

GSAPP - ADVANCED STUDIO - SPRING 2019  
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# INFRASTRUCTURAL GEOGRAPHY: WATER, LEISURE AND ENERGY POLICIES

## SYLLABUS

**INFRASTRUCTURAL GEOGRAPHY: WATER, LEISURE AND ENERGY POLICIES** IS THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT "*RURAL CITY: POST-OCCUPATION OF THE DEPLETED TERRITORIES*" THAT SETS OUT TO EXPLORE THE TECHNIQUES – MODELS AND METHODS- WITH WHICH RE-VIEW, RE-THINK AND RE-DESIGN THE OCCUPATION OF THE ABANDONED BETWEEN-CITY GEOGRAPHIES.....ASSUMING THAT THE EXODUS OF THE RURAL TO THE CITIES IS AN ACCOMPLISHED FACT, THE PROGRAM POINTS OUT THAT ITS REVERSIBILITY LIES IN THE TERRITORIAL POLICIES THAT GAVE RISE TO THIS ABANDONMENT, FOCUSED IN THE LAST CENTURY OBSESSION FOR ENERGY, LEISURE AND WATER INFRASTRUCTURES AS THE DESIRABLE RESOURCES OF PROSPERITY FOR SMALL RURAL TOWNS.....IN THIS WAY WE WANT TO AVOID ANY PICTURESQUE-MYTHOLOGICAL READING THAT LEADS US TO A FAKE RE-OCCUPATION PROMOTED BY FASCINATION AND NOSTALGIA BY "THE AUTHENTIC" WHICH HAS BEEN LEFT BEHIND.....FROM THIS POINT OF VIEW, THE USUAL READING OF THE RURAL AS A COUNTERPOINT TO THE URBAN IMPLIES A PATERNALISTIC ATTITUDE WITH UNPREDICTABLE CONSEQUENCES IF WE UNDERSTAND THAT MORE THAN 90% OF THE PLANET'S SURFACE IS LOSING POPULATION DRAMATICALLY IN FAVOUR OF THE BIG URBAN CONGLOMERATES.....STERILIZATION OF THE LAND AS A CONSEQUENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, CENTRALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SERVICES IN CITIES, AND THE LACK OF FUTURE FOR NEW GENERATIONS BUILD THE DARK SIDE OF THIS PROCESS OF DEPLETION.....STILL TODAY, AT BEST, SMALL VILLAGES DREAM TO BE TRANSFORMED INTO WEEK-END SERVICE CENTRES FOR SPORADIC VISITING URBANITES ELUDING ANY OTHER MORE CONTEMPORARY FORM OF PROGRESS.....THIS SITUATION OF DEPENDENCE CALLS FOR A NEW SENSITIVITY THAT IMPLEMENTS OTHER MODELS OF PROSPERITY IN ORDER TO REDEFINE WHAT WE UNDERSTAND BY QUALITY OF LIFE.....ARCHITECTURE HAS MUCH TO SAY IN THIS DESIRABLE PROCESS OF RE-OCCUPATION OF THE RURAL BY ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LOAD-BEARING CAPACITY OF ENCLAVES AND PERTINENT CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES, BY REVIEWING EXISTING AND NEW TYPOLOGIES, INCORPORATING SOCIAL, POLITICAL, INFRASTRUCTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EQUATIONS.....OUR STATEMENT IS THAT THE EMPTINESS OF THE RURAL IS THE NEW HOLISTIC LABORATORY FOR ARCHITECTURE TO EXPLORE THE FUTURE SINCE ALL THE INGREDIENTS OF THE PRESENT CAN BE RE-DESCRIBED, RE-INVENTED AND IMPLEMENTED WITHOUT THE HEAVY IMMOBILISM OF THE BIG CITY.....

SUBJECT

Those who predict the extent of foreseeable growth of cities' population seem to assume that the mass migration of people from the country to urban conglomerates is a phenomenon that makes all the sense endorsed by the offer of quality of life, employment opportunities, education and an illusory refuge against natural forces. In the meantime, large-scale corporative-agriculture, tourist exploitation, extensive solar and wind farms, dams and big industrial plants transform the rural in increasingly depopulated stretches of land that act as the city's rear-guard, ecological footprint or, larder, a no-man's land crossed by infrastructures. To make things worse, in the last two decades, life in the rural is being violently affected by the climate change; drought and floods are good reasons to flee. Apparently, nobody today ponders the issue of how to make life far from the city a vital experience that draws equally from both rural and urban cultures but there are some signals that attract our attention that can reveal a great opportunity for architecture to come back to the front line of the design of the future and rethink our methods of working.

