

# LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

## FORM AND MATTER

Javier Pérez Igualada



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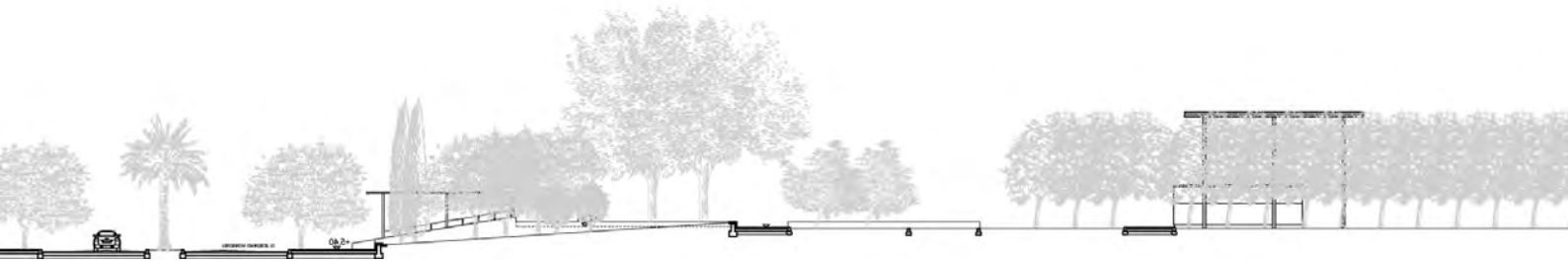
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## Author

Javier Pérez Iguada is a doctor in architecture and professor in the Urban Planning Department of the Polytechnic University of Valencia, having taught since 1988, at the School of Architecture and in various postgraduate and master's courses. He has published the books 'Arquitectura para el transporte' (2010), 'Arquitecturas comparadas' (2007), 'Elements of the urban project' (2007) and 'Manzanas, bloques y casas. Formas construidas y formas del suelo en la ciudad contemporánea' (2005), as well as articles in various research journals. Among his professional work as an architect, we can highlight the stations and urban design for various lines of the Valencia metro and tram network, the Valencia Tourism Development Center, the Nexus Building of the UPV, the Secondary School in Alcasser, the Paiporta Municipal Market, Pedro Goitia Park in Alicante and Cantagallet Park in Alcoy. He is currently a member of the editorial board of the magazine VLC arquitectura, deputy director of the School of Architecture of Valencia and academic director of the Master's Degree in Advanced Architecture, Urbanism, Landscape and Design at the UPV. Web: [jpiarquitectura.blogspot.com.es](http://jpiarquitectura.blogspot.com.es)

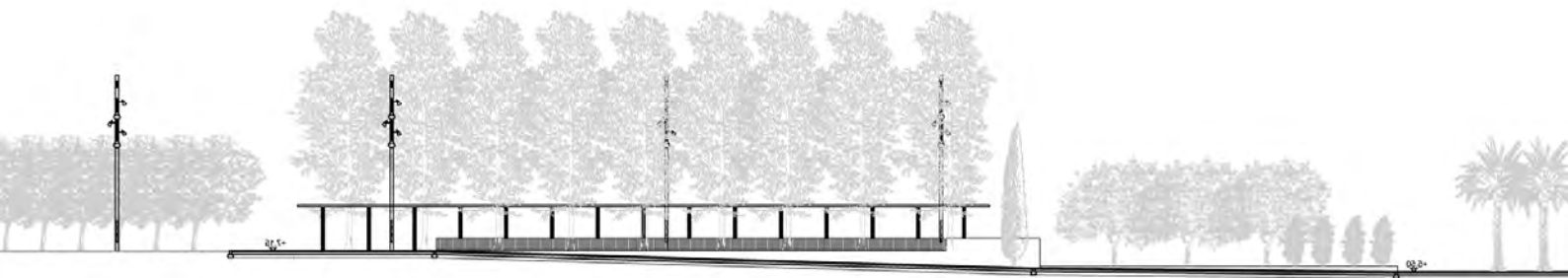
## Abstract

In this book, we address landscape architecture, from composition and construction, from the visual and the tectonic, from form and matter. With this, it is intended to configure a basic manual for the student who delves into the design of open spaces, inducing to approach both aspects -the formal definition and the constructive materialization- simultaneously, which is the distinctive approach of design disciplines like architecture. The book is divided into two sections dedicated to form and matter. The form section starts with a typological classification of green spaces. It continues with an outline of the general bases for forms definition and the compositional elements involved in the project of open spaces. Afterward, each element is analyzed separately: paths and places, walls and fences, plant material, and forms of the water. In the section dedicated to the matter, the construction elements for open spaces are studied in successive chapters: terrain modelling, selection of plants, paving and edging, irrigation and drainage systems, lighting, furniture, and microarchitecture. Both sections include an analysis of a wide selection of international reference projects

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## Presentation

The word landscape is currently used to describe very different realities which, often times, are worlds apart from its original meaning, which is linked to rural areas. The adjectives that usually precedes the word help clarify its meaning and broaden the conceptual framework in which such landscape is located. Thus, we can refer to interior landscapes, musical landscapes, artistic landscapes, poetic landscapes or human landscapes.

For this reason, this book by Javier Pérez Iguualada satisfies a first need, that of pinpointing the conceptual framework in which the concept of Landscape Architecture resides. A discipline that deals with the analysis and assessment of the environmental and formal (in the sense of “form”) material conditions of the landscape, but always focused towards the creation of open spaces through design and the implementation of specific techniques.

