

CREATIVE SPACES

Urban culture and marginality in Latin America

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2. The interstitial spaces of urban sprawl: unpacking the marginal suburban geography of Santiago de Chile

Cristian Silva

The existing literature on urban sprawl has mainly focused on its built-up dimension. This is to say that it has generally overlooked the emergence of a marginal, undefined, undeveloped and apparently inert geography composed of ‘interstitial spaces’ that play a less visible but crucial role in suburban transformations. Planners’ sustained concern with housing shortages has focused attention on built-up space leading to less attention being paid to the interstices.¹

In this context, interstitial spaces destabilise institutional orthodoxies as they emerge as outcomes of less controlled processes in planning with unregulated (alternative) modes of social appropriation and unexplored environmental values. Although somehow invisible, socio-spatially marginalised, delinked from the urban fabric, apparently inert, abandoned, undeveloped, and physically deteriorated, they ultimately offer an alternative point of entry into the study of (sub)urbanisation.² This is particularly relevant considering the quantitative significance of these spaces, and their socio-environmental dimensions, which emerge when they are occupied by marginalised groups (such as the homeless).³

Suburban interstitial spaces can take the form of abandoned industrial zones, areas of countryside, agricultural plots, landfills, brownfield sites, security buffers, abandoned buildings, closed military facilities, derelict public spaces and underused land, geographically restricted spaces, and others. While fundamentally different, then, they are all significant as elements that increase the spatial complexity of suburban areas and therefore demand new political,

1 A. Piorr, J. Ravetz and I. Tosics (eds.), *Peri-Urbanisation in Europe. Towards European Policies to Sustain Urban-Rural Futures* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2011).

2 N. Phelps and C. Silva, ‘Mind the gaps! A research agenda for urban interstices’, *Urban Studies*, 55 (2017): 1203–22. ,

3 A. Mubi Brighenti, *Urban Interstices: The Aesthetics and The Politics of The In-between* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

C. Silva, ‘The interstitial spaces of urban sprawl: unpacking the marginal suburban geography of Santiago de Chile’, in N.H.D. Geraghty and A.L. Massidda (eds.), *Creative Spaces: Urban Culture and Marginality in Latin America* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2019), pp. 55–84. CC-BY-NC-ND license.

economic and socio-environmental investigations into what these spaces are, and what they could be.

Although the presence of 'interstitial spaces' is clear, their definition is conceptually ambiguous as the debate on suburbanisation is still controversial in terms of values and impacts.⁴ This is partly because of difficulties in delimiting an urban area, but mainly due to the tension between differing ideological interpretations which situate urban sprawl either within wider narratives of economic growth or of socio-environmental sustainability. While these spaces are inherently uncertain or ambiguous, it has nevertheless been proposed that they offer alternatives for changing residential trends and the promotion of more multifunctional landscapes.⁵ Additionally, urban sprawl is recognised as a dynamic process of urban development where different expressions of suburbanisation can take place even within the same geographical area.⁶ With this in mind, interstitial spaces can also be marginalised for a period of time until they become attractive for further (sub)urbanisation, or simply formalised as controlled spaces in formal plans and regulations.

Despite the differences to which I previously referred, the consensus raised from morphological studies describes urban sprawl as characterised by land fragmentation and environmental discontinuity,⁷ precisely because of the interstitial spaces that lie between developments that indirectly (and almost undetectably) influence suburbanisation at different levels.⁸ This paradoxical situation has previously been described by Rodrigo Vidal, who stated that cities are composed of urbanised fragments and an inevitable set of inter-fragmentary (and divergent) spaces.⁹ Such an understanding broadens the agenda of urban studies, as that which we understand as the *built environment* is not only defined by what is done (or built) but also that which necessarily remains following apparently well-controlled processes for the 'production of

