Natural urbanity on the urban edge
Design Considerations for Torre-Negra, Collserola

Notes on the Final Degree Project developed by Álvaro Clua at the Barcelona School of Architecture (UPC-2012), under the supervision of prof. A. Linares.

1. A CONFLICT OF INTERESTS
The natural environment of Torre-Negra, between Sant Cugat del Vallès and the Collserola Park, has been under severe discussions for almost thirty years (Busquets, 2003). While PEPCo 1987 (Pla Especial del Pla de Collserola) defined this area as a “valuable agricultural landscape”, the more recent court decisions of Tribunal Supremo and TSJ Catalunya (Freire, 2010) have declared that this area shouldn’t be considered under the Llei de Patrimoni Natural i de l’Eixample Natural and, therefore, it should remain as an area for real-state speculation. Nonetheless, while this resolution is being discussed by the local administration, the Torre-Negra area has been becoming a widely used public park, right at the edge of Sant Cugat del Vallès, next to a number of international schools and faculties, tennis clubs and horse-riding facilities. This area, at the natural confluence of Riera de Sant Crist and Sant Medir and inhabited by the ruins of a former brick factory and guarded by the old watchtower of Torre-Negra, is one of the few farmland areas left within the Collserola Park. The Pi d’en Xandri tree is still the symbol of this citizen vindication.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The hypothesis of this project is to consider that the real complexity in urban management and political discussions in urban edges should be enriched by a design process and assessment. Thus, the research questions would be:

Which activities and design guidelines should be considered to achieve urbanity in those urban-nature transition spaces without a ‘recognized’ ecological or heritage value but with a great social use and meaning?

How to integrate city and nature in a more sensitive way, i.e., attentive to the real potentialities of the place and the social demands?

3. DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Edges between cities and forests should be considered more as a transition than as a duality. While ecology has been demonstrating the wealth of ecotones in nature (Forman, 1996), it is also necessary to create rich urbanity in the interplay between nature and city (Kouskoulas, 2015). In this sense, developing Torre-Negra as a ‘transition park’ could be a way to stop the degradation and provoke positive processes there.

The classical model of ‘nature versus city’ does not depict the best way to preserve our habitats and not vice versa (Marot, 2006) as one of the few natural environment of Torre Negra, between Sant Cugat and the Collserola Park, has been under severe discussions for almost thirty years (Busquets, 2003). While PEPCo 1987 (Pla Especial del Pla de Collserola) defined this area as a “valuable agricultural landscape”, the more recent court decisions of Tribunal Supremo and TSJ Catalunya (Freire, 2010) have declared that this area shouldn’t be considered under the Llei de Patrimoni Natural i de l’Eixample Natural and, therefore, it should remain as an area for real-state speculation. Nonetheless, while this resolution is being discussed by the local administration, the Torre-Negra area has been becoming a widely used public park, right at the edge of Sant Cugat del Vallès, next to a number of international schools and faculties, tennis clubs and horse-riding facilities. This area, at the natural confluence of Riera de Sant Crist and Sant Medir and inhabited by the ruins of a former brick factory and guarded by the old watchtower of Torre-Negra, is one of the few farmland areas left within the Collserola Park. The Pi d’en Xandri tree is still the symbol of this citizen vindication.

The development of the project in 3 phases:
1. pathways + pavements
2. prefabricated modules
3. pavements

The place and management of the project is defined as a "suburban" area, a closed building is less effective when the objective is to create a ‘new’ landscape from lower value elements. Thus, the ‘new’ landscape should be considered a tool for improving urban-natural activities.

Buildings & Uses
1. The peripherical condition of those edge areas is the opportunity to set occasional but essential uses in urban life: a café at the park’s main access, areas for concerts, races and cultural events, summer recreation centres, centre for arts and nature... Those buildings could work as pieces of land art on closing times.
2. Three scales have been taken in the prefabric module: the scale of landscape, the scale of public buildings and the scale of children (in some of the buildings).
3. Design of transitions as a matter of scale and use.

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