This book by Pérez Iguualada offer a broad and systematic vision of the different aspects that come together in Landscape Architecture, based on relevant examples of contemporary landscape culture.

The morphological aspects display the conceptual continuity of landscaping with the world of art and architecture, evidencing the fundamentally cultural nature of landscape design. Many of the best landscape designers have been painters or architects all at once, and so it would not make sense that the formal universe set in motion to design parks or gardens was different from the one used in artistic or architectural production, beyond the influence that the techniques that define it materially have on the form.

Hence the importance in this work of the role played by plant and mineral materials in the creation of the landscape. Both of them impose rules that arise from their own nature and from the techniques available for their production, transport, installation and maintenance.

This point, perhaps, is the one that most clearly manifests the multidisciplinary nature of landscaping or, more specifically, the necessary participation of different professionals dealing with the production and conservation of plant species, the environmental conditions and the necessary infrastructures to make possible the interventions involving the definition, modification or conservation of the landscape.

In this field, Javier Pérez Igualada once again shows the breadth of his knowledge, presenting the right examples for each of the concepts presented, so that this publication can help those who require useful training for professional practice, while also being appealing to those who approach it due to their interest in understanding the interpretive keys of contemporary landscape culture and the love of nature.

Vicente Mas Llorens

Professor of Architectural Projects.

Director of the School of Architecture of Valencia

## Introduction

Landscape design: Visual art or environmental science?

Landscape is currently one of the most disputed cultural and professional territories, from different disciplines related to analysis and design of the physical environment. According to Marc Treib, landscape design can be placed at the intersection of three main axis, each of which supplies different basic materials or content sources: the environmental axis, which includes ecology, topography, hydrology, horticulture and natural processes; the cultural axis, that integrates social and historical aspects; and the formal axis, whose basic elements are form, space, design patterns and materials (Treib, 2001).

Formal axis is predominant in the work of Burle Marx and in the architects of the American landscape school of the fifties, such as Thomas Church, Garrett Eckbo, Dan Kiley and Lawrence Halprin, who integrated in landscape design the visual and spatial discoveries of contemporary art and architecture.

The beginning of the prevalence of the environmental axis in landscape design can be associated with the publication in 1969 of *Design with Nature*, by Ian McHarg, who proposed a methodology based on a multidisciplinary analysis, and an emphasis on processes and overlay maps, that pretended to be scientific and also ethically superior. To McHarg, in fact, the question of design was already solved: the eighteenth century English landscape garden represented the correct way to design with nature, while Renaissance or Le Notre gardens were examples of submission of nature to man, an imposition of Euclidean geometry to landscape (Herrington, 2010).

In the 80s and early 90s, as a reaction to the then prevailing analytical and naturalistic approaches that stemmed from McHarg's ideas, some landscape architects, as Laurie Olin, Peter Walker and Martha Schwarz in the U.S., or West 8 in the Netherlands, decided to rely their work to a large degree on formal definition parameters.

More recently, in the work of architects such as George Hargreaves and Michael Van Valkenburgh, among others, formal (occasionally associated with Land-Art) and ecological aspects overlap as arguments of landscape design, feeding each other. The concept of Landscape Urbanism, proposed in the late 90s by Charles Waldheim and James Corner, relies also on the idea of a landscape design based at a time on the three thematic axis mentioned above: ecological, cultural and formal.<sup>3</sup>

This publication deals with landscape design from form and matter, composition and construction, and the visual and tectonic standpoints. This is intended to create an essential handbook for students who are exploring landscape design, encouraging them to delve into the aspects of formal definition and constructive materialization that represent the perspective of the architectural discipline in any field of the design project, be it buildings or open spaces.

The book is structured in two sections, devoted to form and matter respectively. The section focusing on form –after a typological classification of green spaces– outlines the general bases of the formal definition and the compositional elements that intervene in the design of open spaces, and each of these elements is analyzed separately: paths and places, walls and fences, plant material and forms of water.

In the section dedicated to matter, the elements through which open spaces are built are analyzed in successive chapters: the modelling of the land, the choice of plantations, pavements and curbs, irrigation and drainage systems, lighting, furniture and microarchitecture. Both sections conclude with the analysis of some projects.

However, to approach landscape design from form, a previous warning must be given. When we talk about forms in architecture we still have Le Corbusier's definition: "L'architecture c'est le jeu savant, correct et magnifique des formes sous la lumière". But nature lacks the formal stability of architecture.

If we place ourselves in the territory of landscape, inside of that adjectived architecture called in English "landscape architecture", things are a bit different, for two main reasons: forms are essentially horizontal and, furthermore, they change over time. But this is precisely what makes the forms of the landscape unique, which inevitably seduces us every summer, every autumn, every winter and every spring.

J.P.I.

