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FIGHTING THE MYTH AND NOSTALGIA: COLLECTIVE DATABASES FOR A CREATIVE CITY IN THE VEGA OF GRANADA

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ABSTRACT

This fertile mixed field known as Vega is on the western border of the city and forms part of an area much larger than the actual border with Granada. It was considered both an economic engine and an unquestioned landscape value in the 19th century. This was the reason why the urban planning always tried to avoid urban development in its direction. The research, still in progress and carried out from a teaching framework, studies the urban potential of this 'sacred' space, trying to demonstrate that in functional, spatial, and symbolic terms the possibilities for intervention considerably exceed its value as a pseudoagricultural area that needs to be protected. The discovery of problems and rules of internal functioning, architectural typologies and mutations, old and new ways of life, become critical elements for measuring intervention in a territory that is so susceptible to change, so mythologised, where real knowledge and creativity without prejudices are parameters that must be equally considered.

Keywords: urbanism, suburban area, databases, landscape, myth

BORBA PROTIV MITA I NOSTALGIJE: KOLEKTIVNE BAZE PODATAKA U CILJU STVARANJA KREATIVNOG GRADA U REGIJI VEGA DE GRANADA

REZIME

Ovo plodno i slojevito polje poznato kao Vega nalazi se na zapadnom obodu grada i čini deo područja koje je mnogo veće od granice prema Granadi. Vega je tokom XIX stoljeća smatrana kako ekonomskim pokretačem tako i pejzažem izuzetne vrijednosti. Iz tog razloga je praksa urbanog planiranja uvijek težila da izbjegne širenje grada u pravcu Vege. Istraživanje koje je još uvijek u toku i koje se realizuje u okviru studijskog programa bavi se urbanim potencijalom ovog 'svetog' prostora i pokušava da pokaže da je u fukcionalnom, prostornom i simboličkom pogledu Vega polje mogućih intervencija, i da se ne smije posmatrati samo kao pseudo-zemljoradnička površina koju treba staviti pod zaštitu. Otkriće problema i pravila internog funkcionisanja, arhitektonskih tipologija i njihovih mutacija, novih i starih načina života, postaju ključni elementi u razmatranju intervencija na jednom području tako osjetljivom na promjene i u toj mjeri 'mistifikovanom', gdje stvarno znanje i kreativnost bez predrasuda trebaju biti podjednako uvaženi i zastupljeni.

Ključne riječi: urbanizam, predgrađe, baze podataka, pejzaž, mit

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I. INTRODUCTION, THE CURRENT PROBLEM IN THE VEGA OF GRANADA.

There are territories that demand a project. They often scream for one. This is the case of the area of the Vega of Granada that belongs to the city centre. More specifically, the section located in direct contact with the inner space of the city of Granada, bordered by the Beiro River to the north and the Genil River to the south (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Orthophotograph of the studied part of Granada. The perimeter of the area is marked by an important highway, Carretera de Circunvalación, which radically separates the urban zone from the Vega. [1: 408]

This area also serves as a metaphor for the context of reflecting on brownfields, which are normally defined as areas close to great density urban zones, and identified and studied throughout Europe in recent years. Thus, the Vega in the municipality of Granada, seen as an agricultural outskirt or as previously developed land (PDL), per the traditional English definition of brownfields, needs to be regenerated in the popular view. This must happen before it can be spatially, functionally or urbanistically revitalised. This might generate criteria that will revive it from the state of paralysis it has been in for too many decades back. This simile may be an opportunity for the Vega to be redefined in a new and better way.

For many centuries, Granada remained concentrated in this interfluvial position, until the beginning of the 20th century, when the city was forced to develop. This fertile agricultural land known as 'Vega,' whose area, as we will see soon, is much larger than the actual border with the city, was considered both to be an economic engine and to have unquestionable landscape value. mostly during the 19th century.

This is the reason why the urban planners always tried to develop the city towards the north and the south, but not towards the west, which would seem more logical from the point of view of expanding the early city and

following the growth pattern of many Spanish cities known as the 'Los Ensanches' mechanism.²

Reasons relative to the urban form of the main cities conditioned the observation of this specific adjacent agricultural territory, provoking a kind of 'sacralisation' and making it impossible to perceive and value its position and the logical space that it represents for urban development in the territory of Granada.