- 4 P. Gunnar Roe and I.-L. Saglie, 'Minicities in suburbia – a model for urban sustainability?', *Form Akademisk-Research Journal of Design and Design Education*, 4 (2) (2011): 38–58; E. Charmes and R. Keil, 'The politics of post-suburban densification in Canada and France', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 39 (3) (2015): 581–602.
- 5 N. Phelps, *Sequel to Suburbia: Glimpses of America's Post-suburban Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015); R. Bruegmann, *Sprawl: A Compact History* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- 6 N. Phelps, *An Anatomy of Sprawl. Planning and Politics in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2012).
- 7 L. Inostroza et al., 'Urban sprawl and fragmentation in Latin America: a dynamic quantification and characterization of spatial patterns', *Journal of Environmental Management*, 115 (2013): 87–97; H. Romero and F. Ordenes, 'Emerging urbanization in the Southern Andes: environmental impacts of urban sprawl in Santiago de Chile on the Andean Piedmont', *Mountain Research and Development*, 3 (2004): 197–201.
- 8 R. Sousa Matos, 'Urban landscape: interstitial spaces', *Landscape Review*, 1 (2009): 61–71.
- 9 R. Vidal, 'Fragmentos en tensión: elementos para una teoría de la fragmentación urbana', *Revista Geográfica de Valparaíso*, 30 (1999): 149–80.

the space'.¹⁰ This is to say that formal planning processes which aim to define concrete spaces for specific functions (commercial, residential, infrastructural, and so on) are inevitably accompanied by a residual dimension in which alternative processes of production, appropriation and significance can flourish. On this basis, it is possible to assert that urban sprawl is unconsciously defined (or created) by that which is apparently marginal to it: *interstitial spaces*. By extension, I would also suggest that 'interstitial spaces' can also become sites of creativity through their ability to host alternative modes of occupation, due to their still unexplored ecological contents, and their diverse spatial configurations. It should be noted that this argument neatly coincides with the description of 'marginality' provided in the Introduction to this volume (pp. 21–2), and many of the subsequent chapters explore the 'creative' processes I have just described. Within this chapter, however, it is space itself which is foregrounded, and therefore the central questions which I seek to answer are: what are these interstitial spaces and how do they emerge? Are interstitial spaces mere marginal outcomes of less controlled processes in planning? Or do they have an influence on suburban transformations?

By highlighting the significance of the built environment from its interstitial condition, and the production of non-urbanised space through planning regimes of control, my argument is that interstitial spaces provide an alternative entrance into the study of urban sprawl from its specifically marginal dimension. Therefore, in this chapter, I first revise the debate on urban sprawl to confirm the lack of attention – including different conceptual approaches – to what I call 'interstitial space' in order more fully to account for the whole spectrum of suburban residues. Secondly, I discuss the relative marginal character of the interstices considering such spaces from different planning and socio-environmental perspectives. Finally, I empirically illustrate the interstitiality of Santiago de Chile in order to unpack the series of determinants that explain their presence and demonstrate that, although marginalised, they are fundamental to formal planning rationalities as active elements of Santiago's suburban transformation. I conclude that suburban sprawl is equally composed of both built-up areas and suburban interstices, and that interstitial spaces only become marginal in the light of hegemonic orthodoxies in planning, mainly driven by the housing debate.

The interstitial dimension of urban sprawl

Urban sprawl has been largely discussed as a multifaceted phenomenon closely related to issues of suburbanisation, (post)suburbanisation, peri-urbanisation

10 N. Brenner and S. Elden, 'Henri Lefebvre on state, space, territory', *International Political Sociology*, 3 (2009): 353–77.

and fragmentation of fringe/belt areas.¹¹ Although there is still an open debate in terms of the origins, impacts and ideological meanings of urban sprawl,¹² current scales of suburbanisation describe new patterns of regional fragmentation, socio-spatial diversification, dispersion of workplaces, functional self-sufficiency, and the emergence of more polycentric landscapes.¹³ What is clear is that urban sprawl is a continuous process of urban transformation which functions more like a verb than a noun. This has been reinforced by several scholars who resist the idea that sprawl is a 'static' phenomenon, arguing that one of the main constraints in our understanding and analysis is that sprawl is frequently viewed as an endless and unchanging landscape of low-density residential neighbourhoods which experience pollution, environmental fragmentation, car dependency and a lack of services.¹⁴ Such theorists now attempt to focus contemporary debates on the transformation of metropolitan areas by considering urban sprawl as a continually changing process – which can even illustrate different dynamics within the same region – that shapes an independent geographical unit that deserves its own planning approach.¹⁵ On this basis, urban sprawl emerges as a permanent scenario for innovations in land-use governance, infrastructure and socio-environmental sustainability that reconceptualises the urban–rural interface beyond traditional dichotomous divisions between suburbia and the countryside, and planning orthodoxies based on bi-dimensional conceptions of land-use that include land fragmentation as a value.¹⁶