3. WALDHEIM, Charles, ed. *The landscape urbanism reader*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006.

# FORM

Types of open spaces

Formal bases and compositional elements

Compositional patterns of surfaces

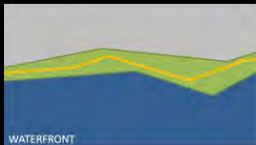
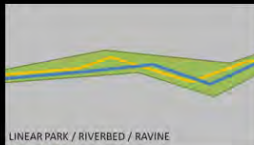
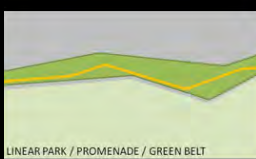
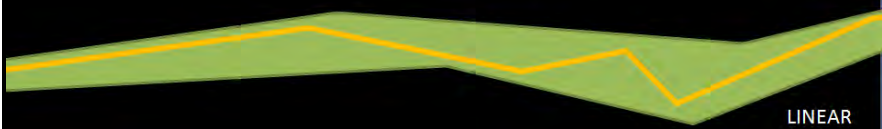
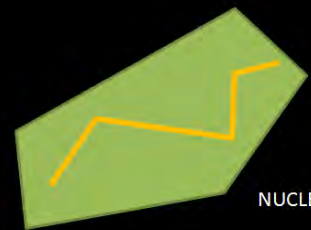
Paths and places

Walls and limits

Forms of water

Plant material composition

# SHAPE OF GREEN SPACES



URBAN

URBAN EDGE

EXTRA-URBAN

# TYPES OF OPEN SPACES

## Shape of green spaces

Green spaces can be classified in many different ways. From an environmental standpoint, classifications based on the characteristics of plant communities, climate or geomorphology are proposed, distinguishing between natural spaces, anthropized spaces or urban green spaces.

From the point of view of urban planning legislation, green spaces are mostly regarded as public spaces or facilities, differentiating between general systems (reserves and protected natural parks) and, in urban areas, green areas which are common in development planning, distinguishing between parks, gardens or play areas, depending on the surface and the intended use for the same.

In this chapter we will study the types of green spaces from a different perspective: that of their general morphology as open spaces.

The approach to the landscape from the form is what characterizes design disciplines such as architecture and urban planning. From this perspective, three basic forms in green spaces can be identified: nuclear, linear and limitless.

Green spaces with a nuclear shape are those whose surface forms an isolated patch, which can be either small or large. These spaces are similar to the concept of patch that Forman establishes for landscape ecology (Dramstad, Olson, Forman, 1996), although here we will analyse them from the point of view of form.

Linear green spaces are those that form a linear belt, with a greater or lesser surface or width and a variable layout. They are both a longitudinally developed surface and a path. Furthermore, they can also be similar to another element of Forman's model: the corridor.

Lastly, limitless green spaces are those in which the extension of the same is not associated with a surface. They are interventions in the landscape, which are not related to transformations of the natural landscape.



Urban nuclear green space. Parque Central, Valencia.



Nuclear green spaces of the urban edge. Bois de Boulogne and Vincennes. Paris.

## Nuclear green spaces

Nuclear or concentrated green spaces can be classified, depending on their location, into three groups: urban, urban edge and extra-urban.

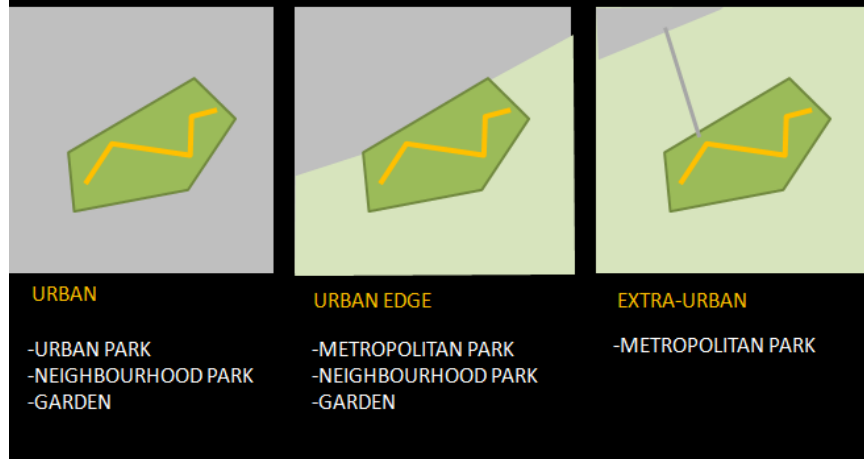
Urban nuclear green spaces comprise those spaces that are surrounded on all sides by consolidated urban fabric. Hence, these spaces are the classic urban parks, which depending on their function and surface area can be either central parks (serving the entire city), district parks, neighbourhood parks (serving a neighbourhood) or gardens.

Concentrated green spaces on the urban edge are those located on the city limits with the surrounding territory. In most cases these include the great parks that arose on the limits of compact cities, due to a lack of sufficient space to create them inside, such as the Bois de Boulogne and Vincennes in Paris, or the Jardines del Real in Valencia.

Concentrated extra-urban green spaces are those parks that are separated from the limits of the consolidated urban fabric, to which they are connected only through transport infrastructure (paths, metro, rail or soft mobility routes). They comprise large metropolitan parks, which serve the central city and its satellite nuclei or the existing protected natural spaces outside the city.

## SHAPE OF GREEN SPACES + LOCATION

### NUCLEAR



Nuclear green spaces. Types depending on their location.



