projects that attend to singularities that converge in this type of space. According to Desvigne (2012), these places would be "intermediate natures", of a relational and flexible basis. These singularities can be grouped in:

- a) Spaces with multiscale relationships
- b) Manifests of a singular urbanity as a new form of territoriality.
- c) Of diverse origin deriving into a physical particular construction and in a differentiated materialization of margins and channels of relationship.

## 2. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY FOR APPROXIMATING TO THE "BORDER SPACE"

For all of the above a definition of the characteristics of the urban and territorial limits as well as possible criteria for intervention from the reinforcement of its hybrid identity is realized. This, for example, is the singular case of the political border between Spain and Morocco which represents three levels of relationships, from the intercontinental as limited to the E.C., passing by the intermediate as a coastal region of the north of Morocco and, at a local level, the border passes around Ceuta and Melilla. Each level of relationship generates physical manifestations that are superimposed in determinate points of the territory, and give place to a reality that is truly difficult to decipher using the traditional criteria of urbanism.

On one hand, the gradual growth of the south of the city of Granada, creates a sum of places that are also border spaces. They are as much geographical limits as they are social, cultural and even economic segregators.



**Figure 1. Intermediate space belonging to the southern growth of the city of Granada. Source: Doctoral Thesis, Bravo (2015).**

From both trajectories a group of common characteristics of border space can be extracted in which the project possibilities can be rooted:

- A) **The intermediate space is a place in itself.** The natural limit is a space between two different things or between two different states of the same material, and with respect to the urban space, the limit is a state of separation between two environments that have their own identities. But this contrast of identities is not produced radically or head on, rather it is a progressive transition through a certain dissolving of the characteristics of each of the urban border limits in favor of a space that is a combination of all of them.

The conflict between city-country, as studied in the case of Granada, has left many examples that allow us to treat the problem of transition in different ways.

- B) **Depth of the limit: of the urban system line.** The transition between two urban systems can be produced crossing only one line or through an urban system in itself, like two extremes of the possible gradated space. In this sense, Haselsberger (2014) differentiates between two manifestations: borders and border regions, and proposes to overcome the negative effects that are often generate through the expansion of the limits towards a network of intertwined spaces.
- C) **An active limit improves the relations between the system and the border. Promoting** in the limits the existence of elements of the transversal relation is necessary to improve the link between the systems of the border and the visibility of the space between them, but, at the same time it is necessary to introduce the functions in the interior of the frontier to convert it into a place that is shared in itself. The cohesive role of the "border space" is reinforced with the assigning of functions that allow for the development of the urban life in its interiors.
- D) **A territory can be understood through the border landscape.** The coinciding of the limits with geographic elements offers a new possibility of interrelationship between the city and the territory. The flood limits, for example, act as ecological corridors in which the urban and the natural create a mixed entity through which the city enters into a balance with the medium and it makes it part of a basin that goes beyond the limits of the constructed. This, through and ecological interpretation, the challenge becomes for some to "incorporate nature, formal and functionally in the urban metabolism". (De las Rivas, 2013).