It is quite common for these border territories to be spaces inherited from a time of greater agricultural productivity, with an ethnological and landscape heritage of unquestionable value. However, it is with the mythification of the patrimonial condition of these areas, previously functional and central, that objective observation of their space becomes difficult. This situation is often guided by a permanent feeling of loss. In the words of the geographer Alvaro Domingues [3:43]:

"This historic landscape, of the countryside and city, feeds a certain nostalgic attitude: from idolising the historic centres to the trauma of losing the 'authentic' rural landscape. It is this tense relationship with the past (successive traumas of loss and respective exorcisms) that disturbs the developing of these new entities [...]"

Around 1930, the sugar beet, the last really big crop, crashed on the world market, and with it fell the agricultural and economic activity in the Vega [3:22]. This economic downturn coincided with the construction of the Camino de Ronda. Its construction began in 1936,³ it was the first axis that has since served as a city bypass for connecting the north (from the Seville Malaga axis) to the south (the highway that goes to the coast of Granada). That was the moment when the myth created the current situation of hyperprotectionism, on which we will reflect.

The investigation, still under way and part of a collective learning procedure, seeks to build a critical database that will permit the study and discovery of urban possibilities for regenerating this space belonging to the Vega, and demonstrate that in functional, spatial, economic and symbolic terms, it has much more potential for intervention than simply being considered a pseudo-agricultural space that needs to be protected against urban growth.

² Such as Barcelona, Madrid, San Sebastian, Bilbao, Valencia, etc., developing since the second half of the 19th century [2].

³ The Camino de Ronda neighborhood is located along the vacant, non-built borders of the city of Granada, just beyond the ring road, which has consolidated since the 196o's and 197o's: a major north-south thoroughfare within the city, which is currently under reconstruction to incorporate the first underground light rail line to cross the Metropolitan Area of the city of Granada from the towns of Armilla (south) to Maracena and Albolote (north).

⁴ Thesis of the School of Architecture of Granada, Creative City workshop coordinated by Juan L. Rivas (2010-2014).

Its potential is based precisely on this quality of open space, mixed with urban centralities and occupations, and its capability to narrate the past processes of occupation and transformation of this territory.

At the same time, this space shows important urban characteristics, which make it attractive for development: accessibility, proximity to the urban centrality, functional as well as historical and touristic, the capacity for formal organisation of the metropolitan areas, especially apt to house new urban functions, etc.

It is the dual aspect of opportunity and heritage, the current lack of functionality and its great spatial and relational possibilities, that allow us to imagine – beyond the compact city and its edge formed by the mobility infrastructure – a new city of architecture, flows and functions on this agricultural intermediate space, harmonising the overlapping territorial times.

2. A GREEN AND MYTHIFIED BROWNFIELD

Brownfields are defined by the Concerted Action on Brownfields and Economic Regeneration (CABERNET) as 'sites that have been affected by the former uses of the site and surrounding land; are derelict and underused; may have real or perceived contamination problems; are mainly in developed urban areas; and require intervention to bring them back to beneficial use' [5:1].

In addition to this, a report by this network focused on the causes of brownfields lists the causes of Europe's brownfield land stock [5:7], concluding that the majority of the current brownfield land is the result of Europe's twentieth-century industrial legacy: mining (typically the biggest source of brownfields), chemical, oil and iron and steel industries, shipyards and docklands, and waste disposal sites.

However, other industries, such as timber processing and paper and pulp production, appear to be an important source of brownfields in Scandinavia; derelict hotel buildings are the major source of a special kind of brownfield in Mallorca, etc.

These economic shocks have made themselves felt in the European context, especially in Mediterranean countries. The huge residential growth and the corresponding growth of the transport infrastructure taking place over the last decades in the metropolitan area of Granada, in parallel with the decline of its agricultural production, show the importance of considering all types of brownfields, and not just contaminated former heavy industrial sites.

With the notable exception of the Basque region, Spain is among the least industrialised countries in Europe, and in many cities like Granada the city-countryside relationship was constructed on a principle that assigned to the city the role of an administrative centre (occasionally of transformation) of production of crops intended for industrial manufacturing. The countryside,

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in this case the Vega was then the center of exploitation of the primary goods.

As we will see, from Nazarian times (ending with the conquest of the city by the Catholic kings in 1492), the evolution and use of the Vega has fluctuated in terms of the kind of use and intensity; first, it was silk, then flax and sugarcane, followed by tobacco and sugar beet: 'industrial' crops grown on a large scale, with a direct effect on both external and internal urban development (Figure 2).