This degree of fragmentation is highly defined by different empty and undeveloped spaces between built-up areas, that which I have referred to here as 'interstices'. Although these spaces determine the physical discontinuity of sprawl, they are nevertheless insufficient to classify a sprawling area as the

- 11 G. Galster et al., 'Wrestling sprawl to the ground: defining and measuring an elusive concept', *Housing Policy Debate*, 4 (2001): 681–717.
- 12 Phelps, *An Anatomy of Sprawl*; M. Polidoro et al., 'Environmental impacts of urban sprawl in Londrina, Paraná, Brazil', *Journal of Urban and Environmental Engineering*, 2 (2011): 73–83; Romero and Ordenes, 'Emerging urbanization in the Southern Andes'.
- 13 N. Phelps and F. Wu, *International Perspectives on Suburbanization. A Postsuburban World?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); M. Burger and E. Meijers, 'Form follows function? Linking morphological and functional polycentricity', *Urban Studies*, 5 (2012): 1127–49.
- 14 M.E. Ducci and M. Gonzalez, 'Anatomía de la expansión de Santiago, 1991–2000', in A. Galetovic and P. Jordán (eds.), *Santiago. Dónde estamos y hacia dónde vamos* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Públicos), pp. 125–46.
- 15 A. Wandl et al., 'Understanding the planning of open-spaces in territories in-between: Dupuy's network urbanism approach applied to areas in-between urban and rural', *RSA European Conference: 'Networked Regions and Cities in Times of Fragmentation: Developing Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Places'*, Delft, The Netherlands, 13–16 May, 2012 (Regional Studies Association, 2012).
- 16 N. Gallent and D. Shaw, 'Spatial planning, area action plans and the rural-urban fringe', *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 5 (2007): 617–38.

latter also depends on other factors related to land fragmentation.¹⁷ Empirical studies suggest that the 'sprawl index'¹⁸ is influenced by interstitial spaces but also territorial boundaries, the scale of analysis and historical patterns of urban growth,¹⁹ which means that an area currently labelled as 'sprawl' may not be so in coming years, or conversely, compact suburban villages can become sprawling in the future. In this context, the series of interstitial spaces are also a matter of uncertainty as what is currently seen as 'undeveloped' may not be so over time.

Beyond its instrumental relevance, the literature on urban sprawl hardly acknowledges the presence of these supposedly marginal spaces, the interstices. If considered at all, they appear as conceptually ambiguous, functionally useless, or as spatial leftovers, simple political residues of uncontrolled processes of urban expansion with unknown values. Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, for instance, argue that many of these spaces are outcomes of 'splintering urbanism', by-products of heavy infrastructures of connectivity that create marginal interstices with unexplored potentials to reconfigure the urban fabric. These are the cases of the spaces between (or under) motorways, railways, electric lines, or security buffers around industrial and military facilities, for instance (fig. 2.1).²⁰ Somehow, they lie behind planning priorities or are simply difficult to integrate considering their property regimes, infrastructural conditions, scale, location, physical restrictions and the multiple political forces involved in their reconversion.²¹

Within fringe/belts areas, interstices appear as part of a complex patchwork of built-up and unbuilt lands that coexist with countryside and agricultural functions.²² Beyond acknowledging their presence, the literature on these spaces is fragmentary and somewhat erratic. It refers to differing sorts of undeveloped/vacant lands but their definitions appear to be contradictory or only useful for

- 17 A. Nelson, 'Comparing states with and without growth management analysis based on indicators with policy implications', *Land Use Policy*, 16 (2) (1999): 121–7; R. Bruegmann, *Sprawl: A Compact History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- 18 The 'Sprawl Index' is an indicator for measuring the degree of physical, spatial and functional dispersion of a suburban area. It helps to distinguish 'urban sprawl' from 'urban growth' (and other patterns of urban expansion), including at least eight variables: *Density, Continuity, Concentration, Clustering, Centrality, Nuclearity, Mixed Uses and Proximity*. Other empirical studies consider land consumption, travel miles and environmental fragmentation that determine different levels of 'compactness' or 'dispersion'. See Galster et al., 'Wrestling sprawl to the ground'.
- 19 G. Hess et al., 'Just what is sprawl, anyway', *Carolina Planning*, 26 (2) (2001): 11–26; L. Inostroza et al., 'Urban sprawl and fragmentation in Latin America'.
- 20 S. Graham and S. Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition* (London: Routledge, 2001).
- 21 C. Silva, 'The infrastructural lands of urban sprawl: planning potentials and political perils', *Town Planning Review*, 88 (2017): 233–56.
- 22 M. Hebbert, 'Urban sprawl and urban planning in Japan', *Town Planning Review*, 57 (2) (1986): 141.