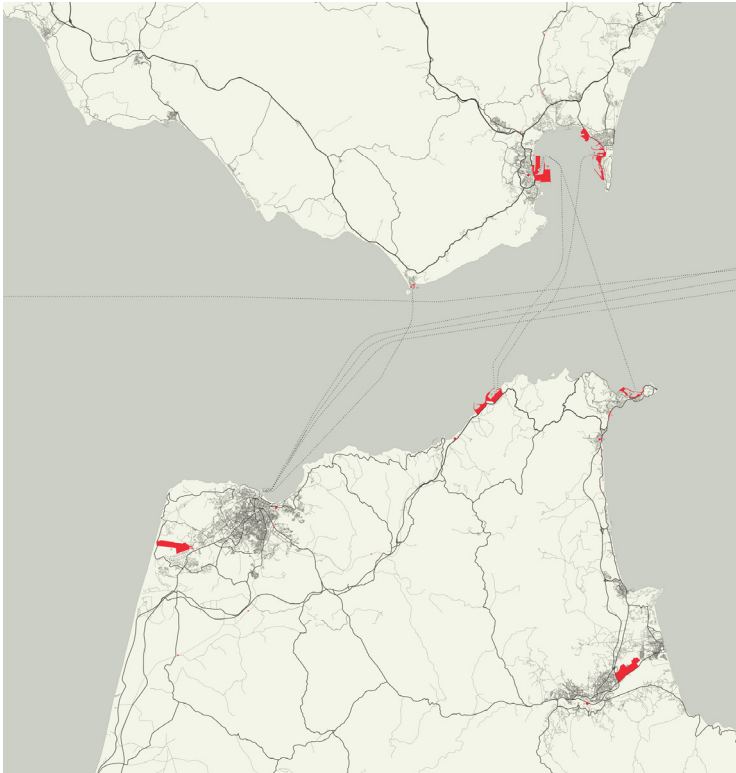
## TYPES OF BORDERS AND URBAN DYNAMICS

Considering that we are considering a complex phenomenon in which diverse circumstances concur, we propose a classification of border spaces that attend to its geographic, geopolitical and mental origins. In the distinct cases the qualities of *multiscaleness*, diversity and confluence previously described, but in each on the prevailing factor is different, which influences in its particular urban dynamics.

- a. **Geographic borders.** They convert into barriers for the continued urban functions, if the consolidate as city-country type conflicts, or they exceed themselves and are integrated within the same urban grouping. The evolution of the city has tended to a hardening of the constructed border, which makes a revalorization of the preexisting geographies to reclaim the ecological nexus of the new metropolitan conformations of a greater scale.
- b. **Geopolitical borders.** In the literal sense, they are a political separation and, in many cases cultural as well, between countries or geographic areas; but they are also a mixture of both. The border has an ambivalent character here, on one hand it is a limit and on the other a connection: a node of the surrounding territory that is subject to global dynamics but ends up affecting the local behaviors (migration, tourism, merchandise passage, etc)
- c. **Mental borders.** They are invisible borders that behave spatially in the same way a physical wall would (Gandelsonas, 1999). At the same time they acquire both negative connotations that lead to a functional emptying of determined spaces and their negation by the urban vitality. Jane Jacobs (1961) exemplifies them through the abandonment that the borders of parks have suffered, that were avoided by pedestrians and commerce, simply for the connotations that they acquire socially.

### 3. CASE STUDY: CEUTA - A PLACE OF PASSAGE IN THE SPANISH MOROCCAN BORDER

The relationship between these two countries has varied throughout history and has gone through different times, demonstrating periods of political tension and of fluid commercial flow between the two. It is Europe's most imbalanced and shortest border, creating great tension at the crossing points which has been increasing in recent years with the addition of migrations from other African countries.



**Figure 2. Urban organization of the Gibraltar Strait. Source: Final Project of Architecture Degree, Jimenez (2015)**

The European Union began not too long ago to be aware of this problem and implemented policies such as the 'Panorama of EU Regional Programmes and Projects-Southern Mediterranean , 2012-2014', through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which has been formalizing relations with Morocco since 2005. General policies have been linked to this territory through the FHIMADES Foundation in four blocks of action:

- a) To promote the social and economic exchange
- b) To consolidate the foundation for business cooperation
- c) To analyze the state of Spanish-Moroccan relations
- d) To promote the human potential of its inhabitants

All these measures move towards the recognition of a distinct territorial reality, but its spatial configuration remains unresolved. The difficulty of responding to its complexity leads to ignoring of the issues and an entrenchment in a position of uncertainty.