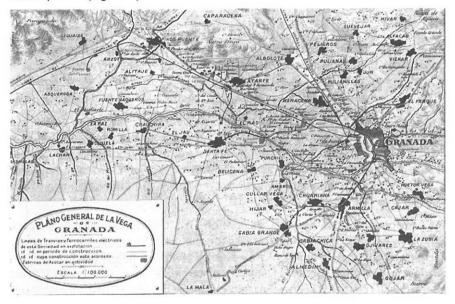


Figure 2. In the time of sugar beet production (at the turn of the 20th century), the connection of the city with the Vega reflected and resulted in the construction of a network of electric interurban trollies that directly connected the city with all the surrounding towns, and it also physically reflected in the bisection of the old Muslim quarter with the new Gran via de Colon axis.

As we shall see in Table I, the Vega has traditionally been exploited to produce industrial crops on a large scale: flax and hemp, sugar beet, tobacco, etc., in addition to small and medium scale farming activity. Sugar beet production was the only industry that gained enough importance to promote investment and push a sort of 'industrial revolution' through the stabilisation of the Grenadian urban bourgeoisie.

In this context, the city-Vega relationship was based on the central role of administration (occasionally as a place of transformation) of industrial crops intended for manufacturing or processing, dedicating the central Vega almost exclusively to the exploitation of raw materials. At the same time, the city was assuming a central role within the greater regional and supra-regional system.

The above shows that the Vega of Granada has many features typical of brownfields [6:4], but that there are also substantial differences between them, such as the rate of unemployment due to the sudden collapse of a specific kind of industry, little technology and potentially low costs of regeneration of the area, from the environmental point of view.

Moreover, many of their difficulties are similar: lack of tools to attract investment; social unrest; adverse effects on urban life; lack of local financial or management resources to address this regeneration process, hence the difficulty to undertake the development works or build free or public green spaces, etc.

These characteristics correspond to an actual state of obsolescence similar to that of other brownfields: implications for the present city-dense areas, in which some past land uses are recognised as currently abandoned or underutilised and in need of revitalisation, regeneration or recuperation.

In the context of the Vega and to better understand this space today, we should now briefly explain how this central territory has evolved in contact with the city. It is also necessary to understand the mythological charge that it has acquired, how it came about and how it is manifested, and how this singular 'vision' continues to condition, even today, the future planning of this territory so relevant to the city.

As previously stated, the Vega, as a whole, is a traditional agricultural space with long-term economic implications for the urban development of the city in its metropolitan territory. As a result of a history full of fluctuations but prolonged in time (Table I), this is a territory with clearly identifiable patrimonial elements, both architectural and agricultural (residences, ethnological elements, manufacturing and industry); at the same time, its landscape quality is outstanding: crop mosaic, vegetation in waterways, perspectives of the city, mountains and other geographical elements, etc.

This has given place to urbanising morphological and typological characteristics of the Vega and its division and building as a territorial element, which, however, has variations in density, function and landscape, depending on the area or internal unit.

From a geographical point of view, the Vega occupies an intermediate position, surrounded by the foothills and spurs of the Sierra. As a major part of the flood plain of the Genil River, it constitutes a large flatland gradually sloping toward the west. As a whole, the Vega extends 50km east to west and 35 km north to south, with a total surface area of about 1.500 km² [7: 33]. This makes it a natural territory for the growth and development of settlements.

However, if we concentrate on the area known as the 'central Vega', that which belongs to the city municipality, this is approximately 3,251 ha to the west of the city [4:18] (Figure 3).

Table 1. Historical and productive evolution of the Vega of Granada. Prepared by the author. Source: PGOU, 2001 [4] and the Special Plan for the Protection of the Granada Vega, 2012 [7].

PERIOD	HISTORIC EVOLUTION	PRODUCTION	
Nazarí Period 13th -15th cen.	Intense rural life. Many working farms. Origin of the division morphology.		
Spanish re-conquest of Granada (1482- 1492)	Decline of life in the Vega. Land abandoned. Over exploitation for the city at first and devastation and cutting of provisions to the city by the Christians afterward.	-	
15th and 16th centuries	Expulsion of the moriscos. Watering system, restructuring of borders and creation of new municipalities. Christian repopulating. Population increase	Aprox. Populaiton (1578) of 8.600 in the Vega and 35000 in the city Production: Wood and Silk	
18th century	Heavy population influx. The rotating system caracteristic of the Vega is implanted.	Population density: 50 people/ km ² compared to 12 people/ km ² at the beginning of the 16 th century. Production: Wheat, beans, flax, sugar cane and corn.	
19th century	Sugar cane crisis. Population static until the end of the century. Confiscation of ecclesiastical property and even more parcel fragmentation.	Population of 49000 people	
Beginning of the 20th century	Industrial burgués, rail systems implemented and internal city restructured.	Population (1930) of 87000 people Production: Sugar beet	
Rest of the 20th century until present	Crisis in the sugar beet industry. Peak of in productivity. Strong population growth in the city and metropolitan area. Abandoning of tobacco production due to European agricultural politics. Contradictory politics mixing protectionism with urban spontaneity.	Subsistence farming: potatoes, wheat, corn, flax and sugar cane	

