

Cañada Real Galiana, Madrid the largest slum in Europe

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(Summary)

On Madrid's Paseo del Prado, hundreds of sheep are driven through the very centre of the city each year. This annual spectacle safeguards the historical right of way of Spanish sheep farmers, because the Paseo is part of an extensive network of drovers' routes, the so-called Cañada Reales. These pastoral droveways form an extended infrastructural network, reticulating the entire country with a total of about 125,000 kilometres. Here, the famous Merino sheep were driven from the summer to the winter pastures since the early Middle Ages. A major part of the Spanish power once rested upon the trade in the precious wool. From 1273 to 1836, this power was represented by the Mesta, the association of sheep farmers in Castile. In 1273 AD they obtained an edict from the Spanish King, Alfonso the Wise, which guaranteed the existence of the Cañada Reales indefinitely, and is still valid today. The individual sections cover the country in legs of up to 800 kilometres, criss-crossing the very diverse rural and urban regions of Spain. Today the still mostly connected routes are under consideration for UNESCO world heritage status. The public, however, associates the name Cañada Real Galiana, which is a section in the area of Madrid, with something quite other than a droveway, since it also constitutes the location of Europe's biggest slum, with almost 30,000 people living here illegally. A conflict that has led to huge controversies in politics and urban planning. The question arises whether there cannot be a way of combining both - the existence of a historical cultural landscape and informal urban growth. For two years the team at our chair has been collaborating with students to work on this issue.)

Cañada Real Galiana

Since early medieval times the picturesque Cañada Real Galiana has been used to drive the famous merino sheep from summer to winter pastures. These pastoral droveways form an extended infrastructural network, reticulating the entire country with a total of about 125,000 kilometres. A major part of the Spanish power once rested upon the trade in the precious wool. From 1273 to 1836, this power was represented by the Mesta, the association of sheep farmers in Castile. They organized the migration of the sheep – three million were counted around 1500 AD – from Andalusia and Extremadura to Castile. The Mesta protected their members and maintained the roads and water troughs. In 1273 AD, they obtained an edict from the Spanish King, Alfonso the Wise, which guaranteed the existence of the Cañada Reales indefinitely, and is still valid today. In individual sections the country is covered in legs of up to 800 kilometres, criss-crossing the very diverse rural and urban regions of Spain. Today the still mostly connected routes are under consideration for UNESCO world heritage status.

The largest slum in Europe

However, far more interesting is the fact that Europe's biggest slum emerged alongside the Cañada Real Galiana within a segment of 15 kilometres in the southeast of Madrid (Dietz 2014). About 30,000 people live here illegally. As yet, the region of Madrid has no clear concept for dealing with the informal settlement and, in the past, reacted drastically by deporting the population. It was, in casual parlance, briskly “bulldozered”, and the problem has thus been proverbially relocated to the city peripheries. This case has been an object of research at the Chair of Landscape Architecture and Public Space at the TU Munich for more than 2 years. We have made a point of studying the capacity of the historical structure, and the capabilities of the informal settlers in this example, in order to develop a landscape architectural plan for the coexistence of both these facets. The goal is to make clear that both the preservation of the cultural landscape and unplanned urban growth do not have to be mutually exclusive. In order to achieve this aim, we have embarked on several expeditions to the Cañada Real in search of the droveways, in our capacity as landscape architects working together with ethnographers in direct contact with the local population.

In search of the royal sheep

From afar the shepherd looks much as one would imagine: small and a bit stooped, a weather-beaten man, who leads a mule by the bridle. The mule is laden with the shepherd's belongings. Two sheepdogs of differing size scurry around them. They obey the calls of the shepherd and race down the hollow before us, in order to keep the grazing herd of around 400 animals together. So there they are, the sheep that we have been looking for over the course of many days and over long distances along the Cañada Real Galiana, one of Spain's many royal droveways. As we approach the flock, I can see the shepherd in intense conversation on his smart phone. When we arrive by his side, he tells his device that he is now no longer alone and flips it shut. He grins at us, appears curious, asks who we are, and proves to be highly talkative. This I would not have expected; I imagined a shepherd to be taciturn and introverted. He is delighted at our interest in what he does, and we learn several things about his animals, which are kept for their milk. The dogs are called Tania and Miguel, and the mule, which turns out to be a hinny, is called Maria. When we question the shepherd about the Trashumancia, the pastoral economy, it turns out that he does not really believe in the existence of the droveways anymore, saying: “Those days were gone the moment they started to move the sheep overland by train. Today the routes, now known as via pecuario, are convenient connections for leisure bikers and hikers, and long ago ceased to be the main cattle drive.” Even the famous Paseo del Prado, the museum promenade in Madrid, is part of this network, and the annual the droving of the royal flock is celebrated as a sort of folk festival.

Cañada informal

Being on the track of these old roads means observing their metamorphoses in the unpopulated as well as the wholly urbanized context. Many of the livestock trails can be experienced continuously in rural space, but with new infrastructure, such as airports and highways, the old trail is abandoned and the obstacle bypassed by the present route.