### 3.1. SUPERPOSITION OF RELATIONSHIPS AND SCALES

In this contact three scales or superimposed relationships have been uncovered:

- 1) **The international relationship.** The territorial dynamics have their reason for being in the productive nature of the border, that convert it into a center of a global, multi-scale system. The Spanish- Moroccan border is separating two worlds, Europe and Africa, a separation that has a land location, prior to the coast, where the geopolitical tension becomes visible. This creates a legal economy that entails the construction of infrastructure, as well as an illegal parallel economy of smuggling, producing a large volume of business.<sup>1</sup>
- 2) **The intermediate scale: population distribution in the Tangier-Tetouan region.** In the Tangier-Tetouan region population pressure has increased exponentially, intensifying urbanization and population displacement in rural communities has been continuous since its independence from Spain. This has established a linear relationship with enormous pressure on coastal ecosystems, accentuated by the increase in infrastructure (roads, ports, dams, railways, airports, etc.).<sup>2</sup>

We find ourselves before a North African metropolis that works informally on both sides of the border without a conscious response or coordination by the administration.

- 3) **The local level: the relationship between Ceuta and Castillejos.** In the vicinity of Ceuta a very intense local activity of exchange of interests between the two sides of the border crossing occurs.<sup>3</sup> This cross-border trade promotes illegal pedestrian flows that coexist with traffic that the border is unable to absorb.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 3. Aerial photo in front of the border between Ceuta and Castillejos. Source: Alicia Jiménez (2015)**

<sup>1</sup> According to estimates by the Moroccan government, this volume amounted to 1,500 million € per year, and represents about 45,000 direct jobs and 400,000 indirect jobs.

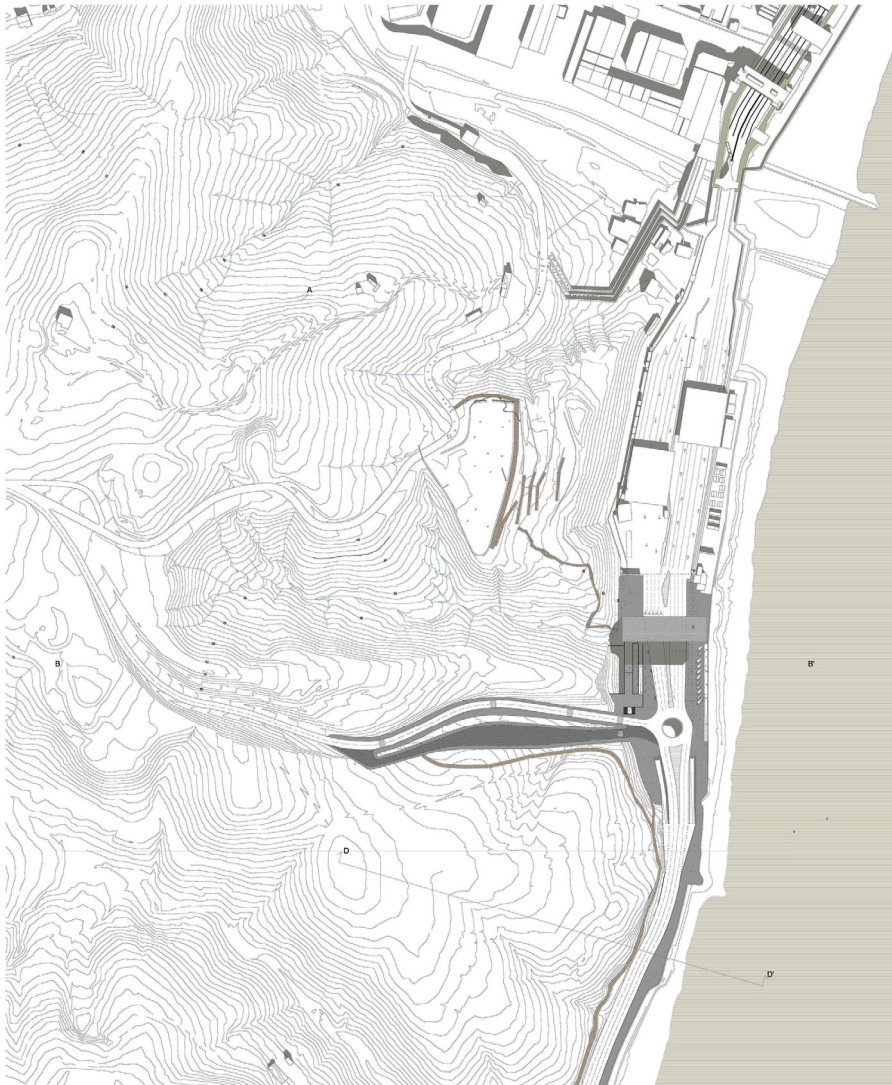
<sup>2</sup> This investment is a result of increased income from the Moroccan middle class, and the improved socio-political relationship between Spain, Morocco and Algeria.

