



***Urban Voids.***  
***Spaces of great expectation***

Francisco Berruete.



## ***What are urban voids?***

The urban voids have undergone multiple conceptual considerations. Especially suggestive is the acceptance de Sola Morales. "They are the edges lacking effective incorporation, the inner islands empty of activity, and the forgotten debris that remain out of the urban dynamics" SOLA-MORALES (2002: p.187).

Might understood that urban voids are areas that are neither city nor nature, also like areas that for whatever reason have been waiting for to be developed, or maybe not. Urban voids could be temporary areas tied to the periphery of the city or left over areas, the consequences of natural boundaries (for example rivers, marshes, mountains, woods, etc..) and also; artificial boundaries such as infrastructures (bridges, motorways, malls, industrial areas).

First of all we will explore the different reasons for their existence.

In the past each time the city expanded, the urban voids on the outside were absorbed by the city itself while other urban voids would appear on the new periphery, as if jumping over to the new location.

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Needless to say the conditions of the traditional city have changed drastically. The idea of the compact city cannot serve as a model for the 21st century, due to two factors, first to the way we think of about living and secondly, to profound socio-cultural changes.

Consequently, the characteristics of urban voids have also changed encouraged by the zoning of uses, the increasing scale of the new urban demands and the variation of the development of the structure of the cities. Traditionally, cities have grown conditioned by several factors such as physical conditions (topography, water courses, quality of lands, vegetation), but also economical conditions (land prices) and finally, radial axes linked to communication. This later growth does not necessarily



generate a compact city. Since the eighties, the widespread access to private vehicles, the high-speed roads complexity, the shopping centres decentralization and the land developments disconnected from the city have caused an "explosion of the city".

According to Sola-Morales, speaking about the terrain vague: "They are places apparently forgotten where seems to dominate the past over the present memory, they are obsolete places in which only certain residual values seem to retain in spite of their complete detachment from the city activity".

From an economic point of view we can say that industrial areas, train stations, harbors, unsafe residential areas, contaminated places, have become in no city areas.

Probably these new urban voids are not to be absorbed by the city, due to two reasons, firstly its great dimension and other the new urban dynamics.

## ***How to recognize an urban void?***

New reasons, new urban voids.

The city has changed in its way of growing. From a biological point of view, it seems that the changes of the city in the last decades are not related to the evolution in its Darwin mutations, nor to a quantity jump on a linear period.

These changes would be related to external conditions that modify the growing process of the city.



The rules have changed. We don't know any longer where the city is going to expand. There are many uncontrollable conditions that affect the expansion of the city.

The compact city.

The concept of density is based on quantity, figure data and secondly on a compact shape.

Since the beginning of the 20th century new shapes have emerged in the European cities. These shapes have in turn produced new chances in ways of expansion as well as in the elements of the city

What do we notice when we analyze a city? We can observe construction and deconstruction processes which we recognize as contemporary phenomena.

Discontinuity and autonomy are parameters that appear and repeat themselves habitually in the new urban developments.

These construction and deconstruction processes have happened in many countries simultaneously because they follow a global model, even though they take different regional characteristics adapting to the local conditions.

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Social and economical changes have occurred influencing local cultures. Society has gone from a scale economy, a Ford concept and Keynesian theories to the fragmentation of processes and automation. The production economy has become a consumption economy leading us to attend new demands which in turn require new spaces.

To illustrate this research, we have chosen the city of Saragossa between 1975 and 2010, as a prototype.

Why Saragossa, Spain?

First of all, we would observe a city, analyze its urban phenomena and study its evolution.

The reading process of the territory allows us to discover how the city has grown.



Consequently, Saragossa is a good example for analyzing the evolution of urban structures because it introduces three distinct conditions, which are the following:

- 1.- Important expansion in the last decades.
- 2.- Between half and one million inhabitants.
- 3.- South European region.

Furthermore, Saragossa appears to be the prototype to observe such changes in a compact city. The study of urban voids is significant and revealing way of measuring the growth structure of the city.

Analysis of the contemporary city:

- 1.- Can we solve the continuity of the city today with the traditional paradigms?
- 2.- Would a possible model of new "compact cities" exist?
- 3.- Would a typological classification of the urban voids exist?
- 4.- Which urban phenomena will be the ones to define the next compact process?
- 5.- Would an intervention within the urban void help us restructure the city?