The interest for the anthropological content of the between-city territories and its dual condition of natural landscape and artificial exploitation, together with the need of learning how to operate with completely new environmental conditions, is nowadays a fundamental topic shared by many disciplines. Architecture is called to this conversation due to the need to invent new ways of occupying the countryside as part of a multidisciplinary task. Several XX Century manifestos –ranging from the metabolist mega-structures of the sixties to the cities planned in the nineties from scratch in China- didn't get our validation because they systematically responded to the architects-fantasy of the major-infrastructure-unitary, ex-novo project. XXI Century brought a new sensitivity to approach situations of high complexity with many agents involved that need to be produced on the basis of strategies and operative systems in which hybridisation, sustainability and uncertainty replace mono-functionalism, epic dreams and specificity of the heroic times.

We see ourselves as architects far from the fascination that reads the rural context as the sentimental reservoir of certain forms of simplicity and authenticity. Under the guise of new economic activities, based fundamentally on energy infrastructures, tourism and the phenomenon of the second home, incentives of prosperity for small countryside villages are given a relationship of dependence on the big city, limiting the slanted development of these nuclei towards the services-for-visitors sector. Thus, while small towns strive to attain competitiveness in their "rural" picturesque, hotel offer, local festivities and natural or culinary resources, they cannot offer their permanent residents even the most rudimentary social, cultural, educational or sanitary facilities, given their small scale and limited clientele.

In our view, the rural structure based on very small villages in close proximity to each other allows for a broader, more imaginative reading that would pursue autonomy rather than dependence on the metropolis, more future values for the local young people, greater diversity among the resident population and less polarity between residents and visitors.

## **WORK AREA AND PROCEDURE**

Around the city of Madrid, beyond the influence of the capital's industrial belt, a large area colloquially known as "The empty Spain" spreads throughout the hinterland of the country -75 % of its total surface-. This abandoned geography built up of small villages, agricultural fields

and infrastructural energy networks is an accurate radiography of the territorial policies of the four decades of dictatorship -focussed in the construction of big dams and power plants- and four decades of democracy later -focussed in nuclear energy, freeways and highspeed trains-.

Sixty miles away from the centre of Madrid -metropolitan area of 6,8M inhabitants- the vast territory around the big water reservoirs of Entrepeñas y Buendía accumulates obsolete sailing clubs, decadent second house developments, inefficient power plants, abandoned nuclear complexes, unoccupied villages and ruins of historical convents, hospitals, leper colonies, and XIX century spas. Groups of three students will work in the re-occupation of the area collecting and mapping data and designing a strategic joint plan through which to optimize resources and offer progress opportunities for local population and immigrants/ outsiders. For the midterm, a geographical re-description of the site, a social-economic programme (production and consumption), a form of organization, an image and a time projection (obsolescence and flexibility) and the first architectural schemes of the architectural developments of the plan should be outlined by each group. After the spring break, each group -all together or split- will culminate their work with the design of the main buildings under the guidelines of the plan.

## **THE ROLE OF ARCHITECTURE**

What's the role of architecture in an environment that needs to invest a lot of energy to get a significant transformation? Where are the limits of scale, amount of architecture and technification of the territory? What are the pertinent typologies, construction systems and preservation protocols? We have already seen enough isolated high-impact constructions killing the landscape with absolutely no character and clear apathy, and many villages transformed into small theme parks or sterilised complexes overshadowed. Our answer to this background imagines a new generation of low-impact clean industry nurseries, research centres, pedagogical institutions, residential complexes that bring new ways of living to re-equip this geography in an endeavour to redefine its character. Such projects will have to take into account the fragility of nature or agricultural landscapes; the impact of global warming to guide the construction of a second-chance nature; the new ingredients of urban culture difficult to implement in big cities that can find here the best laboratory to test them, from gender policies to the most advanced forms of socialization; from the positive incorporation of the new technologies to the concerns about labor conditions; from the environmental concerns to the construction of artificial landscapes.

In order to address these contradictions, we set out to explore the power of design as an instrument with which to read, interpret and describe existing conditions and plan strategies by which to extend the radio of everyday action of the humans and no humans being part of the new ecologies. Furthermore, we want to look at what exists -nature and built complexes- as valuable support from which to develop programmes of recycling in the literal sense of the word. Concepts associated with prepositions (before, below, with, between, without, on...) will develop into architectural operations of occupation, superimposition, infiltration, delimitation and so on. We want to design and build -that's the essence of our work as architects- a new "rural urban culture" that would take advantage of dualities such as isolation-connection, natural-artificial, hybridisation-specificity, individual-collective, sophisticated-elementary technologies, density-porosity... to set new forms of living, working, leisure and socialisation.

The projects to be produced in the studio will be enriched by a strong critical position and a realistic constructability. Intellectual and technical content of the work will be the two sides of the same coin. Engagement with the present topics and contradictions, elaboration of the narratives, choice and/or design of instruments and methods of representation -graphic materials, models, audio-visual resources- are design operations in themselves. In this context, especial emphasis will be laid on the communicative capacity of the portfolios as documents through which to convey the suitability of the project to third parties.

### STUDIO TRIP

The Studio-trip will be to Madrid and its hinterland. It will include visits to historical, and contemporary architecture masterpieces, visits to emerging practices, and meetings with regional activists and politicians.

