

THE SHAPE OF A COUNTRY

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1. The shape of a country.

How is one to draw a country? Which would be the architectural expression of a territory when seeking to define its identity?

In the atlas of the *Laboratori d'Urbanisme*, the plans of fifteen regional territories were drawn up on pages of 250 x 100 cm. in size, working on a 1:10.000 scale and recomposing materials of different origins, which had been conveniently manipulate. Due to the scope, they should have been maps: instead, the new objective this work has in mind is to change a map into a plan.

The thematic reduction of the photogram metric maps or of the urbanistic plans is both the cause and the effect of the sketchiness of the view that is produced so many times by the simplicity and the lack of success of the urban interventions.

To improve the description is, already, to propose. The morphological description of the territory has been, for the work of this exhibition, an alternative route of territorial proposal, for Catalonia, through its shape.

2. The problem of framing.

The scale on which the maps have been made, 1:10.000, was in itself an option of knowledge: from this size it was possible to relate the rural and the urban plotting out, while maintaining the real proportions. The capacity to place on the map the urban plots, even their buildings (insinuating the architectural typologies), the squares, the crossroads, the streets, the monuments, the scattered farms, the substructure as a translation of the social capital invested, the non-urban factory, etc., and also to relate them to each other, allows a possible reading of the territory as a physical structure, apart from simplifying abstractions.

It was necessary to break up the territorial frame into units of reference which could be homogeneous and which, in Catalonia, have a regional nature. The objective is not to fix an initial position in the discussion of the limits, number and dimensions of the regions, but to explore significant fragments of the territory, recognizing them as different or singular due to the specific historical sedimentation of social, productive and economic, in short, physical relations.

The 2,5 x 1 m. proportion of the plan is not isotropic but directional. This criterion allows the idea of which is the dominant "play of tensions" to be solved from the "direction of framing" of a region. Without wanting to make this suggestion a category, what is certain is that the generic image of region developing in a hydrographic basin, invited, in the Catalan case, an option of this kind.

3. The problem of drawing.

On what terms is the problem of drawing and of representation posed in the maps we are representing? The discussion must be bound to the problem of the knowledge of the territory in terms of physical structure. That is, the elements which are the object of attention in the analysis of the territory were at the same time the object of the effort of drawing and representation.

We have taken care not to determine *a priori* a common code or the criteria that had to be used in the drawing, in the measure that, we repeat, the problems of the drawing of each map were associated to the problems of the territory's own identity. The autonomy which the aggregated sum of maps of different regions implies and the autonomy which results from the margins of movement on the drawing, explain the diversity of results obtained. Some elements will be emphasized by the meticulousness of the drawing, by the densification of lines or the hierarchy of thickness, by the use of compacting... At other times the drawing will refer to the image of an element, more than to its literality; or, sporadically, to the conventional representation, in the measure in which they adjust to criteria of general order.

4. Homogeneous plans - Contrasted plans.

The global unity of the reasoning, in terms of search for discipline, and the global unity of the "attitude towards the problem of making maps" justify the comparative study of the results, which will not seek to establish conclusions, but guides to interpretation. A first approach allows, in fact, the discovery of different drawing criteria: those which tend to be homogeneous, in comparison to those which produce situations of contrast.

On the one hand, the criterion which exclusively uses the line and the dot, associated also to the effort to unify all the drawing with the same intensity of line, trying not to give hierarchy to the elements to be represented from this level. The use of a thin line becomes generalized because it has the sensitivity which certain very detailed elements need.

5. Synthetic plans - Analytic plans.

There has also been a different way of understanding the plans starting from different ideas of the relationship of the map with the morphological configuration of the territory it refers to.

In this sense, there are plans that consider the idea of globality and tend to offer a representation which is marked by that "general image of what a region is". From

this point of view, the structuralizing elements or systems which give a more immediate reading are emphasized.

In another group we might place the plans which are concerned with elaborating an answer to each of the precise elements which have to be represented. A contrast between these elements is the result, where each of them searches with autonomy for its own expression, its own possibility of being read. The image of the region is not so precise: a group of structures is expressed complexly and at the same time without a clear hierarchy between them. The plan offers a result which is to a great extent analytical, where there is an effort towards detailed description, in two dimensions, of a very complex reality; whereas the plans described before as synthetical emphasized the interpretation and compromised the plan in terms of drawing, making the reading of it immediate, simplified and directional. This is why the analytical plan approaches obliquely (from this point of view) the classical attitude of the more descriptive cartography in the sense that it recognizes the complexity of the territory, as opposed to attitudes of analytical "interpretation" which are nearer to military operational cartography; what might be the attitude towards "making maps", as contrasted with "making plans".

6. The culture of description.

The problem of expressing knowledge by means of drawing up maps, means one has to make of drawing (also, although not only) an instrument of representation, thus confronting, both the problems of language and the problems of criterion this implies.

Thus these plans are a part of a certain super-realist will which seeks a new interpretation (and also a critical vision) of the territory in the precise selection and evaluation of parts and elements of the real whole. To draw is to select, to select is to interpret, to interpret is to propose. The calligraphic meticulousness which, in fact, picks up the eighteenth century tradition of the French topographers (from Cassini to Marshal Baouchet, for Catalonia), more than the volumetric roundness of the military cartographers or the architects of the nineteenth century, makes the plan an illusion of reality. Fidelity is the method, not the purpose. And what each of them has as a proposal in each subject (like the representation of agriculture, of urban shapes, of public works, of geomorphology or of cadastral property), and in each plan (as the group image of their mutual relationship), depends on the descriptive strength of some elements which are recognized in their exact shapes and

dimensions but which, due to a new contextualization, are in a way reinvented.

The sketchiness of the "explanatory" coincidences, as a paradigm of knowledge, also gives way in the city, to the need to stop once again in the descriptive moment. The strength of the descriptions, the literature in the knowledge, the relief in the accidental simplifications, to the explanatory models, to the diagrammatic representations.

Also an obsession with describing the territory in order to make the synthetic contents of the conceptual proposals more obvious, in which a project (architectural), proposes and remakes the shapes of that which is historical, not so much as a recovery but as a support. Descriptive calligraphy, therefore, as an answer of analysis which allows, on the other hand, to escape from the eclecticism of the work. An effective dissociation of the ambiguous continuity analysis-project: literary territory, conceptual architecture.

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