## Linear green spaces

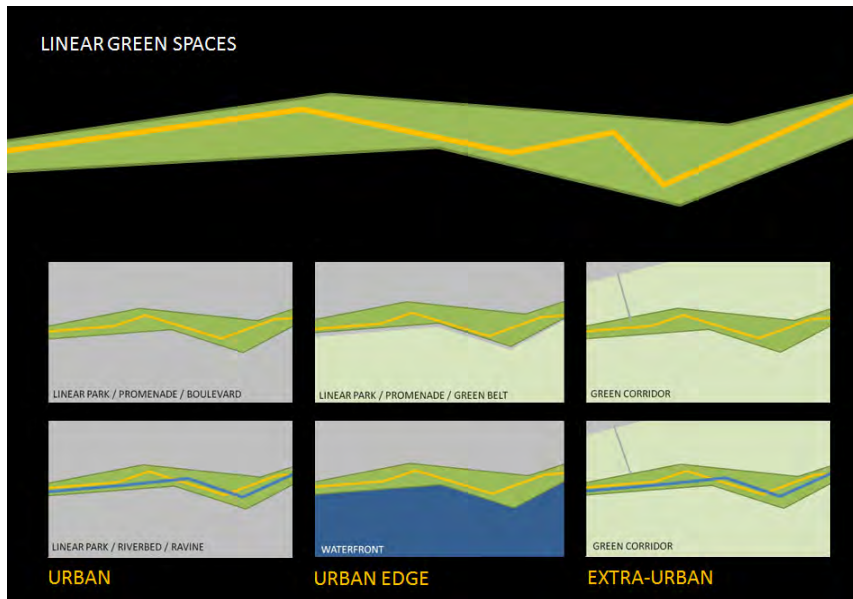
Linear green spaces can also be divided into three types, depending on their location: urban, urban edge and extra-urban. Furthermore, within these groups, we can distinguish between the linear green spaces that are associated with water and those that are not.

Linear urban green spaces comprise those spaces that are surrounded on all sides by consolidated urban fabric. Namely the linear parks that cross the cities, such as promenades, boulevards, riverbanks or ravines.

Linear urban edge green spaces are those located on the city limits, next to the surrounding territory, so that one of its sides is in contact with the urban fabric and the other is open to the countryside or to water. They are linear parks, green belts or promenades on coastlines.

Linear extra-urban green spaces are those that run through the land outside the urban limits, forming green corridors that can also be associated with waterways (ravines and rivers).

Linear green spaces are key in landscape design, since they are the quintessential connecting elements which allow concentrated green spaces to be linked together to jointly form an integrated system of open spaces.



Linear green spaces Types depending on their location and the presence of water.



Jardín del Turia, Valencia.

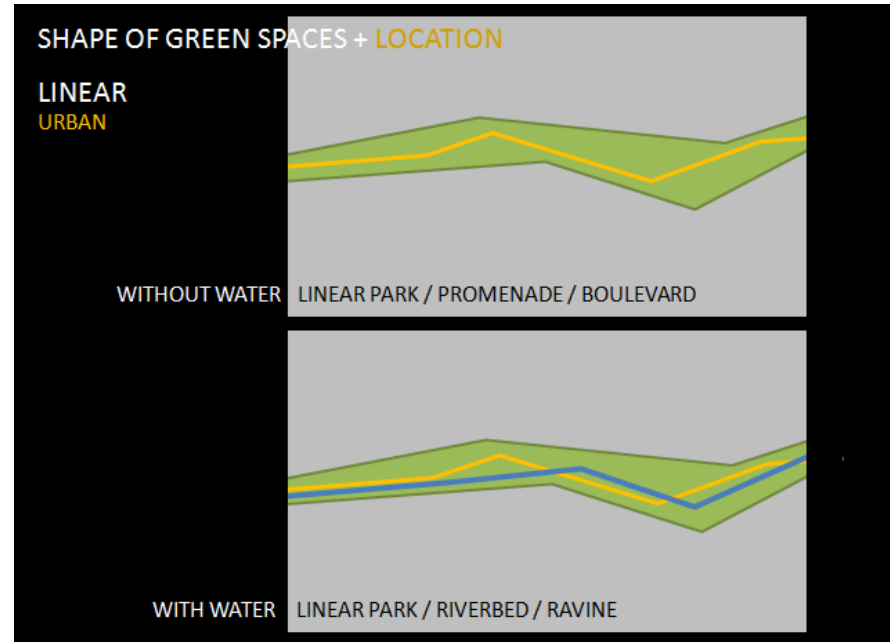


Longgang City Masterplan, Sheng Zen (China). Groundlab LU, 2008.

As we have pointed out, **urban linear green spaces** are belts of variable width that cross urban fabrics and are surrounded on both sides by them. Its layout can be rectilinear, curvilinear or polygonal, and its width can be constant, as in a boulevard or tree-lined promenade, or variable shape, as in a linear park.

Furthermore, within linear urban green spaces we can distinguish between green spaces with and without water, such as permanent watercourses; riverbeds, or temporary ones; ravines. The surface of “dry” linear green spaces is usually at the same level as that of the urban fabric they cross, while linear green spaces with water usually display marked differences in level with respect to the city, due to the position of the rivers and fluvial channels, whose bed is always below the inhabited areas.

The first linear urban green spaces of a certain size were tree-lined boulevards of the 19th century and, later, the Olmsted parkway system, were the projected trace, rectilinear or with smooth curves, was the prevailing one. But when urban design begins to be conceived from the landscape, it is the shape of natural elements such as rivers and ravines that guides and determines the urban morphology.



Linear urban green spaces. Types.

Meanwhile, **urban-edge linear green spaces** located on the limits of the city with the surrounding territory are in contact with the urban fabric only on one of their sides, since, on the other side, the peri-urban territory or the body of water is located, in the case of river edges, lacustrine plains or coastal areas.