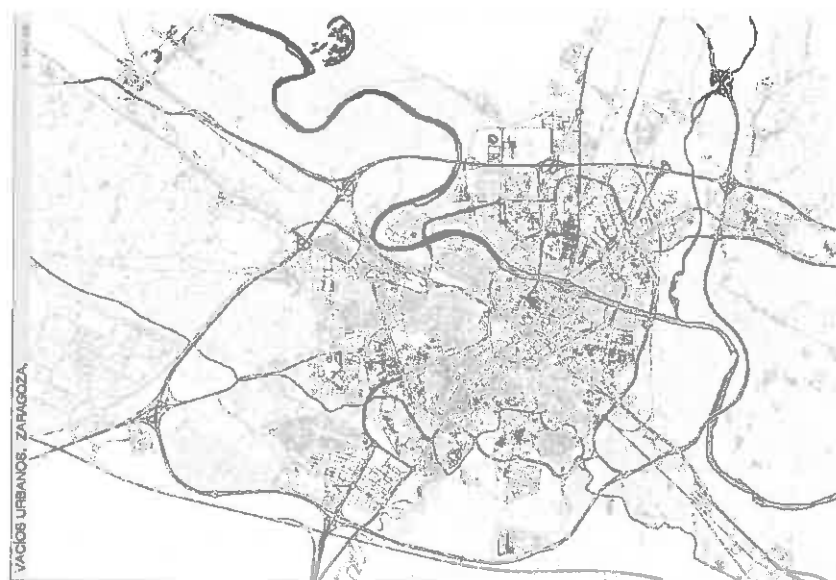
Work hypothesis:

The current way of the city development makes the known model a fact to review. The three possible causes that exist are:

- 1.- Economical background of the city development.
- 2.- Influences of two different urban agents which are:
  - a. Public Administrations.
  - b. Free lance professionals
- 3.- Socio cultural changes.

The research objective is to study the urban void as an area waiting to be urbanized. According to the following procedure:

- 1.- Exploration.
- 2.-Area proposal.
- 3.-Findings.



## ***The different types and their classification.***

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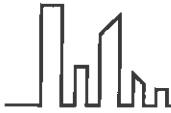
The scale is handled generally corresponds to large areas of the periphery of cities, particularly in Zaragoza are spaces between the third and fourth urban belt.

Each urban void is analyzed as a place with its own history, the reasons for its occurrence, diagnosis and the potential for future use. In the accompanying planes we observe the study areas located in the city of Zaragoza and its different types, within each area.

Different types and classifications:

- 1.- Interiors: Within this category are recognized urban voids situated in already built cities, free areas and plots. These can be easily recognized in high density city housing areas.

Only urban voids offering opportunities of possible transformation of the environment will be selected.



2.- Interstitial: Its shape is generally linear or elongated. It is classified into two types:

- Close to natural elements such as rivers, or urban protected areas.
- Close to infrastructures such as motorways or rail ways.

In the urban plan they should be called "specific or particular urban areas" or "general urban systems" respectively. The surface is variable and the ways of developing these areas limited.

3.- "Caught between" type: This type corresponds to the areas that appear in between the compact city and the new urban developments.

This "caught in between" type occurred during the seventies and eighties.

Its surface can have important dimensions.

The reason for its existence may come from developments without connections that were not given opportunities by the urban plan.

These caught in between areas have difficulties in finding their own purpose when in fact they could offer great opportunities to sew the city together.

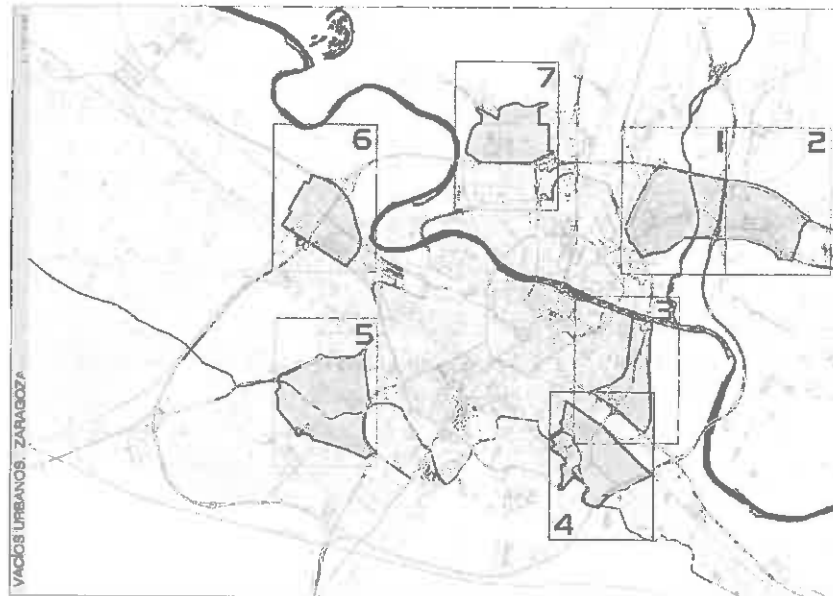
4.- Limits: We find in this category city areas where the growth of the periphery has encountered its limit according to two different types:

- Natural, such as rivers, mountains, forests...
- Man made, such as infrastructures.

The city response could vary, but its solutions help to today's urban consolidations.

5.- "Naturals": They are located around metropolitan areas.

