

CITY-COUNTRYSIDE AMNESTY THROUGH THE 'RIVERSCAPE': TOWARDS A MORE SUSTAINABLE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE URBAN GRANADA AND ITS OWN LANDSCAPE

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The new urban configurations contain an interesting mixture of land uses more or less active. They draw open pieces on a map where the natural geography and agricultural spaces are trapped. They are forms belonging to a time when the relationship city-countryside was clearer, and the coexistence between urban and agricultural functions easier. Nowadays, the agricultural tissue in the urban periphery is a common feature of the European cities (mainly in Mediterranean cities) and, in the case of Granada, the way as the city has been growing may be considered against the geographic and agricultural view of the territory. In this context, rivers are the natural link between urban and rural areas and their 'riverscape' become a field of possibilities for the implementation of new territorial functions. The revitalization of the Genil River along its more urban length must be based on the new territorial dynamics in response to the current social, cultural and economic demands.

The research studies the urban possibilities of this "natural corridor" and tries to demonstrate that in functional, spatial, and social terms, it has many more possibilities of intervention than the fact of being considered as a resulting product of non-rational processes of accumulation of borders, protections, etc. These new 'riverscapes' would lead to a programmatic and typological search in order to incorporate innovative facilities and new collective architectures.

As a result, it is possible to balance two fundamental tensions of the future project: responsibility for the history and inherited geography, and the sense for the occasion and the invention of a landscape deeply related, a way to create an interesting place to allow the temporary coexistence and the development of a more integrated territory.

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INTRODUCTION, HYPOTHESIS: GENERAL APPROXIMATION TO THE CITY-VEGA CONTACT

The growth of the city generates a blur between urban and rural spaces, with the consequent transformation and hardening of the agricultural fabric. The apparent loss of the traditional traits of the land has brought about, during the 20th century, attitudes in defense of the “city body” (Pavia 1996) as a containment mechanism to a positive agricultural support system.

The rigid urbanization, high density cities and elimination of the agricultural traits with urban fabric, have reinforced the existence of excessively severe limits and the city/countryside dialog has been transformed into a confrontation. This is why the integration of the natural traits in the interior of the urban form, either for topographical traits, rivers, rural roads, etc. provide continuity to the geographical support in which the urban interior and the rural exterior are manifests of nuances of the same form of habitat.

This is the hypothesis of this presentation, based on the idea that a more natural understanding of this border will allow for the adoption of special criteria, functions and behaviors that will in turn create a sustainable development of the territory before the conflict. In this harmonic territory the use of more friendly transport, the reduction of consumption of land, the preservation of the agricultural landscape, the possibility to generate urban uses compatible with this “soft contact” that will be utilized by the population of dense areas in the city, etc., are some of the potential improvement of this accord between city and countryside.

In this sense, the rivers are territorial connectors between rural and urban positions. On the contrary important urban streets can be considered as “barrier elements” (Solá-Morales, “Ciudades Cortadas”, 1994), offering unification from a territorial perspective.



Figure 1. Oblique view of the city from the Vega to the west en 1957. Unconsolidated trace of the Camino de Ronda and vitality of adjacent agricultural tissue to the city. Source: Municipal Archives of Granada

The regional capacity of the principal rivers, in the urban and territorial contexts such as the city of Granada (Fig. 1), convert the conservation of the natural, geographic and agricultural qualities of the rivers into something fundamental in these border spaces, favoring the dissolving of the urban-agricultural land conflict, and the construction of a necessary and positive city/country dialog .

CHARACTERISTICS AND POSSIBILITIES OF THE SUBURBAN SPACE

The object of study reveals itself as a narrative thread of the city, besides having constructed it into its present shape. There are many other urban fact that accompany it in different positions, but maybe there is none in which its urban qualities and its structural function are combined in such an intricate way. The new infrastructures of communication which surround the cities over and again cannot compete with the border space in terms of urbanity. It is for this reason that the system that is organized aground the "border space" or "suburban space" presents itself as the most advanced with the parameters that qualify the urban forms, just before transcending the city and stepping into territorial urban forms in which other factors emerge.

The suburban space also exhibits an intense relation with the major scales of the territory. In some cases it has already had its origins in territorial itineraries that traversed the city, usually in relation to its foundation; in other case it has consolidated an intraurban territorial movement which in its extremities projects a potent influence towards the countryside or the villages outside it.

On this borderline different relations are imposed on one another, referring to minor and major scales: the shapes of the road, the neighborhood, the territory of the city, etc. These multiscale actions have to be represented by drawings, adequate information and history, images about the contribution of the space to the globalism of the city, wrapped up in a decisive manner in its spatial and temporal story, in relation both to what it ascertains and to where it goes wrong.