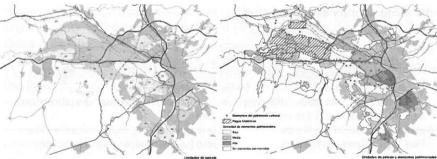


Figure 3. (From right to left) Situation map of the area of the Creative City of the Granada Vega, with an overlaid map depicting the limits of the landscape units. Map of the patrimonial elements and dynamics of change [7: 70].

It was there that the new axis of the Camino de Ronda road opened new homogeneous perspectives. Just as Josep Parcerisa wrote [8:62-63], "the Camino de Ronda opened magnificent perspectives of the city that were previously hidden and very partial"; thus, its architecture emerged frontally, imposing contemplation of the empty space, of this land of the central Vega, as an immutable patrimonial space (Figure 4).5



Figure 4. Oblique view of the city from the Vega to the west, 1957. Unconsolidated trace of the Camino de Ronda and the vitality of the agricultural tissue adjacent to the city. Source:

Municipal Archives of Granada

These visions, fed by a general fear of change and a permanent feeling of loss, characteristic of the Grenadine culture, have also been reinforced since the end of the 20th century by the more general patrimonial currents as well as the contemporary ecological ones.⁶

⁵ Following these ideas we can say that the Camino de Ronda, which was originally proposed as an extension toward the west and was in no case associated with the idea of limiting growth [8:72], its urbanisation and even the buildings along it, have become an enemy, in a sense that their consolidation led to a frontal disposition that converted this area into the 'end of the city' confronted with an 'open countryside' and fixed an idea of a permenanet urban fact, condemning it to remain undeveloped.

⁶ In this way, associations like the 'Platform to save the Vega' [8], digital magazines like *Planning the Territory* (The decline of a landscape) [10], newspapers like *El Pais* (The 'strangled' Vega) [11], collectives of 'Granada for a new territorial culture' [12], and even active platforms for the revitalisation of traditional agricultural activity like those created by the project for excellence PLANPAIS, 2010-2014 [13], are strong defenders of the Vega, the majority in opposition to the urban. These initiatives are, together with the administrative position, complicating the real integration of this territory into the realm of the

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Thus, in time, this rural space has lost its stable sense, an agricultural activity that is not sociologically 'rural' but rather sociologically urban [3:55]. All this nostalgia for the past, although supported by true values and urban and territorial registers, has had two deleterious effects:

- I) The Vega has been converted into a totemic element, mythicized and indivisible, in which implanting anything other than an agricultural activity has become prohibited. It is foreign to all the positional territorial logic and, paradoxically, is at the mercy of spontaneity and continuous exceptions that are damaging it.
- 2) The flip side of this same coin, the strong city-countryside division, has impeded the city growth, as it did in the previous centuries, towards the west, consolidating the boundary and promoting its continued densification.

Presently, and as a consequence of the above, much of the territory of the central Vega is paralysed or in decadence, virtually exposed to deregulation and to occupation by illegal uses, increasing the maintenance costs and continuing the problems of fabric impermeability and privacy.

Then there is the city, which has missed the opportunity to evolve its centre with the unstoppable increase in its metropolitan movement. In its approximations, the smaller populations have suffered – principally prior to the crisis that has been devastating Spain since 2010 -an exponential growth, because of the relaxed regulation of building in the Vega, and because residential land has been made accessible to those buyers who cannot afford to purchase land close to the city centre.