Figure 2.1. An infrastructural interstice between Cerrillos and Pedro Aguirre Cerda communes. This is a boundary area composed of high-speed motorways, a railway line, derelict spaces, a canal and electric lines (author's photo, May 2014).

a narrow array that does not recognise the varied geographical spectrum of the interstices. This conceptual constraint determines that pieces of countryside, farmlands, brownfields, landfills, geographical restrictions, speculation lands, security buffers, infrastructural areas, industrial facilities and others, cannot be elements of a coherent geography, methodologically simplified for further analysis.

One approach to this suburban interstitiality is proposed by Thomas Sievert with his conception of 'in-between space'. Although etymologically speaking 'in-between' suggests empty or underused spaces between urbanised areas, Sievert actually uses the term to describe the entire suburban landscape as a territory located between the consolidated city and the open countryside – which is indeed the urban sprawl itself. Understood in this way, the term becomes ambiguous and redundant, unable precisely to describe suburban interstitiality.²³ Another approach is the idea of the 'undeveloped space'. Although highly debatable, 'undeveloped' – or 'undevelopable' – space, refers to physical handicaps that impede urbanisation. Some farmlands, hills and industrial plots fit into this category.²⁴ The term 'vacant lands' describes

23 T. Sieverts, *Cities without Cities: An Interpretation of the Zwischenstadt* (Routledge, 2003); Wandl et al., 'Understanding the planning of open-spaces in territories-in-between'.

24 H. Wolman et al., 'The fundamental challenge in measuring sprawl: which land should be considered?', *The Professional Geographer*, 1 (2005): 94–105; D. Theobald, 'Land-use

industrial obsolescence and spaces often reclaimed for regeneration or infilling policies. It illustrates infrastructural decay, 'brownfields' or simply abandoned industrial facilities.²⁵ 'Open spaces' are also discussed as gaps in the urban fabric, both those which are integrated and those which are marginalised. Nevertheless, the term generally has positive connotations related to the socio-environmental benefits they provide as social venues, and the positive function they serve in reducing the impacts of natural disasters.²⁶

The notion of 'wildscape' also appears in the literature as a term which describes undeveloped areas that host some kind of wildlife. The term is employed in a broad sense and refers to abandoned spaces which contain very different expressions of flora and fauna; even those found in abandoned buildings, ruins or unattended facilities where the city's forces of control are absent and spontaneous natural activities can flourish.²⁷ Despite the seemingly negative connotations invoked by the term, 'wastelands' similarly refers to abandoned, marginalised and forgotten spaces characterised by exuberant flora and fauna with aesthetic and ecological benefits. Referring to these spaces, Matthew Gandy coined the term 'marginalia' to describe wastelands that offer strong sensorial stimulation, define their own aesthetic character, and which feature spatial flexibility and retain some material fragments of the past.²⁸ 'Non-urbanised-areas' (NUAs) is another term which refers to the ecological attributes of marginal and undeveloped spaces. It highlights their ecological contents, biochemical and socio-economic properties that support narratives of sustainable development and ecological modernisation. It includes farmlands and any possible expression of green infrastructure.²⁹

From a morphological viewpoint, 'inter-fragmentary space' refers to any undeveloped space between urbanised areas. It is derived from Vidal's definition of cities as agglomerations of 'fragments' that presuppose the presence of 'inter-

dynamics beyond the American urban fringe', *Geographical Review*, 3 (2001): 544–64.

