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# The agricultural and historical origin of an urban green infrastructure: Madrid-Río

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#### Abstract:

Madrid-Río is a recent green infrastructure built in Madrid, a linear park of multiple uses that sought to connect the historic city center with the less favored neighborhoods of the south, to bring them spatial and socioeconomically closer to the center. Our purpose is to detect, in this new urban space, the traces of its origin in agricultural uses linked to the river. These uses widely extended since the city became capital, had their reflection in several historical places, such as Casa de campo, Paseo de Virgen del Puerto, etc., which have been tried to integrate into the new project. The methodology used combines the analysis of historical cartography, with historical data and own analytical planimetry. The findings are to detect historical focal points and their relevance, locate the footprint of spaces of agricultural origin in the current park and, more broadly, assess their value in the functioning of GI.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage Landscape; Adaptive reuse; Urban Identity; Landscape Architecture and Urbanism; Madrid

#### 1. Introduction

In its growth, Madrid has incorporated productive areas located in its surroundings as what it could be considered an "historic urban landscape". These agricultural areas generate a vision of the city from its immediate surroundings, but also as a peripheric vision in a territorial scale. Its peri-urban image has been changing at the same time as the use and exploitation of the land was developed, changed, or abandoned, making agricultural activity an agent with the capacity to generate and preserve the landscape and so, the identity of the city.

This peri-urban landscape has its own physical, cultural, and perceptual characteristics, and its study extends the landscape analysis of the city of Madrid, as seen from the productive spaces in its surroundings.

Analysing the historical evolution of the city, it is possible to appreciate how its limits have been modified, absorbing the surrounding territory in each of its enlargements (Aziz Amen & Nia, 2018, Amen & Kuzovic, 2018, Amen & Nia, 2021, Aziz Amen, 2017). These territories around the city generally had a productive character, dedicated to agriculture and exploitation of the countryside, and have always been the transitional landscape between the urban core and "nature". A space of "domesticated nature as a second nature concept where agricultural changes have modified the natural world" (Maderuelo, J. 2005, pp 175), with its own character and landscape and social specificities; a peripheral landscape, to be defined, that blurred through agriculture the boundaries between the city and the countryside (Zárate Martín, M. A. 2015), precisely where the urban landscape was defined by the rural environment around it. We intend to show the traces of that landscape in the current green infrastructure of Madrid-Río.

## 2. Material and methodology

There are countless studies on these landscapes from different overviews, such as urban planning, land uses, architecture, history, painting, literature, etc. The different perspectives highlight the existing problem when trying to find a suitable definition for urban landscape and, particularly, peri-urban landscape.

A landscape that evolves over time with the city and interacts with people, engaging and wrapping them in a physical reality full of individual and collective experiences. These ways of approaching the study of landscape have much to do with the historical evolution of its definition (Maderuelo, J. 2005), which since the 18th century, with the Enlightenment, has been adapting to the interest generated by its study, incorporating different concepts, qualities, and nuances.

For this reason, it was not until the European Landscape Convention in Florence in the year 2000, in article 1a, which states that: "Landscape is part of the land, as perceived by local people or visitors, which evolves through time as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings" (Council of Europe, 2000; Dipeolu et al., 2022). This is already discussing perception, character and interaction between man and nature. In this European Convention, further set of guidelines, definitions and ways of doing regarding landscape were given, regardless of their rural or urban nature, in a place between both realities proving to be the main focus of interest in numerous subsequent publications and reflections on the landscape and the city environment.

In this study, using the current concept of landscape and the review of previous studies on the Madrid landscape, we systematically analyse the evolution of the urban landscape, through the study of historical cartography as the main tool (figure 1) together with the graphic analysis of notes, drawings, charts, and photographs, orthophotos, using the reading

of chronicles to recreate and understand the agrarian nature of the descriptions of Madrid's surroundings. We identify the transitional spaces between the city and the countryside in the different periods of Madrid's urban development by redrawing their limits, in order to compare the selected areas and the current state of the city, and thus be able to find preserved or disappeared spaces in a city in constant evolution.