In the memory of 20th Century urbanism, as an example of urban planning that takes into consideration agricultural based borders as a starting point, is the Alvaro Siza project in Evora, Quinta da Malaguiera. This work recovers a marginal area, a side-product of the urban groups around it (Castanheira, 2002). On this occasion, the fragmentation of the program made it possible to incorporate natural space by means of small gestures of urbanization: for instance the installation of a small lake as a community space, the appearance of paths and bridges, trees, urban furniture, etc. The combination of a strong collective use and the topographical sensitivity are responsible for the fact that the project is incorporated in the peripheral space with its distinctive personality, and that it gives back centrality and cohesion to the intermediate space.



THE CASE OF GRANADA: OBJECTIVES AND CRITERIA

Historically the Genil River in its passage through the city of Granada is noticeable after its opening into the valley, where the “Puente Verde” was the last connection between the two banks. In its upper course, before entering into the city, the progressive settling of the Carretera de la Sierra and its joint urbanizing with the nucleus of Cenes de la Vega have converted the Genil Valley into an urban surrounding in which the agriculture of its valley begins to become an anecdote. Here, the river generates a territorial identity that connects the nucleus in its banks, from the Canales reservoir, passing through the town of Pinos Genil, Cenes de la Vega and Lancha de Cenes where it comes into contact with Granada.

However, at the entry of the river into the central Vega, to the west, we find a profound contrast between the urban structures and the agricultural support system. In this environment, the permanent idyllic vision of the immediate territory of the Vega contrasts with the heavy occupation in urban uses within it, which is not logical at all. Thus, in this close environment, we can find recreational, institutional, commercial, and administrative uses, that is to say, we can return to the city center that we have come out of. The confusion between “in” and “out” in this territory, measures the confusion of the planning that during the end of the 20th Century eliminated future urban extensions of the Camino de Ronda, created a potent roadway infrastructure that cauterized the natural relationship city/countryside, and at the same time, gave cart blanc to mistreat the Genil river way and pave it as if it were just another street in the urban passage.



Figure 2. Orthophotography of Granada in the area of study. The limits are marked by the presence of an important highway: Carretera de Circunvalación, which radically separates the urban space from the Vega. [1: 408]

This is why we decided to study this moment of contact city/countryside of the Genil River that is marked by the presence of the Circunvalación Highway, the A-44 highway (Bailén-Motril) as



it passes by the western edge of the city of Granada (Fig. 2). This potent infrastructure was constructed following the Urban Plan “PGOU” of 1985 and was finished in the 1990s, to provide a bypass for the national and regional traffic running North-South that previously passed through the city, but also was intended to limit the growth of the urban city and “preserve” the continuous agricultural space.

Within the framework of the educational and investigative work of the last years, we were able to define the urban and territorial elements that are understood as fundamental and are the base for the formula of criteria of a balanced development in this area of study. These are:

- 1) **The residential fabric** that is articulated around the Camino de Ronda road.
- 2) **The cultural and entertainment hub** situated in the right bank of the river (public and private installations: Science park, Museum of Andalusian Memory, CEAMA, Caja Granada Seat, etc.)
- 3) **The particular characteristics of the Vega in the Granada Municipality** (uses, typological characteristics, new implantations, street network, land division structure, values related to heritage and landscape, etc.)
- 4) **The “fluvial space”** (the geographic vision of the territory, the river as a formative element of the territorial identity, current opportunities and problems, etc.)
- 5) **The Granada Bypass “Circunvalación”** (Its current role and its relationship with the roadway structure and the future city – new infrastructures planned as a second bypass, etc. contacts, margins, urban actions, longitudinal and transversal dynamics, etc.)
- 6) **Connectivity with the city center** (Distance center-periphery, the functional relations with the consolidated city, multiple urban uses, value of the area as a spatial resource of the city, entertainment and non-lucrative activities, the intermediate condition between city and Vega towns, the visual capacity of the area respecting the city and its landscape, the new light rail, etc.)

The research studies the urban possibilities of this “natural corridor” and tries to demonstrate that in functional, spatial, and social terms, it has many more possibilities of intervention than the fact of being considered as a resulting product of non-rational processes of accumulation of borders, protections, etc. These new ‘riverscapes’ would lead to a programmatic and typological search in order to incorporate innovative facilities and new collective architectures.

METHODOLOGY: AGROFLUVIAL SPACE IN THE GENIL RIVERBED

First, through the consolidation of the neighborhood associated with the Camino de Ronda and later with the density produced by the roadway infrastructure around the “Circunvalacion” Bypass, that originated a classical polarized growth (Font, 2007), the western

border of the city of Granada has experienced a “solidification” relative to the naturalness in which the transition city-vega had been taking place.

If we understand the Genil River as a collective space that should function as a centrality, we should also understand its system of networks, spaces and uses to determine its character and give meaning to this system, connecting the river to it, defining an adequate scale in relation to its territorial character.

In the framework of the Final Project example that the series proposed in the “River Space”, the work that is presented here proposes a study of the successive networks, spaces and uses through recognition of “values” and “threats” when developing a new territorial proposal.

In as much as VALUES are concerned, the current planning documents (“Plan de Ordenación del Territorio de la Aglomeración Urbana de Granada” [POTAUG] and “Plan de Ordenación de la Vega de Granada “[POVG]) that gravitate around this space were studied, as well as the topography and networks of landscape value and quality. In this sense, the discontinuities and dysfunctions of the system become evident in the study.

