

The colorful fields could vitalize our towns

From two-fields model to fourteen-fields model

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Introduction

The terms “brown fields” and “green fields” appeared in Western Europe about 15-20 years ago, when planners were looking for opportunities to manage vital urban areas in more efficient ways. The need to vitalize our towns and to satisfy new urban needs, demands etc will never stop. New needs imply new spaces and new management tools. The present paper aims to show that urban configurations offer a lot of obvious or hidden opportunities which planners, architects, decision makers etc have to be aware of, in order to contribute effectively to the regeneration and vitalization of our cities.

Brown fields and green fields

The brown fields concern abandoned old industrial areas and premises (Fig.1) and the green fields (Fig.2) concern mainly agricultural fields which were used as cultivation areas which could, (under certain preconditions concerning infrastructure, type of development etc) accommodate vital urban uses [1] [2] [3]. The general public is more familiar with the term “brown field” in a sense that it comes very often across articles describing the reuse of old abandon industrial premises for the rehabilitation of cultural activities (e.g. the old Gas-village in Athens).



Figure1. Brown field in San Francisco, USA



Figure 2. Green fields along Han River, China

Square one

Speaking about land management one has to turn back to square one and set basic questions that may facilitate the analysis of our topic.

Questions like the following :

1. does land management concern only the existing land?
2. which is the characteristic that differentiate a place from a space?
3. which are the development limits (Fig.3) of private land?
4. what is the point of naming, specifying or categorizing new sort of fields?

The answers to these questions may lead to answers like: "no", "life", "it depends", "new management potential", respectively. The present paper aims to explain why.

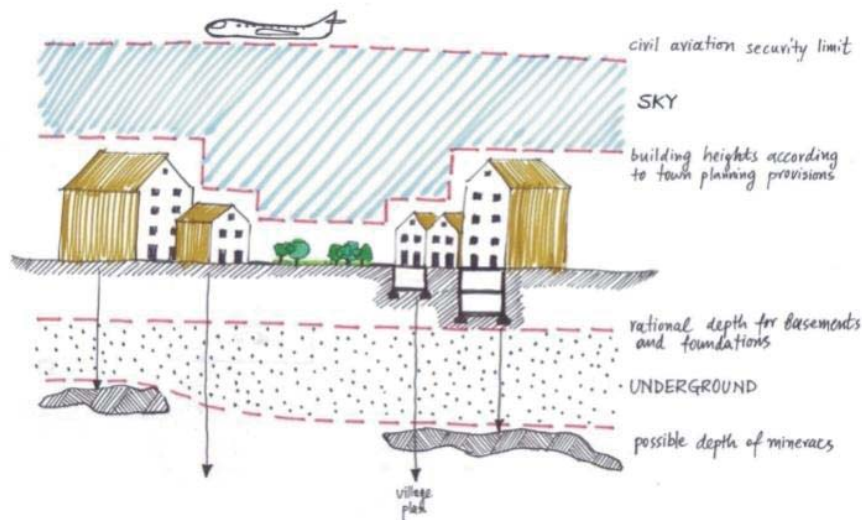


Figure 3. Topology of underground fields and sky fields that surrounds the development limits of private land

Searching for new fields

Looking for other vital urban spaces it was quite reasonable to search for additional opportunities offered within the urban limits [4].

From my point of view any town offers, at least another twelve opportunity places or spaces, which should be treated and managed in various ways. These are: the real green fields (that is green public spaces, quite different from traditional "green fields", which can be better described as "vacant" fields, (Fig.4), grey fields, government, community, sea, orange, underground, sky, bank, donor, energy and time fields. Let us see some of the new fields.



Figure 4. Vacant fields in Nicosia, 3-5 km from the central area

Grey fields

The grey fields concern the public urban spaces (besides the "real green fields") which includes all the urban road network and circulation areas, like pathways, pedestrian routes, squares etc as well as old abandoned train lines or other road networks.