However, the Cañada Real appears most interesting at its point of intersection with the city, where it accrues unplanned characteristics, as in the southeast of the Spanish capital. Here, between the municipal areas of Madrid, Rivas, Coslada and San Fernando, Europe's largest slum has attached itself to the historical Cañada Real Galiana. The informal settlement has developed linearly and not just in the recent past. For over 60 years, people have settled here either in carefully built brick houses, or in makeshift shacks born of necessity. Having once arisen from old rural workers' houses, a legalized and thus fully affiliated area has already evolved, where houses have 2-3 floors, and are surrounded by fences or walls. If at the inception of the settlement it was rural workers from Andalusia who settled here, an influx of Roma arrived in the following phase, mainly originating from Romania. In the most recent period of the 2000s, during the Spanish construction boom, workers from North Africa came, above all Moroccans, the majority of whom are Muslims.

This colourful ethnic mix makes up the current population of the Cañada Real.

For transparency's sake, the municipal authorities have subdivided the 15 kilometres of the Cañada into six sectors from north to south. In the south, the poorest segment situated in direct proximity to the city's mountains of garbage, the most precarious conditions are visible. This is where people primarily dwell in shacks and dens, and sift through the garbage for usable material. It is also the sector in which Madrid's fiercest hotbed for drug trafficking has developed. Moreover, the city of Madrid's drastic demolition policy is implemented, which does not improve the situation. The business of recycling the garbage is an important component of the slum economy for many residents in the south of the Cañada Real. Since 2015, another enterprise has gained ground for itself: Moroccan residents have begun to lay out gardens in the Cañada for their own vegetable production. For many years, there has been active commitment to the residents at NGO level. Meanwhile, community groups have formed which are able to provide support on an informal basis. This spans everything from health care to Spanish lessons for Moroccan men and women. *Arquitectos Sin Frontera*, *Todo por la Praxis*, *Zuloark* are groups of architects who have engaged with individual projects in the Cañada Real.

In search of the people

During several stays in the Cañada Real since 2014, we and our students have been trying to understand the situation on the ground, and its potential from the view point of landscape architecture. From extensive analyses of the spatial properties and numerous conversations with the residents, a multi-faceted insight into life on the historical route of the Cañada Real has emerged. The absence of formal planning has liberated talents among the inhabitants, which provides us with information on how people manage to create infrastructure in precisely those places where formal structures fail. What the sociologist *AbdouMaliq Simone* characterized in the term 'people as infrastructure' (Simone 2004) is equally valid for landscape architecture as a key to the development of public space. In the same sense, thanks to our ethnographers *Prof. Ignacio Farias* and *Thomas Criado*, we were able to develop profound insight into the life of the people on the Cañada. With the help of the sociological survey methods of "photo-elicitation" and "shadowing", enabled our students to make contacts with due circumspection, and summarise their experiences in journals, photo documentation, and films, which subsequently formed the basis of the Cañada designs.

Merced und Manuel

Just as we are buying a Coca-Cola at Ibrahim's self-built kiosk, a large truck drives up the bumpy Cañada. The driver stops right next to us, rolls down the window and suddenly says: "Hey, if you like, you can come visit us later at our place!" "Us," that is he and his wife and their two children. "We live in the last house on the road," he says and drives off again. When we go to look for the last house on the road, we come upon a semi-derelict rural worker's house onto which a canopied front terrace constructed of wooden posts and planks has been provisionally attached. We climb over a pile of rubble in the entrance area and are warmly greeted by Merced and Manuel, the young couple. Manuel's face and arms are black, and the rest of the family hardly looks any cleaner. They live in and off the garbage, and have struggled along for years. Their greatest wish: "If we can somehow able to save enough money, we want to build ourselves a bathroom out here." "Life here is hard," they say, "but also free." And this unites many residents in the Cañada, as does the wish to get out at some point. And all are united by the constant feeling of not really being safe, either from theft by the others, or from demolition by the police.

How can one succeed in combining the Lives of Others with the ideas of city planning to create formalised structures here? Is desisting from a policy of deportation and allowing the Cañada Real to become a place of reminiscence on its historical origin and further urban expansion conceivable? In a spatial sense, the Cañada real offers an interesting default, and one usable for urban planning. The historical 72.22 metre driveway corridor, together with the centrally oriented development, presents an ideal scale for a linear city model. This echoes Arturo Soria y Mata's urbanist ideas for Madrid as a ciudad lineal, from 1905 (Fidel 2008). The structural capacity of the Cañada Real seems to be almost ideally predefined. By assimilating this structure, it would be possible to protect the driveway as the central developmental axis, in order to legitimize the flanking informal development as its logical extension. Following from this, a provisional thesis presented itself as follows: The appreciation of the specific capabilities of the residents, as well as the further development of the spatial capacities of the Cañada's historical structure can lead to a sustainable overall approach in the sense of contextual design and planning, and can increase acceptance of the informal settlement. The coexistence of the historical driveway and the settlement, should, in the best case, lead to identity-founding added value instead of disruption.

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