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# MADRID, THE SOUTHEAST DEVELOPMENTS

## THE SUN ALSO RISES

*What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief  
And the dry stone no sound of water.*

T.S. Eliot .*The Waste Land* 1922

### 1. SUMMARY OF INTENTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The workshop aims to look at the landscape of the vacant and deserted territories on the city limits and think through what the nature of the actual situation is and venture into what the next steps forward could be.

Within the socio economic context and with the framework of the revision of the Madrid Master Plan, the south-eastern fringe of the city presents a huge question mark. It is a place where planning is paralysed and poses a number of questions. What are the real problems that need to be solved once the speculative forces have faded away? What would be the role of the planner and the designer in such a territory? Should anything be done at all?

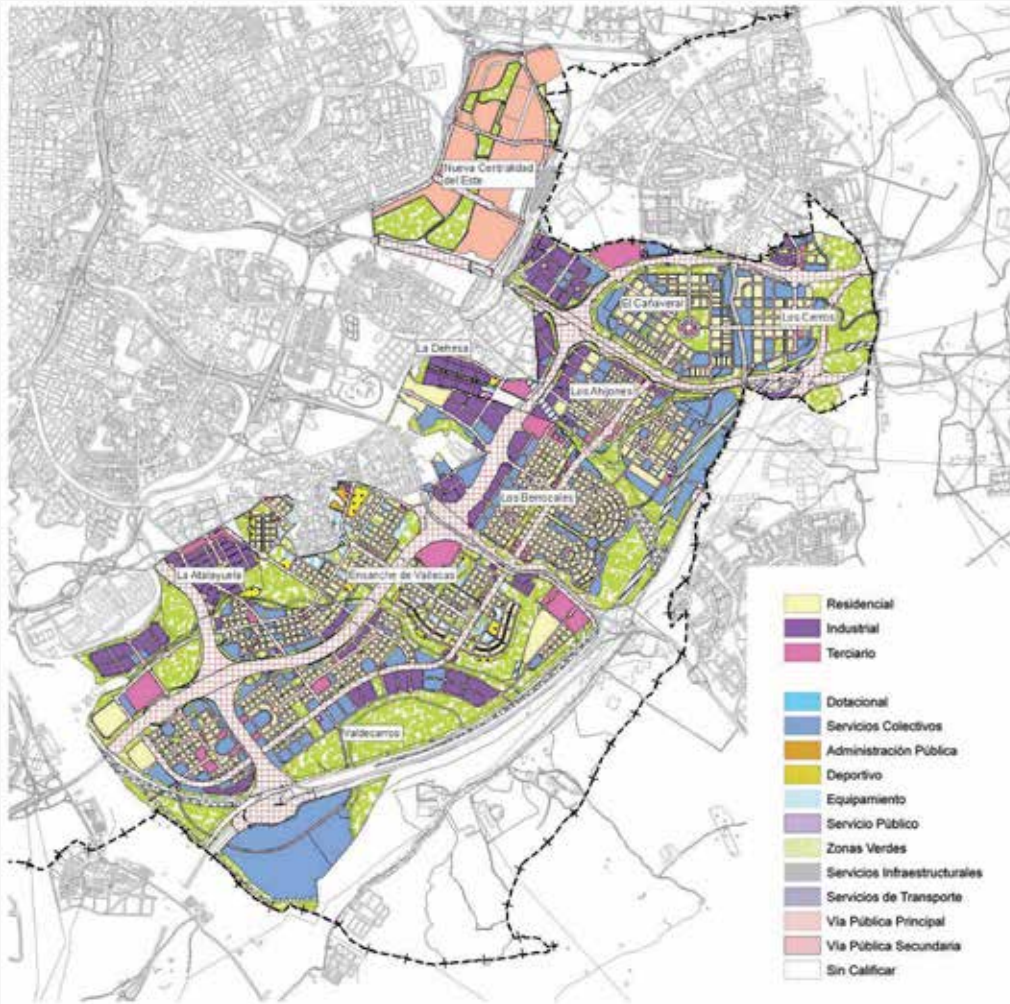
Objectives: Research and development of possible strategies for a large area located in the city limits. Devising ways to approach this territory from different viewpoints. The objective is not so much to come up with a design but to think through possible strategies after grasping the complexity of the problems.

#### Phases:

1. Approach to the area: Description of planning context. Approach through plans and pictures. On site visit, exploration.
1. Positioning: One specific aspect of the territory should be chosen to be observed, analysed, mapped out or even invented. They can be either environmental or social or functional aspects. Detecting problems to be solved or possibilities that open up. Exploration of continuities and discontinuities.
1. Toolkit: Production of strategies, processes, tactical approaches to the city.

### 2. WORKING AREA

The Southeast Development Strategy is a structuring operation in the Southeast metropolitan



### 1. Layout of the Southeast Developments

Source: Ayuntamiento de Madrid

rim. It spans over 5,000 hectares within the city limits and planning for the area includes around 143,000 dwellings. The operation includes six residential projects which will occupy the existing vacant land to the limits of the adjacent municipalities.