**Figure 1.** Pedro Texeira, Mantua Carpetorum sive Matritum Urbs Regia, Topography of Madrid, 1656. Topografía de la villa de Madrid, 1656, (composición digital de 20 hojas, 180x 285 cm. BRM, Mp.II/45. Hoja nº16 (Palacio) 48x59,3.-encuadre 45x56,5.

## 3. Background on "historic urban landscape" and agriculture in the city

Despite many texts, both national and international, begin to value the importance of analysing cities within their natural environment, in their territorial context. It was not until the *Vienna Memorandum* in 2005 that the growing interest in placing urban development, cities and their buildings within their natural reality became truly manifest, thus giving rise to the concept of "historic urban landscape" (UNESCO, W. 2005). A concept that has evolved over the last few years and has been dealt with in numerous international conventions up to the *Paris Recommendation* on the Historic Urban Landscape in 2011, where articles 8 and 9 specify the following (UNESCO, W. 2011):

- 8. The historic urban landscape is the urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of "historic centre" or "ensemble" to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting.
- 9. This wider context includes notably the site's topography, geomorphology, hydrology and natural features, its built environment, both historic and contemporary, its infrastructures above and below ground, its open spaces and gardens, its land use patterns and spatial organization, perceptions and visual relationships, as well as all other elements of the urban structure. It also includes social and cultural practices and values, economic processes and the intangible dimensions of heritage as related to diversity and identity.

A "historical urban landscape" includes the geographical environment with its features, both traditional and contemporary. The peri-urban Madrid was dedicated historically to agriculture and farming. Consequently, agricultural landscaping has been converted in an added topic to the problem of characterizing the so-called "proximity landscape to the city" (Rodríguez Romero, E. J. 2018). The balance between urban and rural environments becomes relevant, as it was underlined in the Green Cities Initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations where it is pointed out:

Today, more than half of all people live in urban areas; by 2050, it is estimated that around 70 % will do so. As a result, the countryside is also migrating. Residents of Lima's desert periphery, suffering from nutritional deprivation, grow vegetables hydroponically. Greater London is dotted with vegetable gardens. From New York to Manila, communal gardens are taking over vacant lots. Metropolis are putting on their farming boots and proudly reclaiming a rustic past. (FAO. 2023)

This urban agriculture has evolved alongside the city, adapting to its expansion, its development and socio-cultural habits, from the Middle Ages to present day. Urban agriculture has moved from occupying a limited areas among historic buildings to a kind of a peri-urban high-productive agriculture (Zárate Martín, M. A. 2015). In its medieval origins, the city

of Madrid had its main market gardens on the left bank of the Manzanares, while the right bank remained free, with a more rustic and natural character. Furthermore, the city turned its back on the river, to which people only went down to work the orchards and wash their clothes, since the running and irrigation water did not even come from the river, but from ancient underground channels of Islamic origin (Moya González, L. 1993).

## 4. Evolution of the "historic urban landscape" in Madrid: the city, the river and the countryside.

Studying the city outskirts until 1900, Madrid had numerous market gardens in its surroundings, especially near the river and its most important streams, including some areas within the city walls, such as large convents, street gardens and meadows. Humanized nature penetrated the city surrounding it, as orchards, gardens, and tree-lined promenades, generating a peculiar link with the outer countryside. Another key element in this peri-urban landscape were also a series of country houses and country estates, clustered in the nearby rural centres and along the main access roads. Overall the surrounding landscape was characterized by large royal estates, representing immense reserves of land, with a relevant role even today (Rodríguez Romero, E., Sáenz de Tejada Granados, C., & Santo-Tomás Muro, R. 2018).

Until the 19th century, the structure of Madrid outskirts was defined, like those of any European city, by roads that starting from the city gates, periurban walks and groves, the topography and vegetation, the river and its streams with , with a series of associated washing places and industrial establishments, inns and other constructions along the roads, small settlements and agricultural or recreational farms. These country residences, whose precedent was the aristocratic country houses, of medieval or Renaissance origin, became quite popular among the upper middle classes during the 19th century, and even formed settlements of a certain size, as happened on the outskirts of Madrid.