Perimeter linear parks have occasionally been associated with the idea of a green ring or belt, that is, a belt that limits urban growth, marking a limit between the city and the countryside that, often times, has ended up being exceeded over time.

Linear urban edge green spaces play a particularly important role when they accompany a ring path along its perimeter route to the urban fabric. In this situation, continuous linear green spaces make it possible to mitigate the negative environmental impact of the infrastructure (noise, pollution, lights), both with respect to the urban fabric and the peri-urban land.

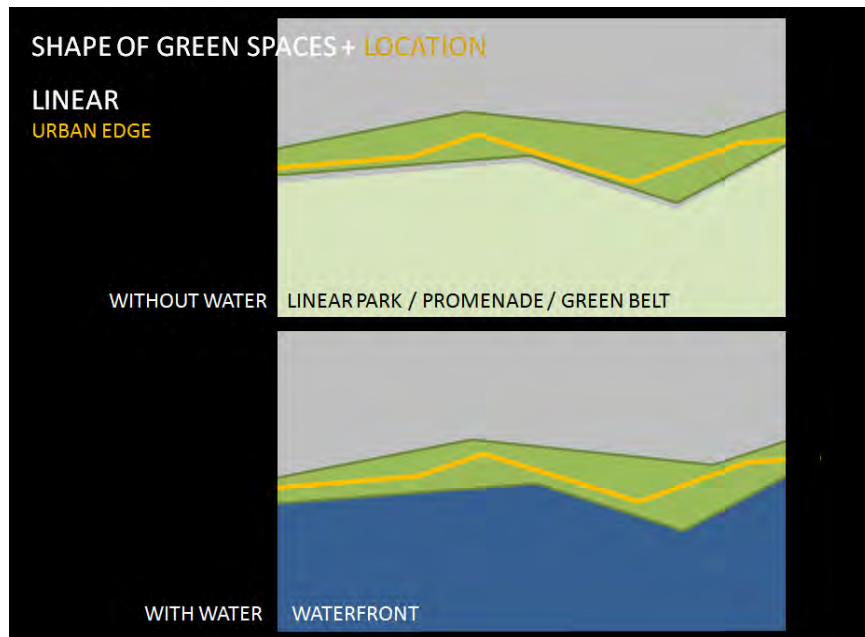
The other type of linear urban edge green spaces are, as pointed out, those linked to water fronts, which appear when the city is located next to a lake, a wide river or next to the sea, such as promenades of the coastal fronts.



River bank of the Fluvià river, Besalu (Gerona).



Ronda de S'Agaró path. Castell-Platja d'Aro. RGA Arquitectes, 1999-2001.



Linear green spaces of the urban edge.

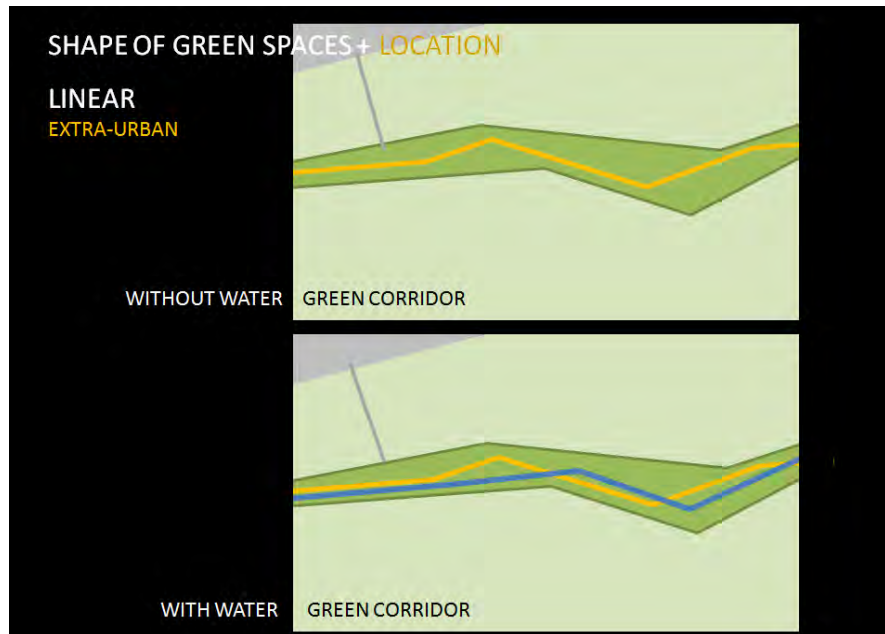


Proposal for the River Turia Nature Park. Landar, 2007.

The third group of linear green spaces, depending on their location with respect to the urban fabric, are the **extra-urban linear green spaces**, which are those that run through the territory, outside the city limits, creating green corridors that are generally linked to watercourses (ravines and rivers), although they can also be linear green spaces linked to transport infrastructure. These linear extra-urban green spaces are not usually set up as public parks in the sense of an urban context, but rather are considered as spaces associated with the natural surroundings.

River banks and ravines are linear extra-urban green spaces associated with the irrigation and drainage of the territory, which can be arranged as natural parks or preserved in their original state. Due to their continuous nature, they play a key role as natural ecological corridors for flora and fauna.

The extra-urban green corridors associated with transport infrastructures (paths, railways) have a different nature depending on whether the infrastructure is in operation or in disuse. In the first case, the main role of the linear green space is usually to mitigate the environmental impact of the infrastructure. While, in the second case, it is a green corridor in its own right.