The new developments is also adjacent to the largest informal settlement in Madrid, the Cañada Real Galiana. Based on a stretch of a livestock path, it is a linear city with a total

length of about 14 km and a population of about 18,000 inhabitants. The settlement began in the 1960s and combines slum areas with consolidated irregular residential areas.

The residential development is taking place supported by various large infrastructures: the motorways and regional highways M-45, M-50, R-3 and the high speed train AVE. They have severely fragmented the territory. The different sectors, isolated from one another by the infrastructures, are lacking continuity and presenting problems for any transport alternative to private vehicles.

### Current state

Due to the economic crisis and a legal problem related to planning land classification, only the Ensanche de Vallecas has been built so far. Original expectations in terms of its viability and planning parameters are currently under question. These sectors were envisaged to be developed in one single development phase each, implying a large process of planning and development. This process froze up with the real estate bubble burst. An agreement was signed in 2011 by the City Council to implement and speed up the planning process. In 2012 a sentence by the High Court on demand of the ecologists considered the development of 22 new sectors in Madrid “illegal”, but many of them were already fully developed or under construction. The sentence included the developments of Southeast Strategy. By now, the sectors of the Southeast area have reached different stages of urbanisation, from earth movements to road construction. However, the works seem to be paralysed in most of the area at present.

### 2. Development works in accesses to Cañaveral

Picture: Juan Arana



### 3. APPROACH

#### Crash-landing on the Periphery

With a certain degree of disbelief the team strolls up the bare hill of Cerro Almodovar near Vallecas on a warm September evening. The hill sits on the limits of the built city. From the top there is a compelling view of the scale of the area. On the west side the skyline of the south of Madrid is on the foreground and the towers of Castellana on the background. In the opposite direction the view opens onto the city border areas which comprise a waste of industrial sites, road infrastructures, vacant arid land and recent urban developments. The Ensanche de Vallecas stretches to the east in the middle of empty land designated for Madrid's southeast development.

urbanisation process has stopped at an initial level the vegetation layer is still immature or has been removed, the water courses have changed and strange looking geometrical hills form a surreal archaeological landscape. In the untouched areas the land is not cultivated; some debris accumulates here and there. The territory is crossed by traffic infrastructures, alienated from its surroundings. It does neither belong to the city nor to the natural environment

#### Key aspects

On a first contact with the place, the following reflections come up in the team:

- **Connection of the Southeast with the city:** physically, psychological and symbolically.
- **Closer look at the territory:** to find corridors of interest; to find missing links.



#### Waste Land for sale

When driving through the moon-like landscape of the southeast a billboard welcomes us enthusiastically to Los Berrocales: “Improve your quality of life! Los Berrocales”. The expectations of development for the area pervade the landscape. They are present in the paralysed earth movements and the scale of the infrastructures. In the areas where the

- **Resources:** soil, available land, connectivity, infrastructures.
- **Economic viability:** who owns the land? What is the real situation?
- **Conflict:** existing settlers in La Cañada Real, pressure from owners waiting for their house to be built.
- **Identity:** The aim is to look for the identity of the territory. What is it now? What could

3. Panorama

Picture: Glenn Kustermans

it be in the future?

- **Opportunities:** to become a productive territory; to use production, energy and waste; to become a pole of attraction; to restore the landscape.

#### 4. SOCIOECONOMIC VIABILITY

##### Stakeholders

Who owns the land?

- Developers. They are organised in the form of *juntas de compensación*, a collective of individual land-owners.
- Financial institutions. Much of the real estate properties belong now to banks and they are currently changing value dramatically.
- Residents. People who live in Cañada Real and Vallecas.
- Existing natural ecosystems.

##### 4. Stakeholders



##### Is there any need for a new housing in Madrid?

The current projects plan 150,000 new dwellings in the area. However, the population of Madrid is not growing at the moment. It is actually decreasing due to foreign population leaving Madrid since the start of the crisis.

There is a demand of housing from young people. 70% of people between 20 and 29 and

18% of people between 30 and 34 live with their parents. The unemployment rate among young people in Spain is close to 50%. The problem does not seem to be the lack of housing offer.

##### Office and retail. An unreal perspective

There is also a huge gap between the wishful projections in terms of office supply creation and the reality of the market. The objective in the existing project is to build one million sqm of office and retail in Valdecarros alone. This projection made by the developers is far from possible in a market that has considerably contracted in the last year and is highly concentrated in the centre of the city (CBD mostly) and in the northeast of the metropolitan region adjacent to Barajas airport.

The same could be said about the commercial perspectives of the area. Except for some new shopping malls, as the recently opened Ikea, there are clearly no opportunities for the development of the area, at least from a short term perspective. Moreover, such out of town shopping centres seem to be contrary to the objective of revitalising the inner city.

To put it simply, the project has been imagined for a time which does not exist anymore and probably will not reoccur within the next decades, even if the country recovers from the current crisis.