Since Madrid was named capital of Spain, two architectural typologies have conditioned its urban and peri-urban landscape: the numerous convents and monasteries founded during the Habsburg period, especially in the 17th century, and the hunting and farming estates used by the kings for leisure (such as El Pardo, the Casa de Campo and La Florida). In the second half of the 18th century, following the Versailles model, *bagatelles* became fashionable (Casitas de El Escorial, El Pardo, Casa del Labrador in Aranjuez...), so that the aristocracy, imitating the monarchy, organised their suburban "villas" on the outskirts of the big city, combining leisure and culture with the former agricultural functions. The farms were sometimes merely for the self-sufficiency of the estate, but other times they materialised large-scale trials that led to important agronomic advances (e.g. in Moncloa, Alameda de Osuna, Quinta del Berro, Soto de Migas Calientes, etc.). Therefore, the spread of physiocracy in the Spanish agricultural world and the eagerness to imitate royal customs on the part of the families of the nobility were the factors that decided the process of transformation of the peripheral landscape (figure 2) on the outskirts of the capital (Rodríguez Romero, E. J. 2017).



Figure 2.

Fragmento de la Vista general de Madrid tomada entre poniente y sur.( Fragment of *General View of Madrid, from the Southwest*) Fernando Brambilla, 1832. (fuente: SANCHO, J.L. y ORTEGA,J., 2016, Una corte para el rey. Carlos III y los Sitios Reales, P110)

From the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup>-C, agriculture has been moving away forced by the urban sprawling and its associated infrastructures. This has modified the way to understand the productive outskirts together with external perception of

the city. These new infrastructures, the increasingly important access roads and the annexation of peripheral rural areas, have substantially modified the way of understanding the city of Madrid, the surrounding landscape and the productive peri-urban landscape from which it is accessed.

To complete the vision of the city with landscape intention (Rodríguez Romero, E.J. 2019), in a look from the countryside that is city, analysing its characteristics and the infrastructures necessary for its development, we could find the traces that the countryside worked in the past has left in the current city and in the historical city. Towards West, the territory that historically surrounds the capital has been the fertile plain of the Manzanares river. A natural and topographical boundary that has served to protect and preserve the view of the so-called "cornice of Madrid". This cornice is the identifiable silhouette of the city, which has witnessed the evolution of the suburbs during the developmentalism of the 60s and 70s of the 20th century.

The natural Northwest and West city borders are elevated vantagepoints, being a natural boundary between the city and the forthcoming urban areas. From there, a series of peripherical elements such as paths, wooded areas, washlands, orchards, country estates, recreational and rural areas spread out southbound (Rodríguez Romero, E. J., Santo-Tomás Muro, R., Sáenz De Tejada Granados, C. 2022). At the same time, the zone became a limit to the urban expansion in this direction, forcing the extension towards East. A natural boundary that hinders the growth of the city and focuses it towards the east in a natural way, leaving the river to one side, on the outskirts of the city.

The streams that flowed from old Madrid down the slope to the Manzanares, such as the Leganitos and San Pedro on the left bank and the Meaques and the Luche on the right, among others, converged at the river. These streams and their small brooks, all of which have been piped or have now disappeared, fed the cultivated areas on the banks of the Manzanares. Although these orchards no longer exist, they had their own names, as can be seen in the 1856 *Contornos de Madrid* map, such as Moncloa, Osuna, Paso, Bombilla, Puente de Segovia, Hospital, Azua and Alguacil, among many others, on the right bank, and Cerezo, La Partida, San José and Castañeda, among others, on the left bank. (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Contornos de Madrid en 1856. (Madrid outskirts) . Archivo Cartográfico y Estudios Geográficos del Centro Geográfico del Ejercito, Ar. E—T-9-C.2-62bis

Not until the 20th century that some attempts were made to integrate the river into the city, including its channelling by means of small dams (Moya González, L. 1993). However, in 1970 the M-30 Madrid ring road was created, flanking both banks of the river. This dual highway would distribute road traffic along the different accesses to the capital and connect the main national radial roads.