<sup>3</sup> Moroccans shop for European products in Ceuta because have 50% less tax. For Ceutis, Castillejos is a usual shopping venue both because of its proximity and the diversity and quality of its products.

<sup>4</sup> The stretch of country road of about 1.5 km that connects Ceuta and Castillejos is a major artery for different types of flows. People walk along the roadside and sometimes on it because the road section lacks a space reserved for pedestrians.

### 3.2. THE URBAN ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT IN THE BORDER CROSSING

Working on urbanizing in this context means to materialize the above approach and seek to respond to the different functions and flows that converge within it. In the developed project, we have tried to transform a space of transit and conflict into a place capable of articulating the concentration of social and economic dynamics, generating specific spaces for each function through a platform that naturally extends as an extension of the geographical slope. Thus, the complexity is taken over by an intricate architectural section in which the different types of flows are made possible and are integrating with the coastal landscape. A backdrop that unifies the different positions of the section.



**Figure 4. Intermodal space in the passage between Ceuta and Morocco.**  
Source: Final Project of Architecture Degree, Jiménez (2015)

The project channels the longitudinal mobility of the border crossing through the diversification of transport modes:

- 1º Enabling and improving the space for pedestrian traffic through the upgrading and adaptation of a traditional path located along the hillside.
- 2º Generating a transit line crossing the border that connects Tetouan and Ceuta without interruption.
- 3º Allowing space for both road traffic circulation and parking.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS. CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY IN THE BORDER**

It becomes evident in the border spaces studied that, in spite of their different scales and positions within the territory, they present common traits that are derived from the border condition. On one hand, the interstitial environments of Granada's southern growth have spawned a new sedimentation of more than contradictory urban facts in its margins, alternating episodes of recognizing the limit as a space of encounter or interlace between the neighbourhood or the center of the city with periods of abandonment and imbalance evident between the riversides – in the case of the fluvial limits, literal- in the case of border spaces studied.

On the other hand, the border situation at the Spanish-Moroccan pass in Ceuta, continues in a state that is increasingly conflictive, in which more and more demanding infrastructure, administrative and socio-sanitary conditions are being added to one of the most evident borders of the western world, and the ever increasing unsustainable spatial conditions of the local territory of the border. In these spaces, places without urbanization, interminable lines of vehicles waiting and hundreds of thousands of people in their daily activity bang at the legal doors of Spain in a territory that is unstructured and deprived of physical conditions.

As we can see in the border situation, these places are principally treated from social and economic policies without responsibly attending the necessary spatial configurations that are fundamental for permitting the development of transcending functions of its border condition, important multifunctionalities for the existence of a certain autonomy in its interior.

It can be affirmed, that there is an identity of the border that should be reinforced to convert its qualities of indetermination in confluence of multiscalarity. With this, surpassing the connotation as a permanent space of conflict, we define the basis for the spatial project and its potential social, economic and cultural success.

In the Southern district of Granada, the doctoral investigation chose a morphological point of view for a project of limits that gives it a perception as a system. This system permits it to multiply the forms of contact and interexchange between its borders and transforms the simplicity of its lineal conception in a fruitful combination of spaces, fabrics and axis that strengthens the functions and new coverage of the existing.

We should not seek, therefore, the dissolution of these border spaces. On the contrary, we should define the elements that conform their unique urban system that should be projected according to aspects discovered through thorough observation and analysis.

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