In as much as the THREATS are concerned, the river has been suffering paving projects of that have caused an evident loss of naturalness: loss of watering areas, risks of flooding, etc. Also, the sword of Damocles that is the second “circunvalacion” bypass supposes an impact even before its construction. The planning of such treats demonstrates the current situation of indolence around the river, trapped in a city/countryside battle that has relegated it to a position of lesser importance when it should be at the center and key in the territorial planning of the city of Granada and its metropolitan area.

As a conclusion of the study of pros and cons, the work demonstrates a lack of centrality of the river in this intermediate area of urban and rural plots; also a lack of continuity of this space with the Central Vega, and a lack of connection with diverse territorial and landscape corridors that could become references for the open metropolitan space.

On the other hand, in spite of being contemplated as an area of high ecological value in the sub regional planning, constructions such as the violent and poorly conceived second “Circunvalacion” bypass that is projected exactly over the river path when crossing the first “Circunvalacion” bypass, are evident treats to the future of this singular space in geography of Granada.

The TERRITORIAL PROPOSAL is based on the following parameters and criteria for intervention.

- i. Pedestrian networks. Unification of landscape networks of the POTAUG and the POVG with existing historic roadways, water courses, bicycle paths and new connections with the center on the Genil axis.



- ii. Limiting of traffic circulation. Relegating traffic to secondary paths to liberate the Genil Axis and readjust the peripheral nodes. Elimination of the second “circunvalacion” bypass connector node with the first “circunvalación” bypass over the Genil River
- iii. New territorial crossings. Pedestrian networks and the Genil axis are favored to improve access to the center. New crossings are created for traffic circulation to put it on a secondary level and liberate the Genil River.

A) NEW ECONOMIES:

- **Commerce.** Spaces of short interexchange are favored where both manufactured and directly grown products from the vega can be commercialized are promoted.
- **Manufacturing industry.** To generate a system for the primary sector of the vega, a small secondary sector capable of manufacturing local (territorial) products are promoted.
- **Cultural.** The Genil River exhibits a strong cultural character. The cultural infrastructure like the “Palacio de Congresos”, “Parque de las Ciencias” and “Museum of Andalusian Memory” are added to the central proposal for the regeneration of the cultural landscape of the Vega.

B) PROPOSALS FOR DIVERSE SPACES:

- **Open spaces.** The existing open spaces will be connected and new areas in Lancha del Genil, Parque de las Ciencias and areas around the old Urende building will be created.
- **Extensive areas.** The proposal of the POVG for the extensive area of the Monachil River and the extensive area of the Central Vega are added to the proposal of the Agrofluvial space between rivers, in the entry of the Genil River in Granada.
- **Meeting points.** Next to the open spaces and extensive agricultural areas small crossings conceived as resting areas are added.

Thus, the agrofluvial space between rivers consists of a landscape and functional recuperation of an area of disuse, an area with potential that is defined by the Genil and Monachil rivers and the Tarramonta “acequia” which passes through it. It’s productive agricultural past is a strength that should suppose a change in the concept of the limit between the city of Granada and the Central Vega.

CONCLUSIONS

“Urban planning needs, to rise above the barrio between urban society and natural processes, an ecological viewpoint that demonstrates the possibilities of interaction

between the artificial urban and the natural...the challenge is still in incorporating nature, formal and functionally into urban metabolism.” De las Rivas, Juan L. (2013)

The ecological vision permits recognition of different forms of relation between the urban construct and, in this sense, the peripheral system assumes a great responsibility as a nexus between them. In the study done by Joan Morano (2010) on the River Llobregat, in the path between Matorell and El Papiol municipalities, places are identified in terms of their qualities that are conferred upon them and their relative position to the highway and the river: Critical systems like, ditch, entry, limit, course, mosaic, and window.

On the other hand, from a culturalist viewpoint, the fluvial valleys constitute a patrimonial and landscape unit. Around them specific activities of an agricultural base are developed that over centuries have left cultural footprints in the form of buildings, parcels, crossings and vegetation all woven together by the waterways.

Following these types of contributions (De las Rivas, 1998; Barba, 1982), and understanding the waterways as spaces in which the support has a greater presence than in other positions of the city, a segregated form of elements is identified and the realities are artificial, understanding these as constructed, as opposed to the natural or open spaces associated with river banks.

The high portions of the watershed, the agricultural parcels and the riverbank parks constitute a base of the natural network of the limit, such that the current actions should contemplate the revalorization of the support of the areas in which its traits live on, as well as the means of transformation of its banks into urban areas where it is necessary to reinvent the significance of the fluvial landscape through the urban.

As a result, it is possible to balance two fundamental tensions of the future project: responsibility for the history and inherited geography, and the sense for the occasion and the invention of a landscape deeply related, a way to create an interesting place to allow the temporary coexistence and the development of a more integrated territory.

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