- 25 K. Foo et al., 'Reprint of the production of urban vacant land: relational placemaking in Boston, MA neighborhoods', *Cities*, 40 (2014): 175–82; J.O. Ige and T.A. Atanda, 'Urban vacant land and spatial chaos in Ogbomosho North local government, Oyo State, Nigeria', *Global Journal of Human-Social Science Research*, 2 (2013): 28–36.
- 26 A. M. Barkasi et al., 'Urban soils and vacant land as stormwater resources' *World Environmental and Water Resources Congress 2012: Crossing Boundaries* (2012): 569–79; T. Kurz and C. Baudains, 'Biodiversity in the front yard: an investigation of landscape preference in a domestic urban context', *Environment and Behavior*, 2 (2012): 166–96.
- 27 A. Jorgensen and R. Keenan, *Urban Wildscapes* (London: Routledge, 2012); J. Kitha and A. Lyth, 'Urban wildscapes and green spaces in Mombasa and their potential contribution to climate change adaptation and mitigation' *Environment and Urbanization*, 1 (2011): 251–65.
- 28 M. Gandy, 'Marginalia: aesthetics, ecology, and urban wastelands', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 6 (2013): 1301–16.
- 29 P. La Greca et al., 'Agricultural and green infrastructures: the role of non-urbanised areas for eco-sustainable planning in a metropolitan region', *Environmental Pollution*, 8 (2011): 2193–2202.

fragmentary spaces'.³⁰ On the one hand, these spaces are not necessarily marginal as they can be fully connected to the urban fabric. On the other hand, they become marginal if these connections are spatially and functionally weak. In this sense, the marginal condition of inter-fragmentary space is highly dependent on the characteristics of its relationship with its surroundings. For Vidal, these spaces are illustrated by the backyards of commercial buildings where rubbish bins are located, for instance, or parking areas for trucks and other heavy vehicles. Within the larger urban scale, the idea of 'drosscape' coined by Alan Berger connects with Graham and Marvin's idea of 'splintering urbanism' as it, too, describes residual landscapes created by heavy infrastructure – such as the spaces below motorways or bridges – all by-products of transport infrastructure. The difference between them, however, is that Graham and Marvin explain these residual spaces as outcomes of institutional asymmetries and power, while Berger argues that residual landscapes emerge inevitably from the lack of spatial sensitivity in infrastructural design. These infrastructural spaces are therefore institutional leftovers that remain outside regulations and norms and thus, become not only spatially but also institutionally marginalised.³¹ Ignasi de Solà-Morales' *terrain vague* is similarly used to describe marginal spaces defined by industrial obsolescence, abandoned facilities or industrial areas without activities or functions, characterised by a strong sense of 'emptiness'. They are also undefined (a 'form of absence') without fixed limits or predictable destinations.³² In this vein, the urban marginality described by Solà-Morales is not only a present condition but also refers to the future.

Although the aforementioned approaches to urban sprawl acknowledge the presence of undeveloped, less-developed, empty or inert urban spaces, they are too specific, partial or they simply do not fully explain the condition of urban sprawl as an area composed of a whole landscape of marginal spaces. It is for this reason that a wider conceptualisation is proposed through the idea of the 'interstitial space', as it more generically refers to a space, a physical entity or an interval of time, between two or more elements or events. This condition is intrinsically 'in-between' and thus presupposes surroundings – or at least boundaries – that confine its unitary nature.³³ Moreover, the marginal condition of interstices remains part of their intrinsic nature and discloses

30 R. Vidal, 'Fragmentos en tensión', in R. Vidal, *Fragmentation de la ville et nouveaux modes de composition urbaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002) pp. 5–7.

31 A. Berger, *Drosscape: Wasting Land in Urban America* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007).

32 I. de Solà-Morales, *Territorios* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2002).

33 The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines an 'interstice' as '*An intervening space (usually, empty); esp. a relatively small or narrow space, between things or the parts of a body (frequently in pl., the minute spaces between the ultimate parts of matter); a narrow opening, chink, or crevice*' (www.oed.com/view/Entry/98353?redirectedFrom=interstice#eid).

unexplored socio-environmental potentials for a wider comprehension of the suburban landscape as a whole.