At this point, the banks of the river and the activities generated in the immediate surroundings were separated from each other and the right bank was cut off from the city despite the existence of bridges and footbridges. The Virgen del Puerto and San Isidro chapels, the sculptural bridges such as the Rey, Segovia and Toledo bridges and the historic gardens along the riverbed as it passes through the city, such as La Casa de Campo and the Campo del Moro, will be disconnected from each other and from the city. Not to mention the fact that the areas of orchards and tile fields or the open spaces around the river would disappear from the banks of the river, now subject to the pressure of new urban development and the infrastructures of a city in constant growth.

Attempts to soften this edge of the city had been unsuccessful except in very specific interventions, and the need to return the view of the river and connect the city and the southwest periphery was a classic demand of the inhabitants of these urban edges. Not so much from the inhabitants of the rest of the city, who had no experience of the presence of the river and the view of the Madrid cornice except from the view of the car, through the accesses to Madrid from the northwest to the southwest and the M-30 expressway. This relationship between city and river made it necessary to regenerate and integrate all the areas that linearly accompany the river on its route through the city of Madrid in order to recover its visual, landscape and historical meaning.

## 5. Reflections on the recent Madrid-Rio project, results and discussion.

Between 2004 and 2007, this regeneration became possible when the M-30 was buried in the section running parallel to the Manzanares River, in the western area. It is approximately 6-7 km from the Puente del Rey bridge to the area of Legazpi, at the South (Martínez Calzón, J. 2011). This operation also includes the undergrounding of Av. de Portugal, which will link up with the area of the Puente del Rey bridge. An area of opportunity that, on the one hand, at a territorial level will try to connect the green spaces of Monte del Pardo to the north of the capital with the river plain, generating an ecological corridor in search of the greatest possible environmental benefit, and on the other hand, at an urban level, try to connect neighbourhoods and incorporate and conserve the existing heritage linked to the river (Madrid City Council. 2012)

The Madrid-Río intervention was completed with its landscaping in 2011. It was the result of an international design competition, becoming awarded the architectural studio Burgos y Garrido, which created a working team with West 8 studio, specialized in landscape architecture.

The project establishes as a general strategy the idea of establishing a vegetal layer, almost of a forest-like character, wherever possible; in other words, to create a landscape with living matter on an inert underground substratum, modified and excavated for the automobile, on a construction that expresses in itself the maximum artifice. (Mrío Arq., West 8. 2011, p.37)

An urban green infrastructure, when it is on the threshold of the city, "by its form and its history, acquires the sense of an urban threshold and acts as an element that generates the identity of the city" (Santo-Tomás Muro, R., & Rodríguez Romero, E. J. 2020). This green infrastructure thus gives meaning to the definition of resilient landscape that "supports ecological, economic and human interests by maintaining its integrity and promoting landscape connectivity, while enhancing the quality of life and sense of belonging to the environment across different landscape boundaries" (Mell, I. C. 2010) and connects with the Madrid Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Plan 2018, based on sustainability, connectivity, climate change, quality, participation and co-responsibility, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency, according to its executive summary (Madrid City Council. 2018).

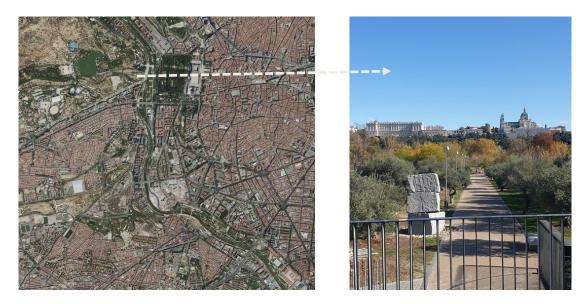
The intervention consists of three different landscaping areas: a pine hall and a link with the monumental city, at the right bank of the river, and a band of gardens, at the left. All of them are differently treated and longitudinally related. The gardened areas are adapted to the space left by the M-30 undergrounding (Mrío Arq., West 8. 2011). And they also have small integrating actions that stitch the project together and connect it to each other, to both banks and to the city. (Figure 4).

Regarding the link with the monumental Madrid, the actual sector around the King Bridge and Casa de Campo has been without edification due to the fact it was already a protected area. This was due to the previous conditions aforementioned as real possessions, something that can be noticed in the historic documentation seen.

