

The Ciudad Lineal in the globalized context: a social history of Madrid, 1960s-2010s

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Intake Year: 2017

Research Track: History and Theory of Architecture and Urbanism

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Dissertation Abstract

This thesis analyses Arturo Soria's Ciudad Lineal (linear city) as a streetscape that is produced by the negotiations between private and state initiatives that have led to the implementation of particular contested modes of urbanism.

The street is a source and reflection of urban and social crisis. The 1960s witnessed a renewed interest in Soria's linear city, first by American scholars and later in Spain. The 1968 publication of the last text on Ciudad Lineal by the American art historian George R. Collins, edited by Carlos Flores and commissioned by the left wing Italian editor Alberto Mondadori, coincided with the emergence of mass social movements in the streets of capitalist countries. In the twilight of Francoist dictatorship, this new social consciousness was commencing to slowly penetrate a regime that was hitherto impassable. Most recently, these movements have re-emerged following the 2008 Great Spanish Recession in the context of a globalized Madrid.

Since its realization in 1894, the Ciudad Lineal project has been the site of diverse conflicts between public-private initiatives, center-periphery in a national and local scale, the morals of a liberal economy-Catholicism, upper-lower classes struggle, city-countryside, and car-train-bicycle-pedestrian contestations. Conceived to become a 50-kilometer long by 500 meters wide development along the periphery of Madrid as a nexus between city and countryside, the project was truncated at 5.5 kilometers in the 1930s due to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

Currently, the original completed 5.5 kilometers form an important street running from north to south in Madrid's downtown with a unique suburban character. Residential gated complexes formed by 4-storey blocks surrounded by gardens with swimming pools are predominant, with very few commercial activities at the street level, being private health centers, schools and religious institutions the main services. The street is formed by 2-3 car lines in each direction plus parking spaces, combined with lawns and large trees, some of them heritage of Soria's project, contrasting with the denser streets and the urban atmosphere of Madrid's city center.

The aim of this research is to study the impact of historical and contemporary socio-political events that have shaped and continue to produce this urban space. New phenomena developing since the 1960s will be taken into consideration, in particular, environmental, feminist or pensioners movements; the disputes between a neoliberal urbanism and state/institutional control; the reorganization of the geopolitical context and the presence of international actors in Madrid; and the impact of new global technologies. Archival, statistical and demographic research, field work, graphic and mapping studies will be carried out in order to describe a deeper understanding of this built environment and the conditions that produce the urban space. The analysis of the physical evolution of the street will be conducted in relation to the sociopolitical contexts, expressed through changes in urban legislation and demographic shifts.

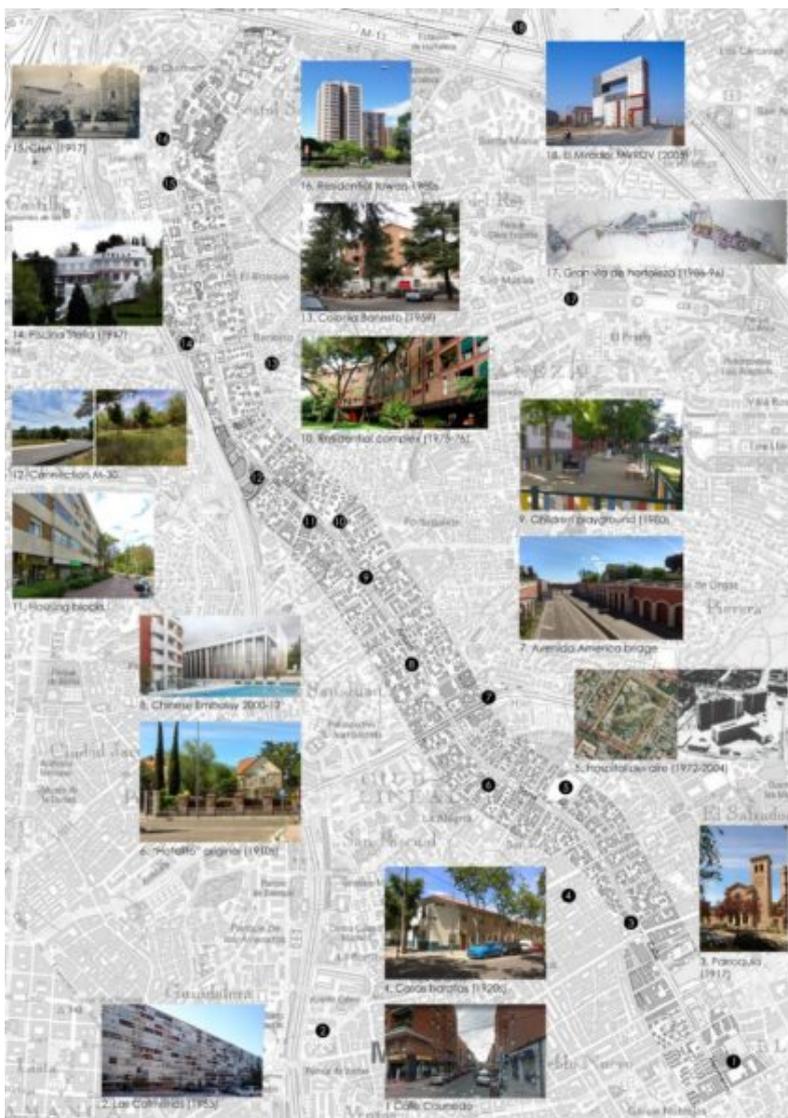


Figure Street analysis of Ciudad Lineal