The relative social marginality of the (sub)urban interstices

As discussed, interstitial spaces are intrinsically part of the urban sprawl phenomenon and although marginal, they are spatially and environmentally diverse. As varied as the city itself, the interstices differ in their origins, spatial and physical characteristics, functional performance, levels of occupation and socio-environmental potentials. They also vary regarding their relation to their surroundings. For example, some interstices are spatially stable but their surroundings change over time and, thus, their relative marginality varies concomitantly with their degree of integration. On the other hand, it can be the suburban context which can be particularly standardised while the interstitial spaces it contains can be spatially and functionally different. While some interstices in this example are physically well-defined (such as fenced-in, undeveloped private properties, former industrial areas or military facilities) others are characterised by blurred boundaries where the city penetrates them in different ways (abandoned lands, unfenced farmlands or natural reserves, for example). From this dual conception of interstitial space we can see that it contains a latent and relative marginality which is malleable and plastic, inherently unstable, and which depends not only on their own characteristics but also on the wider dynamics of the suburban process.

In planning, the idea of ‘interstitial space’ has occasionally been invoked to describe the marginal by-products of urban sprawl which are oftentimes reclaimed for further urbanisation. Jamal Mohammadi, for instance, asserts that suburban sprawl describes several ‘interstices’ which can be utilised for alternative functions such as agricultural or infilling policies.³⁴ Similarly, Nick Gallent and Dave Shaw explain how rural–urban fringes attract the attention of policy makers and provide opportunities to manage the inherent complexities of urban ‘interstitial landscapes’.³⁵ Rute Sousa Matos argues that ‘interstitial spaces’ should be reclaimed for new developments, functions and activities and, thus, integrated into the urban fabric.³⁶ Gandy uses the term ‘interstitial place’ for unregulated spaces full of valuable information about local nature which is transferable among citizens.³⁷ Anna Jorgensen and Marian Tylecote coined the term ‘interstitial wilderness’ to refer to sites where humans can develop relationships with nature, such as woodlands, abandoned

34 J. Mohammadi et al., ‘Urban sprawl pattern and effective factors on them: the case of Urmia City, Iran’, *Journal of Urban & Regional Analysis*, 1 (2012): 77–89.

35 N. Gallent and D. Shaw, ‘Spatial planning’.

36 R. Sousa Matos, ‘Urban landscape: interstitial spaces’.

37 M. Gandy, ‘Interstitial landscapes: reflections on a Berlin corner’, in M. Gandy (ed.), *Urban Constellation* (Jovis, 2011), pp. 149–52; Gandy, ‘Unintentional landscapes’.

allotments, river corridors, brownfield sites and any space where vegetation grows spontaneously.³⁸ In these approaches, it is implicitly suggested that the interstices should be integrated into planning regimes by considering their present condition of marginalisation in one way or another.

Despite these attempts to address the marginal condition of interstitial spaces, it normally prevents them from assuming a more visible position in planning agendas. That is, unless they become socially active, politically urgent, or economically attractive. Thus, many interstices are overlooked, undervalued or entirely ignored (within formal institutional representations and by private developers alike), precisely because the groups that occupy them are marginal or simply not a factor within land market appraisals. Ali Madanipour, for instance, states that public spaces in marginal areas of the city 'are not in the list of priorities to be dealt with by local authorities, whether in terms of political legitimacy, the economic competitiveness and social cohesion of the city or its image of marketability'.³⁹ Similarly, Andrea Mubi Brighenti highlights the relevance of interstitial spaces as trenches from which marginal groups can express critical views of the societal establishment. He also argues that interstices are shelters that provide protection from institutional repression and provide a certain stability to families and groups that cannot afford formal housing, for instance. This is to say that interstices are gaps within formal regimes where marginal but strong reactions against formal and mainstream society can take place. These interstices are also characterised by the new relationships between their occupants and the built environment that they produce. Considering that the spatial configuration of these spaces do not follow formal planning criteria, urban design or architectural stereotypes, these relations are manifested differently, and therefore trigger the emergence of new forms of socialisation and understandings of nature, social interaction and urban space.⁴⁰ This is what happens, for instance, in places where abandoned land becomes a playground, a space of exploration or intimacy, a shortcut between neighbourhoods or an improvised social venue.

Considered together, what these arguments make clear is that interstices are sometimes spaces of 'no interest' to planning regimes and are not considered to participate in the urban dynamic. In sharp contrast, however, when they are occupied by marginal groups they become visible and operational as counteractions against suppressive forms of urbanisation determined by formal planning. This is to say that, precisely because the interstices are initially invisible and ignored spaces, they attract marginal groups outwith the view

38 A. Jorgensen and M. Tylecote, 'Ambivalent landscapes – wilderness in the urban interstices', *Landscape Research*, 4 (2007): 443–62.