Their importance resides in the fact that not only does their cover large superficies but also, they emerge at strategic points in the city development processes.



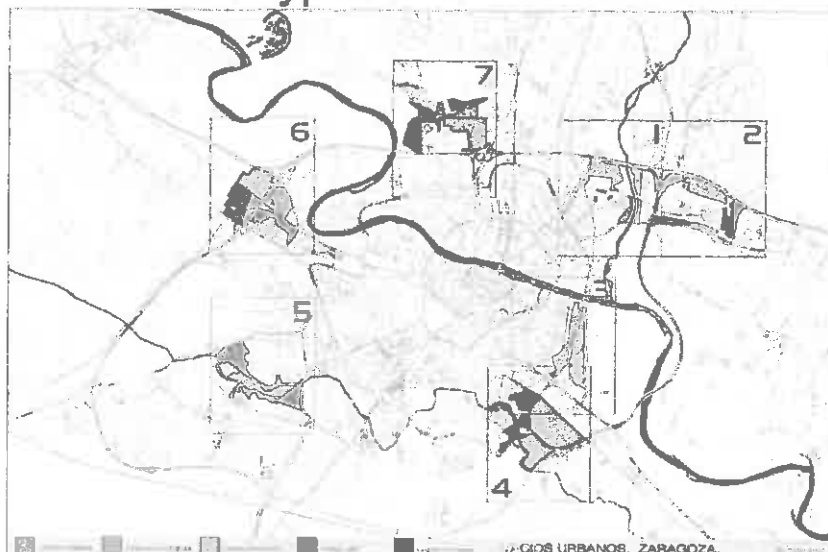
There are important urban facts that occur in these areas.

- 1.- Relation between nature-city.
- 2.- Influence of nature in the evolution of the structure of the city.
- 3.- Centre polarizing new developments.
- 4.- Segmentation produced by infrastructures and communication ways.

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These contemporary areas are produced by the "zoning" of large urban areas.

## The different types and their classification





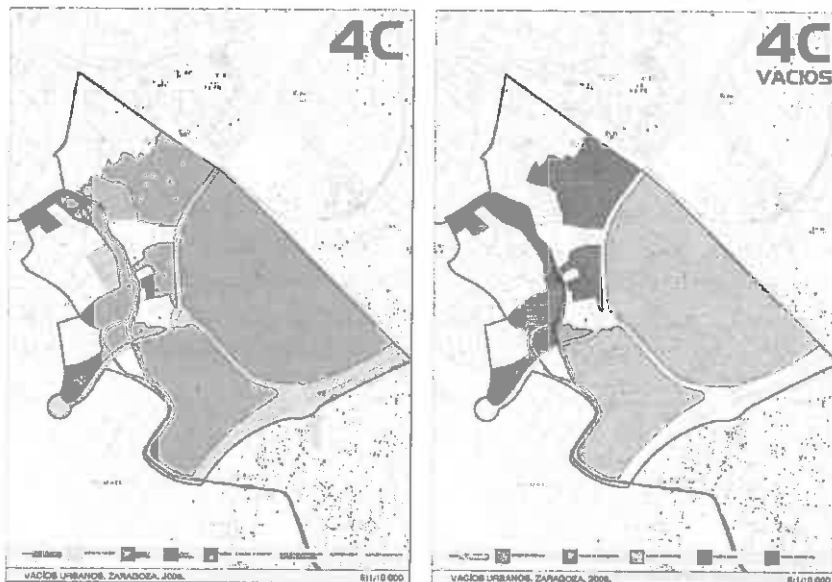
## ***Past, present and future.***

Due to the economical and social evolution, new urban developments have emerged to meet the needs of the growing quality of life, against the traditional compact city.

There are many new areas of the city that are reorganizing themselves in a non continuous way because of emerging habits and social demands.

Comparing the past traditional compact city with today's contemporary city, as we said earlier, we observe that changes happen not only on a formal level but also, on social demands and urban habits. Since the CIAM a new concept appears: the segmentation of the urban areas with different uses.

This separation with its lack of continuity has generated voids of hitherto unknown dimension, exceeding even the increase caused by the urban own initiatives. The hope to "fill" these voids now seems improbable even judged undesirable. Today we should rather think of them as spaces with their own history, places of no city, with their memory and thus giving us a new shape to the city. The way the city is developing is becoming less tied to physical factors. "New towns" are being born that meet their own uses and needs, autonomous from the core city, based on concepts such as connectivity, synergies or nonphysical realities.





## ***Conclusions.***

The urban void could be real areas of intervention, not only on a morphological level, but also on a social-spatial organization.

In the current economic situation, proposals on these spaces, treated as an urban rehabilitation, can be a good opportunity for regeneration and restructuring of large areas of the city.

Urban voids can be seen as absences, but also as promises, encounters and spaces of great expectations.



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