In this sense grey fields (which got their name from the color of typical asphalt roads) cover a huge percentage of urban configurations as compared to other land uses. They constitute the biggest, continuous urban field, which is really unique.

The road networks are directly related to adjacent urban surfaces. This relation, which can be captured as a percentage, varies a lot and may well exceed 30% of the respective configuration (Fig.5). In the majority of typical European towns grey fields support the circulation of cars, which may act as nuisance against other important urban functions. Quite frequently however, grey fields offer substantial remanagement opportunities for the formulation of cycle routes (Fig.6), pedestrian areas, squares etc.

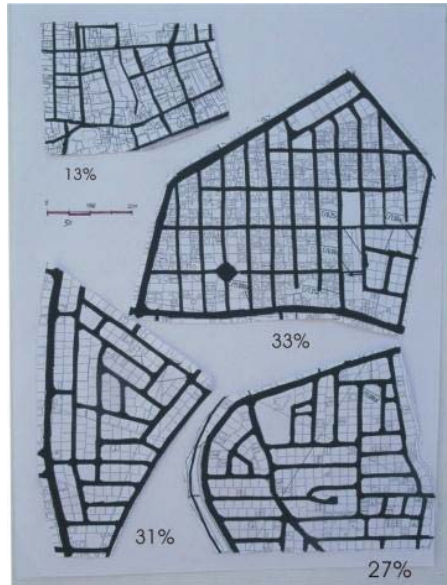


Figure 5. Proportion of typical grey fields as compared to other land uses



Figure 6. Alternative remanagement schemes of grey fields from UK, Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium which allowed the incorporation of cycle-routes for free.

Sea fields

The sea fields concern parts of the coastal areas which have been reclaimed and converted into vital coastal fringes. In order to proceed with such investments nowadays, one has to take into account among other parameters, the sea level rising phenomenon, the possible tsunami risk etc. Even though, sea fields adjacent to central areas offer tremendous opportunities for drastic city transformations (Fig.7, 8).



Figure 7. The coastal front in central Limassol town, during 60's



Figures 8. The reclaimed area which was turned into a linear park.

Orange fields

The orange fields concern plots which accommodate functional but non efficient premises or land uses and in addition they occupy some very vital urban spaces. The term orange field is correlated as a hue with brown field but is differentiated from it, in a sense that is still more or less functional, which however approaches its sunset. Orange fields could offer additional opportunities to face urban problems, satisfy crucial demands and accommodate important urban uses. Therefore it may be necessary for competent authorities to examine the possibilities to acquire these areas through purchases, land swap or expropriations. This is because is not always the best approach to expect the gradual decay of a central and vital immoveable property, whereas is quite important to start to plan for alternative developments before the final desolation of the existing ones. In these cases feasibility, viability, town planning and other studies can reveal that the social, commercial and other interests of the town, demand a much more dynamic intervention. Such interventions may include necessary land expropriations, an approach carried out in central Nicosia (Fig.9) in order to implement an extended redevelopment, which includes a new civic square, government buildings, a cultural complex and a new parliament (Fig.10).



Figure 9. An old stadium and adjacent insufficient buildings constitute a bunch of orange field in central Nicosia