39 A. Madanipour, 'Marginal public spaces in European cities', *Journal of Urban Design*, 9 (3) (2010): 269.

40 A. Mubi Brighenti, *Urban Interstices: The Aesthetics and the Politics of the In-Between* (London: Routledge, 2016).

of planning regimes, whose actions paradoxically make them visible sites of resistance.

Expanding on this social dimension, Forrest Stuart argues that cities across the globe increasingly concentrate homeless populations in marginal interstices. These operate at smaller scales in peripheral areas – where they take the form of hidden spaces between buildings – or at the neighbourhood scale where larger groups extend their survival networks against marginalisation. At a similar scale, the term ‘interstitial space’ has been used in architecture to describe any marginal space where alternative functions can take place. This usage of the term normally focusses on artistic interventions, installations and manifestations against political orthodoxies such as segregation or the invisibility of minorities.⁴¹ Ajay Garde expands on this use of the term, arguing that temporary uses of marginal suburban spaces provide secure stages for political claims, for the vindication of community values, but also for expressions of identity that lie beyond marketable views of urban life. For these reasons, Garde argues that interstitial spaces are important in shaping a more complete representation of the urban landscape.⁴²

As they develop, larger interstices can become restricted environments which only local residents and their supportive network can access. In such cases, formal and informal actors exert considerable influence on how these spaces (in terms of spatial character but also with regard to policies and social regulation) can be reintegrated to formal planning regimes of control.⁴³ In other cases, these ‘interstices’ – although formally produced – operate as an instance of informal practices exercised by new users, which alter their morphology from formal to informal with the addition of physical structures and materials that support these new uses of the space. After a while, these interstices describe their own unique morphology that alters the image of the formal urban space.⁴⁴ They are similarly described as ‘zones of transition’ for immigrants where they can learn about local culture and undergo processes of adaptation better to prepare for integration into a different society. Such ‘zones’ take the form of peripheral slums where people receive economic and social support, information and shelter from local inhabitants while waiting for the approval of formal housing applications. Simultaneously, the new residents can enrol their children in schools, access public services and are protected from

41 P. Shaw and J. Hudson, ‘The qualities of informal space: (re)appropriation within the informal, interstitial spaces of the city’, *Proceedings of the Conference Occupation: Negotiations with Constructed Space* (Brighton: University of Brighton, 2009).

42 A.M. Garde, ‘Marginal spaces in the urban landscape: regulated margins or incidental open spaces?’, *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 18 (1999) : 200–10.

43 F. Stuart, ‘From “rabble management” to “recovery management”: policing homelessness in marginal urban space’, *Urban Studies*, 9 (2014): 1909–25.

44 K. Dovey, ‘Informal urbanism and complex adaptive assemblage’, *International Development Planning Review*, 4 (2012): 349–68.

discrimination. This is the case of several slums in the city of Antofagasta, Chile, for instance, where immigrants from Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Venezuela live in informal interstices as they wait for formal inclusion of different kinds.⁴⁵ These frequently assume the form of residual spaces between industrial facilities, roads, canals and informal shelters typically found in peripheral areas.⁴⁶

From these multiple social references to the term, it is clear that the 'interstice' emerges as a marginal space that provides shelter for alternative societal relations, or becomes a space of and for creativity, or simply contains the potential to become something else. As they are invisible to formal regimes, they attract marginalised groups and are configured as flexible trenches for alternative mechanisms of survival and social expression. In Abaleron's words, 'this marginality – social, economic, political, and ecological – leads them to locate in areas where there is little or no resistance to an informal appropriation of land'.⁴⁷ Although it does not mean that interstices are physically invisible, they become economically and politically unattractive unless societal reactions turn them into a focus point of conflict that can eventually destabilise societal inertias. Yet once interstices are socially constructed, their occupants have shown diverse abilities to survive in ways that defy regulatory frameworks of control and planning expectations.⁴⁸

From an environmental perspective, what is defined as a marginal, ambiguous or simply 'undeveloped' space that does not participate in formal regimes of urban development can be a well-defined 'ecotone', that is, a clear zone of transition between two or more ecological communities.⁴⁹ This suggests that the character of interstitiality can be distilled from its social character but also from its contribution to political ecology, ecosystem services, green-infrastructure, urban agriculture, natural capital and regional policy inter alia, in which their marginal condition is relative to their ecological contents.