3. COLLECTIVE DATABASES FOR A CREATIVE CITY IN THE CENTRAL VEGA OF THE GRANADA MUNICIPALITY

Observing the past insufficient and inadequate planning and the consequent negative effects on the form and function of the city, we decided to initiate a workshop known as 'Creative City in the Granada Vega' in 2010 for final projects at the School of Architecture. The objective was to generate a change in mentality that transcends or at least grants amnesty to the empty argument city vs. countryside implanted in Granada since the times of Angel Ganivet, and later, Gallego Burín.⁷

We have seen how the planning has been limited to permanently readjusting the limits of the Vega, as an exercise in cynicism, which has in many cases accommodated perimeter residential growth without occupying or

metropolitan urban space, beyond the juxtaposition, and avoiding the questioning of its inadvisability or functional innovation or change.

⁷ Both are references to the cultural heritage of Granada: the first one was a writer and precursor of the generation of 1898, and the author of Granada la Bella; the second one was the city mayor in the 1950's and a staunch supporter of the first, whom he used as a standard for his urban regeneration policy [8:62-70].

substituting the totemic and singular area of the Vega. This tends to happen without criteria or a search for meaning in the spaces that construct it, without delving into knowledge to repair and better define its environs.

What we are seeking is a method for establishing criteria of intervention rather than proposing concrete measures. These methods encourage the inclusion of sensibility and the incorporation of methods of approximation, as well as the use of adequate scales, selections and focuses. This is where the connection between this collective methodology and the proposal for the regeneration of brownfields to be implemented at different places, where setting up a system and ensuring logical management and acting criteria is very important.

In order to identify new methodological approaches aimed at improving systems for mapping and evaluating brownfields, it is necessary to consider those urban brownfield programmes that have adopted a systematic holistic approach to sustainable regeneration across Europe [5:1]: to support economic development and competitiveness, improve the sustainability of the built environment, increase the cultural identity and quality of life, and improve urban management.

In this sense, the approach to the revitalisation and regeneration project of the Vega of Granada should contain some of the most important objectives of these European programmes, such as recycling the urban fabric, former buildings and urbanisation, environmental sensitivity in the process of landuse change, densification in the use of urban space, and mainly intensification of urban life, content and function of green and public spaces, etc.

This commitment to the criteria instead of specific short term actions is especially relevant in this case. It becomes the general baseline for the development of tools for decision making on the different acting levels as in other brownfield programs.

Here again, the area observed is a field of investigation in which many phenomena have occurred over time in a definite manner. Thus the discovery of the rules of internal functioning, of the occupation of plots, the architectural typologies, the ways of life, becomes a key element for measuring intervention in a territory that is so susceptible to change.

Among the large repertoire of studies that have been undertaken for analysing and understanding this territory, we identify a few as defined in Table 2.

In the same manner, we present in Table 3 the principal subjects treated in the integral contributions to the collective database. The field studies, the analyses of the historical and socioeconomic evolution of the area, as well as the production of essential maps are the principal analytical elements and data source. Efforts to ensure objectivity in relation to the territory and establish criteria to move towards the necessary operability are reflected in the results of these contributions.

Table 2. Types of database analysis for the Creative City [14:11].

Multiscale analysis	Relations between the contemporary urban elements and their constituting forms or systems from a triple perspective: metropolitan urban and local		
Temporal analysis	Discovering the form and character of the area over time, its oldest formal and functional values, and its evolution, mainly in the 20th century		
Formal analysis	Organizing the different directions which cross the space of the agricultural matrix from the territory and from the city of Granada		
Thematic analysis	Supposing relations with respect to a dominant urban function, in this case the university, which are introduced in the agricultural space as ar element of generating order		
Complementariness of roads	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,		

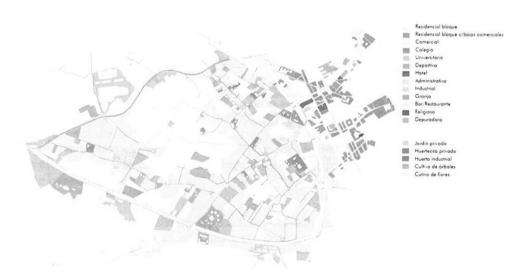


Figure 5. Mapping functions in an integrated area. Coexistence of elements of patrimonial and landscape value and the current building of a mosaic. Source: Patricia Tuesta Couce, architect, Granada. Workshop 2011-2013.