On this right bank, the royal possessions and the area of the Casa de Campo stand out. This estate, which due to its proximity to the royal palace would have been used for hunting, agriculture and livestock farming, is watered by the Meaques stream, among others, and given its protection for royal enjoyment, it is endowed with gardens close to the building of the Vargas palace, such as the Reservado Chico and the Reservado Grande, with ponds, statues, flowerbeds and grottoes or mock galleries (Ortega Vidal, J., Martínez Díaz, A., & Marín Perellón, F. J. 2008). In the immediate vicinity, La huerta de la Partida, and the nurseries of National Heritage (Patrimonio Nacional) appear on the margin above. Of the three nurseries that the city of Madrid currently has, Migas Calientes, Casa de Campo and Estufas del Retiro, the first two are located in this area and their activity remains the same as ever, providing the municipality with ornamental plant species and for research purposes without forgetting that they are integrated within historical spaces, with the Reservado Chico and the Reservado Grande being conserved within the historical fence of the Casa de Campo nursery (Toribio Marín, C., & Fernández Fontanet, R. 2019). Both the nurseries and the area of the Villa de Los Vargas are integrated into the Madrid-Río project only as its main access through the Rey Esplanade, crossing the entrance to the Casa de Campo but

without being incorporated into the road, at least not like the other space in front of the villa: the Huerta de la Partida. Although it is an enclosed space, it is a clear example of the integration and recovery of the historical landscape into an urban park project in a deliberate manner. Today, La Huerta de La Partida (figure 5) recreates its agricultural past through the planting of fruit trees, a past history that was also dedicated to medicinal plants in the 1930s before the Spanish Civil War, when it was completely razed to the ground as a battle front. From an orchard irrigated by a natural stream to an enclosed orchard with an imaginary riverbed today, which helps us to understand the meaning of the water's course, its importance, its use and its outlet to the old Manzanares River.

The Madrid-Río intervention has apparently solved the problem of the relation between the city and its River. The urban green infrastructure reminds riverside woods and meadows, as well as the historic tree-lined promenades along the river's banks. It also reinvents the idea of the former public washing as modern fountains.



**Figure 4.** Orthophoto Madrid. SIT 2023, Sistema de información Territorial de la Comunidad de Madrid. Consultado el 10.05.23. http://idem.madrid.org/cartografia/sitcm/html/alerta.htm

**Figure 5.** Vista del Palacio Real de Madrid, museo de las colecciones reales y catedral de la almudena desde La Huerta de La partida, 2019. (View of the Royal Palace, Royal Collection Museum and Almudena Cathedral from the so-called Orchard of La Partida). Sáenz de Tejada Granados, C., Santo-Tomás Muro, R., & Rodríguez Romero, E. J. (2022) en Visiones periféricas: Paisajes planeados, paseados, vividos. Madrid: conarquitectura. CC.07 silueta haúlica pg 75.

# 6. Conclusions

Just as the historical buildings and spaces that characterise the image and identity of the city are studied, the study of the productive agricultural spaces in its vicinity, its edges or limits would complete the vision of the city.

In Madrid, the historical view of the cornice has endured throughout history due to the topographical configuration and thanks to the protected green spaces on the outskirts of the city, from where today we can continue to see the iconic image of the city. The Manzanares River has been an urban boundary space that led us towards the countryside, where the suburban villas combined leisure and culture with farms.

Since the end of the 19th century and especially throughout the 20th century, with the appearance of the new developments and neighbourhoods to the west of Madrid and the layout of the M-30, this area and the river were isolated. Overall, one crucial aim of the intervention has been the intention to bring up part of the city memory, especially in the historic section of the River Manzanares. The urban green infrastructure has provided a new identity and character to this part of the city. This urban green infrastructure is reminiscent of the riverside woods and meadows and the historic tree-lined promenades along the banks of the river. It also incorporates the facilities of the old public washing places, historic gardens and the recovery of the Huerta de La Partida, a direct allusion to the agricultural past of the banks of the Manzanares. In this way, the memory of the city is reflected in a walk along its river.

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#### **Conflict of Interests**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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