Linear extra-urban green spaces.

## Limitless green spaces: interventions in the landscape

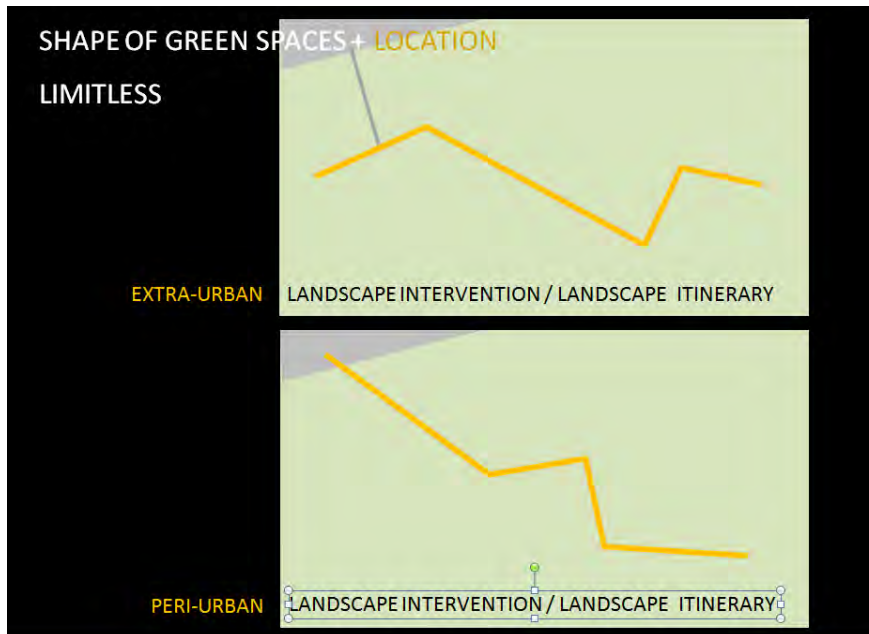
Interventions in the landscape do not always entail a transformation of its surface, as it can be limited to setting up itineraries that enter and run through it without modifying it. These landscape itineraries can be classified as peri-urban or extra-urban, depending on their degree of continuity with the urban pedestrian routes or axes.

In short, interventions in the landscape seek to revitalise it by making it possible to access it. Such an access to enjoy the landscape requires, in order not to distort it, a careful design of the elements that make it up, both in terms of layout and materials.

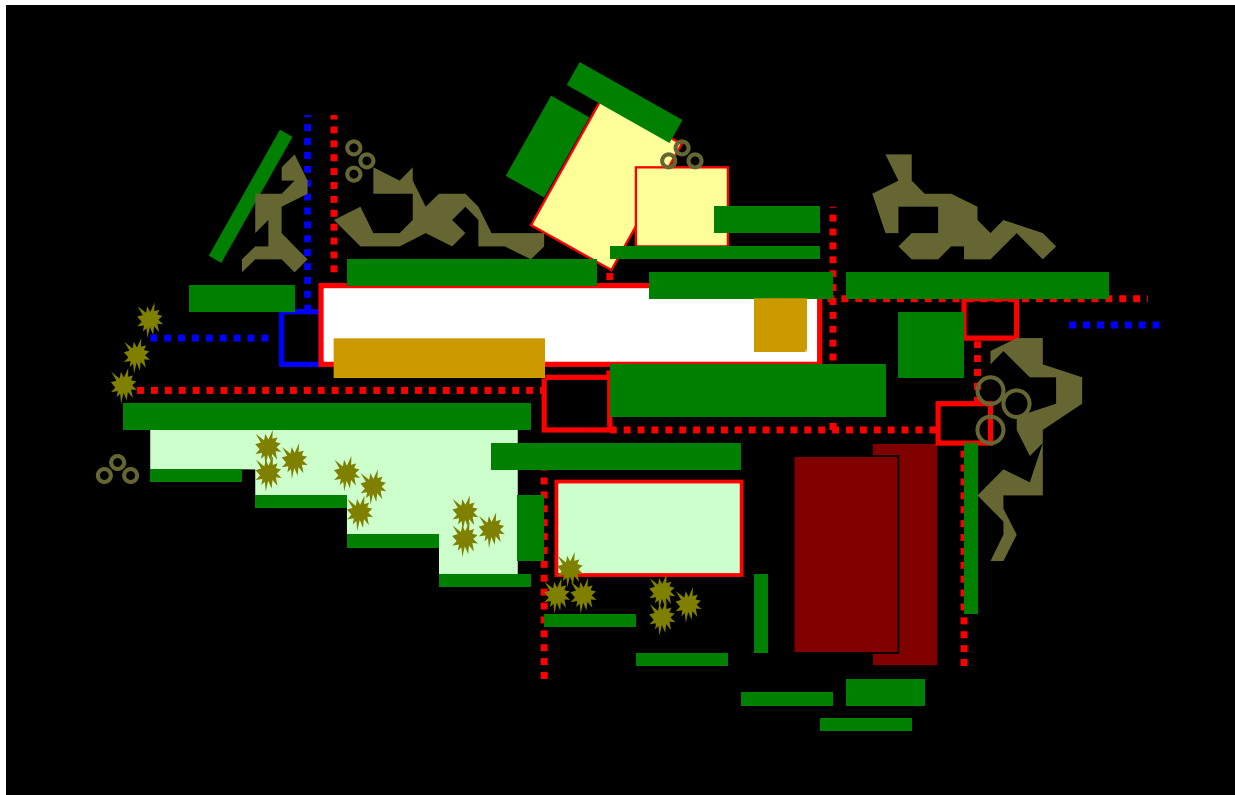
A good example of this careful design of the intervention in the landscape is the environmental restoration action carried out in the Tudela-Culip area, in Cap de Creus, which involved the demolition of the existing buildings of an old vacation club (Club-Med), bringing the land back to its original state, but incorporating a number of paths and signs that allow you to enter a rocky coast area of singular beauty, allowing it to be contemplated and, in a certain way, amplifying its aesthetic potential as a natural space.