##### A new economic context for Madrid and its southeast region

The south and east of Madrid have some very specific negative features that have worsened with the crisis: poor population, high immigrant rate, high unemployment.

The housing market is now going back to reality with a dramatic decrease in value since the beginning of the year 2013. The average decrease in value is estimated at 20% in

general. This tendency is particularly true for the southeast.

### Some basic conditions to find a way out of the crisis

There will be some losses for the developers (Junta de Compensación) and there might be also some “blind runs forward”. This is the case of Addleson’s Eurovegas project for example.

### Renewed planning at the regional level:

The last Master Plan was characterised by a *laissez faire* approach that made sense at the time. The new project tries to strengthen the attractiveness of Madrid as a “creative city”. The southeast area could be part of the solution, especially regarding the necessary effort to rebalance the development of the city between north and south. What appears now as a burden for the city could become an opportunity to develop a new centrality on the southern border of the river and seize the opportunity offered by this available piece of land.

### A necessity to reform the legal framework:

The system of *juntas de compensación* is a very efficient tool to build rapidly with a low transaction price. The new period, transformed by the scarcity of resources and the slack of the housing market, should force the stakeholders to reconsider the organisation of the development process through the *junta de compensación* by:

- including mandatory consultation with the public authorities at every step of the process
- giving an incentive to the developers who contribute through their action to improve the entire region.

### Some questions and issues

#### that should be addressed:

- Is the city capable of getting control of the land in the medium term? No!

#### What are the other options?

- When public interventions occur to bail out some investors, they should ensure that they obtain some planning obligations in return (as is already the case)
- To impose a stricter municipal Master Plan to ensure that future developments are participating in the overall renewal of the area.
- To reform the “planning by consensus” rule (or just get rid of it) so that general interest is taken into account by the private developers

All of this is much easier to say than to do when the city is basically going bankrupt!

## 5. TOOLKIT

### A strategic position:

The southeast quadrant of Madrid is the last remaining large void in the municipality. It is located at the intersection of two significant axes:

**Natural corridor:** The area is located to the east of the important blue and green corridor composed by the Manzanares Park and on the city limits in the south by a regional park.

**Productive corridor:** A number of industrial activities are located at the limits of the existing city forming an east-west axis to the north of the area.



### What does Madrid need that could be offered in the area?

- Affordable housing
- New creative/productive activities
- A contribution to a new identity for the city
- Some contribution to a green effort and ease of movement

### Major issues to be taken into account in the area:

- Reconnect the existing zone with the rest of the city
- Prevent the risk of becoming a wasteland
- Consider the residents in the area, including informal settlements
- Overcome the huge separation created by the infrastructures.

## 6. SCENARIOS

The proposals are not meant to be isolated projects or final solutions. They are scenarios for a territory in transition. They can overlap in time or space.

### Recycling waste system

The closeness of the working area to waste management and water management facilities would be an opportunity to implement strategies of energy production from waste management. For this scenario different flows are considered: organic waste from the main food wholesale market of Mercamadrid, the existing railway structure, the traffic infrastructures, the slow flow of Cañada Real and the proposed new recycling and energy flows.

### Agriculture

This was once a rural area with different types of food production. This second scenario proposes to take advantage of the closeness to Mercamadrid, the main wholesale food market of Madrid and recover the ground to make it

productive. It would include leisure vegetable plots and job creation. The distribution of organic products would take place also at local fairs. The residents would benefit from educational activities, environmental awareness and community enhancement.





## Festivals

One of the strategies to revitalise the dead and forgotten land after speculation would be to use it for festivals. It is probably the financially least demanding activity to bring the area alive with activities. The idea is that creative individuals or groups who see potential in this land and want to bring in their activities, would respond to an open call of projects. There are international examples, such as the Burning Man festival in a desert in Nevada, United States, or the World is not a Fair by Raumlabor on Tempelhofer, Berlin. Both are located on (previously) unused land, and have a temporary, DIY, bottom-up approach. We think that this strategy would fit very well in the first stage of revitalisation of the area. It would bring a positive buzz connected to the place and would slowly engrave it in the minds of the Madrid people. In a summer no man's land will suddenly become everyman's land. Emptiness would be transformed into activities, experiences and interactions.



## 7. FINAL REFLEXION

The approved projects for the southeast strategy for Madrid could easily be improved. The design could be changed into sensible and more sustainable neighbourhoods and the socio-economic aspects could be made more rational and reasonable.

But interestingly, the results of this particular workshop do not take that direction. They focus on a time of change, on the stage in between or after something has happened. They use the potential of the vacant land as an unfinished urban space.

All of these scenarios maintain a sense of transition; they leave the future of the area open.





They have that elusive quality of the unused spaces, allowing room to think freely of the future. All of them evoke a city that is actively shaped by its inhabitants. There is a promise of space for production, for micromanagement, for gathering and building something and starting a community around an event or family farming. It is in this sense that they offer a glimpse of what planning for the post-speculative city could be.