Table 3. Collective databases for a Creative City in the Vega of Granada. Prepared by the author⁸

METHODOLOGY	CRITERIA	CONTRIBUTION 1	CONTRIBUTION 2	CONTRIBUTION 3
Integral vision of the territory	Without an initial differentiation between urban and rural, but rather as a multiplicity of urban elements	rete measures a unomparistado al kas assistado lectivo autobo	Study of the city's urban borders with the non-developable land considered Vega	
Mapping functions in the integral space	Coexistence; flexibility; abundance; urban demands; heritage	Educational, public space, cultural and entertainment	Coexistence between elements of patrimonial and landscape value and current constructions of miscellaneous character	Waste water treatment, plant nurseries; infrastructures expelled from the city as institutional, educational, sports fields
Characteristics deduced from field study		Loss of the city- countryside duality; Parcels and buildings abandoned; Illegal occupation; Privatization of roads	Privatized roads; Lack of internal permeability; Logics of development according to the road	Abandoned spaces with sporadic use; Spaces completely abandoned; Spaces used for illegal dumping
Characteristics obtained from the cartography		Space used for urban traffic between city and towns (east-west); Absence of continuous roads moving north-south in the Vega.	Intense functional relationship Vega- Town; Low density is not directly related with small buildings; Border road space is occupied by urban uses; High percentage of protected buildings abandoned.	Relationship between the building positions and the parcels; Places of opportunity and associations; Difficulty of transition and access from the city center; Mosaic of uses and conflicts.
Analysis of the current planning	<u>Failure</u> in obtaining means of control to effectively protect the agricultural space	Heavy occupation of urban uses; Microparcelation; Lack of real methods to recuperate public space; Disconnection with the central city; Cultural change in the demands for employment in the city.		ly intersification of the series of the seri
Diferenciation	Need for internal diferenciation of the Vega territories		ke#wesugitlöri	Need to <u>reevaluate</u> the diversity and heiarchy of the roads
Assessment	Water and climate components	mai lunchogiss lunchogis	becomes a	Traditional network of waterways that irrigate the entire Vega; Groups of large trees.

Data:	 The protected space in the Vega has not been considerably modified since 1973 (C.1) 4000 has. of rural land was transformed into urban land (1999) (C.1)
	 Between the years 1984-1999, the protected area lost, of great ecological, agricultural and environmental value, increased by 18 times (C.1)
	- Since 1999 the protected area lost has increased by 39% (C.2)
	 Of the 100% of all the protected land in the metropolitan area, of which 69% is mountainous protected area and 31% is Vega protected area, 92% of the land lost belongs to the Granada Vega and only 8% is mountainous (C.2)

⁸ Contribution 1: María del Mar Cuevas Arrabal, architect, Granada. Workshop 2010-2012; Contribution 2: Patricia Tuesta Couce, architect, Granada. Workshop 2011-2013; Contribution 3: Javier Barbero Martín, student, School of Architecture, University of Granada. Workshop 2012-2014.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND THE PROJECT REPERTOIRE

This working collective database has been built using the criteria, information and representations that provide orientation toward a very open urban renovation project. In contrast to the kind of fabric developed by building heavy industry, which is now considered obsolete, the Vega has no contamination problems and does not need technology or large investments to be regenerated [6:4].

The area of the central Vega in contact with the city shares many of the typical problems associated with brownfields: lack of tools to draw investment; social conflict; adverse effects on urban life; lack of local economic or administrative resources to support regeneration. This makes it difficult to urbanize the space or turn it into public open space.

The gathering of criteria in this investigation should lead to a series of programmatic possibilities that, in turn, develop the best option for the future:

- Occasional interventions which enable certain functions and mobilise the space, relative to the time it takes to reactivate agricultural landscape.
- Mediation of the area of intervention, to establish intermediate structures and new forms of occupation.
- Configuration of new aspects of the creative city with a greater or lesser degree of transformation, which make use of the positional potential of the space that is so close to the consolidated and central city, as well as its singular qualities in order to obtain unique landscapes and functions that would be impossible to reproduce in the traditional compact city.

In this sense, we would locate the key to success in all these projective approaches by attending to the natural geography and the traditional agricultural subdivisions to create a real supporting matrix. Also crucial is the creation of an interesting space which allows for temporal coexistence, and the overlapping of functions and rhythms that are also urban.

But for all of this to be possible, it is important to permit the desired territory and city to emerge. It also supposes a profound knowledge of the city's territorial and urban structures, combating the myths and nostalgia, and observing the territory face on.

Large homogeneous areas would be abolished and a truly progressive transition to an agricultural park constructed. Not so much a hard section, but rather a type of osmotic membrane, a positive frontier capable of both differentiation and interexchange.



Figures 6. Urban and architectonic consequences of an example of implanting of the "Creative University City" in part of the study area [14:15].

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