Intervention in Tudela-Culip area, Nature Park Cap de Creus (Girona). M.Franch, J. T. Ardévol, 2010.



Limitless green spaces: interventions in the extra-urban and peri-urban landscape.



Composition: space + mobility + plant material + architectural elements. Extension of Ayora garden, Valencia. J. Pérez Igualada.

# FORMAL BASES AND COMPOSITION ELEMENTS

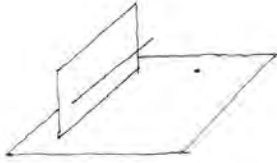
## Landscape design as visual art: form and composition

This chapter focuses on exploring the bases in which the elements that make up the formal axis in open space design are structured.

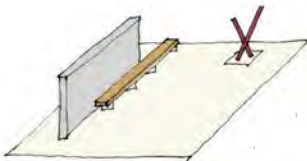
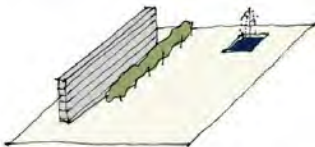
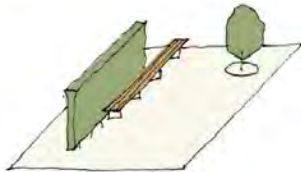
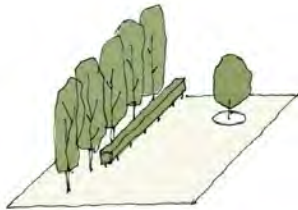
The creation of forms occurs differently in artistic disciplines, such as painting or sculpture, and in design disciplines such as architecture or landscape. In the former, the artist directly creates the forms and materializes the work, usually with his own hands. In the latter, the author creates shapes indirectly, through a design or project, in which various collaborators can intervene. The design is not the work, but a tool to be able to build it, a process in which other additional agents intervene. The project is, in short, an instrument that makes it possible to tackle the creation of large forms (a building, a park), whose materialization is not within the reach of a single person.

Both direct artistic creation and indirect creation through the design are modalities of the visual arts, hence they share a basic approach: both study the elements of form and the abstract principles from which these elements are organized to obtain the desired effects.

It must be taken into account, in any case, that the Vitruvian triad of *firmitas*, *utilitas* and *venustas* is applicable to the design of open spaces, as in architecture. Unlike what happens with painting or sculpture, in landscaping design shapes are not defined solely to create artistic objects, but are elements that must be suitable simultaneously from an aesthetic, functional and constructive point of view.



Conceptual design elements: point, line and plane.



Line, point and plane as visual elements.

## Forms. Conceptual and visual elements of design: attributes and compositional role

Point, line, plane, and volume are primary geometric concepts: they do not exist as shapes in the physical world, but are mathematical abstractions. They are also the conceptual elements that underlie any design (Wong, 1979).

But designers cannot work with concepts, they need visual elements. These visual elements are real objects in the physical world, which have **attributes**: a specific shape, size, color and texture.

Thus, a fountain, a sculpture or a singular tree are forms that can be recognized as points in a composition. A hedge, low wall, or bench are forms that are visually perceived as lines, and a wall, tall hedge, or set of trees are forms that are perceived as vertical planes.

In the design of open spaces, as visual art, the precise definition of the visual elements of the design, that is the forms and their attributes of size, color and texture, which are generally associated with its material nature, occupies a central place.

These shapes can play various **compositional roles** in the design of open spaces. Kevin Lynch, in *The image of the city*, distinguished five elements in the visual form of the city: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. Adapting this classification to the visual form of green spaces, we will identify five possible compositional roles associated with forms:

Path: linear routes that connect places

Edge: linear element that marks a discontinuity on the surface or in space.

Patch: Mass, stain or volume, identifiable as a differentiated element.

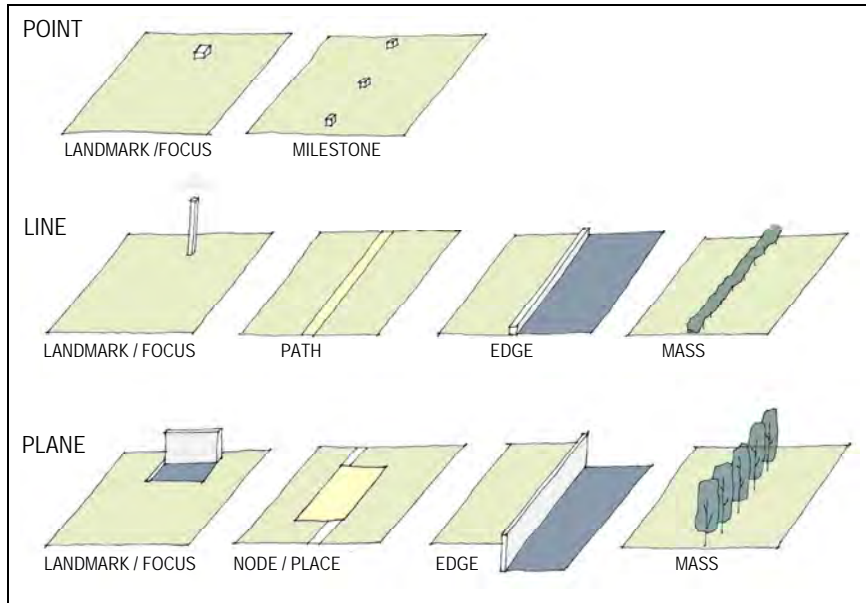
Place: Node, surface element where paths converge.