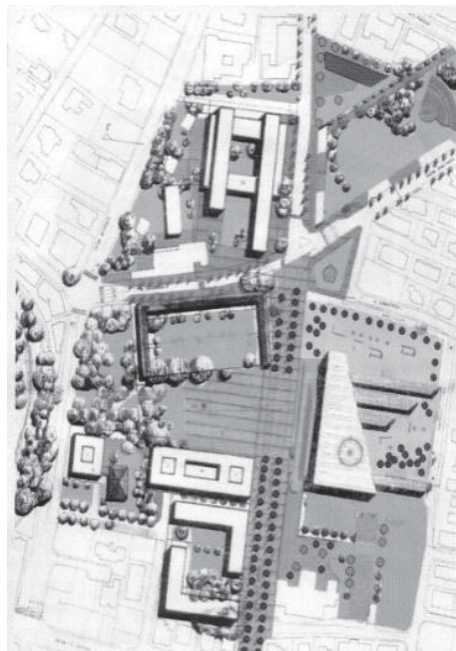


Figure 10. The expected new civic development

Sky fields

The sky fields concern the ambient space which lies between the urban skyline and the navigation airfields (Fig.3). Today this space is not used, but the continuous increase of urban demands (e.g. for renewable energy etc.) may lead to the examination of the possibilities to exploit this space, for structures which can accommodate e.g. photovoltaic panels etc. (Fig. 11). In Fig. 12 one may see the dual use of large solar panels, firstly for the creation of a protected car parking area and secondly for setting up a recharge energy area for electric cars. In the sketches that follow (Fig. 13) one may see a possible exploitation of the sky fields above the road

network, which offers the possibility for the exploitation of solar energy. The relevant structure contributes also to the increase of shaded areas and therefore to the improvement of the environmental conditions and the overall circulation conditions especially for pedestrians, something which is very desirable for areas where the intensity of the sunshine is high.



Figure 11. Existing sky fields in Styria, Austria



Figure 12. Proposed sky field over car parking area, which will also function as energy recharge area for electric cars in Spain

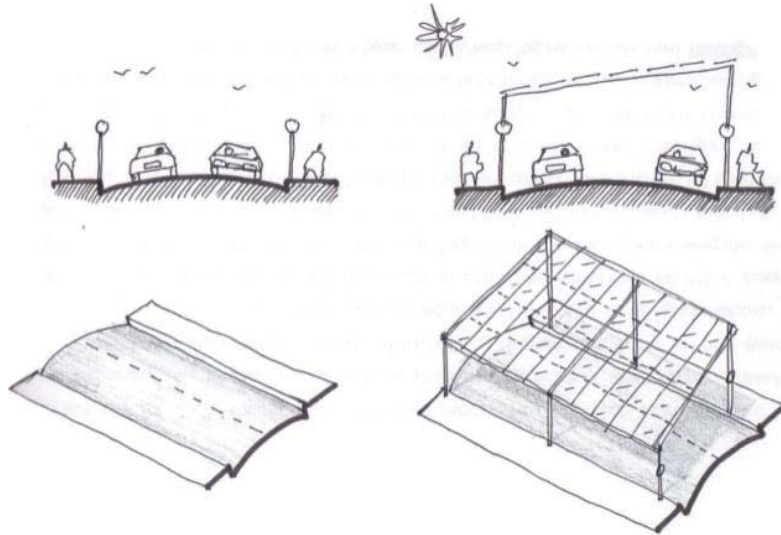


Figure 13. Possible future sky fields

Time fields

The time fields highlight the time dimension which offers a lot of perspectives as long as spatial management is concerned. These may concern any field analyzed above, but also any other private or public place which can be utilized (according to prerequisites) for certain time periods for the accommodation of urban uses others than the typical. A classical example concerns the temporary designation of circulation roads as car free areas for a specific time period and their conversion into temporary commercial-pedestrian areas (Fig.14,15). Another example may concern the use of a space which is used during mornings as a parking area and during evenings (when the employees of the respective premises have gone), as a playing field (Fig.16-18).



Figures 14. Typical time fields in Athens.



Figure 15. Selected streets are turned into open markets for certain time periods every month.



Figures 16. A time field ...



Figures 17. ...which functions as parking area



Figures 18. ...and futsal field

Conclusions

Based on all the above it seems that town planning configurations offer many opportunities which are founded on the exploitation of the following fourteen places, spaces or fields, that is : brown fields, empty fields, green fields, grey, government, municipal, sea, orange, underground, sky, bank, donor, energy and time fields.

It can be stated therefore that when competent authorities or key stake holders face a specific town planning problem or strive to improve, renovate and vitalize an urban area, they could investigate the opportunities which are derived from all the above fields.

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