Landmark: Strategic or referent point, singular or serial.

The concept of patch (stain), borrowed from landscape ecology by Forman and Godron, complements that of place (node), since it allows differentiating between elements that imply a void (place) and those that designate the fulfilled one (mass). In this classification, the district by Lynch does not appear, since it is equivalent to a large size patch.

We will now analyze the relationship between the basic forms (point, line and plane) and the compositional roles that they can assume in the project. The range of possible compositional roles varies for each of these forms, as we shall see.





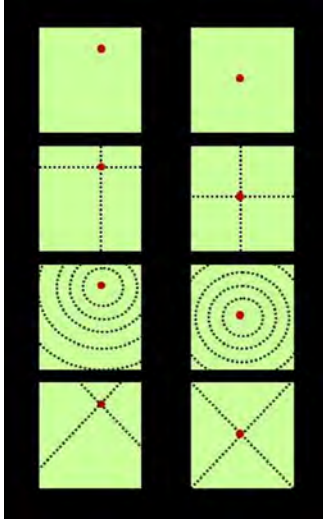
Form as line, point and plane: possible roles as a composition element.

## Point

As a conceptual element, a point is a dimensionless entity: it has no width or length and indicates a position in space or an intersection between two lines. As a visual element, on the other hand, a shape is perceived as a point when its size is comparatively tiny concerning the frame or ground. This shape can be regular or irregular, large or small, since its perception as a point is relative: it depends on the field that we consider.

As for the compositional roles, those usually assigned to punctual forms are those of landmark or milestone. As a landmark, punctual forms can induce significant transformations by placing them in one position or another within a particular visual field.

These transformations become evident if we draw what we can call lines of force generated by the point, as concentric circles around the point or straight lines that intersect at the point, orthogonally or obliquely. A point located in the center of gravity of the ground implies stability, metrical regularity concerning the ground edges, and symmetrical equilibrium. On the other hand, an eccentric point position implies instability, as asymmetric interactions appear with respect to the center and the ground edges.



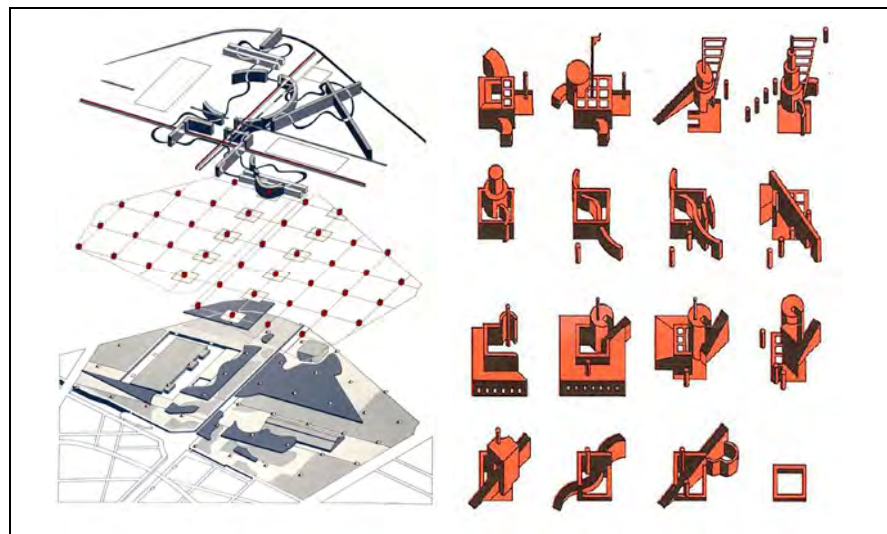
Point in a ground.

The characterization of a shape as a point is relative, as it depends on the scale of the frame: the same shape can be perceived as a point in the general composition when the frame is large and as a volume if we consider a small scale frame. An example of this can be found in the *folies* at La Villette Park by Bernard Tschumi, which from a closer view are buildings designed as cubic volumes of different shapes while, at the same time, as a whole, they are just red dots with a compositional role as milestones, structuring the park's general plan as nodes of a virtual grid.

### Line

Conceptually, a line is a set of points, the result of the movement of a point, and has length but no width. As a visual element, however, a shape is perceived as a line when the length is its dominant dimension.

The parameters that can be used to classify linear shapes are thickness, trace, contour, and slope. In terms of thickness, linear shapes can be narrow or wide. As for the trace, we can distinguish between lines with a rectilinear trace, a curvilinear trace, or a broken trace. Regarding the contour, we can distinguish between lines with regular or irregular edges. Finally, due to their inclination with respect to a horizontal surface, linear forms can be vertical, horizontal, or oblique.



La Villette Park, Paris. Bernard Tschumi, 1982.

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