By focussing on these environmental qualities, it becomes clear that one way to reverse the marginality of the interstices is to view them as sites which house alternative forms of nature and expressions of wildlife.⁵⁰ From this perspective, the interstices serve a crucial function in reducing the effects of natural disasters, above all in highly densified areas lacking natural surfaces for facing

45 P. Flores, 'Migración y vivienda: apuntes para la política pública', *Revista CIS, Centro de Investigación Social de Techo Chile*, 22 (2017): 7–9.

46 S. Tonnelat, "'Out of frame" the (in)visible life of urban interstices – a case study in Charenton-Le-Pont, Paris, France', *Ethnography*, 3 (2008): 291–324.

47 C.A. Abaleron, 'Marginal urban space and unsatisfied basic needs: the case of San Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina', *Environment and Urbanization*, 1 (1995): 98.

48 M.P. Smith, *Marginal Spaces* (London: Transaction, 2004).

49 E. Pleasants Odum and G. Barrett, *Fundamentals of Ecology*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia, PA: Saunders, 1971).

50 R. Laforteza et al., 'Green infrastructure as a tool to support spatial planning in European urban regions', *iForest-Biogeosciences and Forestry*, 3 (2013): 102–8.

storm events, or for the evacuation of the population during earthquakes or similar disasters.⁵¹ Thus, it is possible to combine the marginal character of the interstices – socially and politically defined by mechanisms of exclusion – with their environmental aspects and thus to define them socio-environmentally as an alternative infrastructure that deserves its own place in planning agendas. In this vein, it is worth investigating the extent to which planning rationales encompass the formation of interstitial spaces by considering their social and environmental characteristics.

Determinants of Santiago's interstitial spaces

The capital city of Chile – Santiago – shares common patterns of urban growth with many Latin American cities.⁵² Although 'urban sprawl' as a term belongs to the Anglo-Saxon literature, it constitutes a comparable process to that which in Santiago is often invoked as 'urban dispersion',⁵³ 'urban fragmentation',⁵⁴ 'metropolitan expansion',⁵⁵ 'suburbanisation',⁵⁶ or simply 'dispersed urban expansion'.⁵⁷ More specifically, Santiago's growth is clearly characterised by a fragmented suburban morphology, permanent expansion to outer zones, and the presence of different interstitial spaces between built-up areas.⁵⁸ Empirical studies critically characterise Santiago's sprawl as the main driver of socio-environmental and residential segregation, poverty concentration, territorial disparities, increases of travel times and inefficient land uses.⁵⁹ Considering these impacts, in the last thirty years planning policies have focused on restraining

- 51 D.La Rosa and R. Privitera, 'Characterization of non-urbanized areas for land-use planning of agricultural and green infrastructure in urban contexts', *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 1 (2013): 94–106; Barkasi et al., 'Urban soils and vacant land'.
- 52 Inostroza et al., 'Urban sprawl and fragmentation'.
- 53 D. Heinrichs et al., 'Dispersión urbana y nuevos desafíos para la gobernanza (metropolitana) en América Latina: el caso de Santiago de Chile', *EURE*, 104 (2009): 29–46.
- 54 F. Link, 'From polycentricity to fragmentation in Santiago de Chile' *Centro-h, Revista de la Organización Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Centros Históricos*, 2 (2008): 13–24.
- 55 C. De Mattos, 'Santiago de Chile, globalización y expansión metropolitana: lo que existía sigue existiendo', *EURE*, 76 (1999): 29–56.
- 56 C. De Mattos, 'Metropolización y suburbanización', *EURE*, 27 (2001): 5–8.
- 57 M.E. Ducci and M. González, 'Anatomía de la expansión de Santiago, 1991–2000', in A. Galetovic and P. Jordán (eds.), *Santiago. Dónde estamos y hacia dónde vamos* (Santiago de Chile: Centro de Estudios Públicos), pp. 125–46.
- 58 C. Rojas et al., 'Understanding the urban sprawl in the mid-size Latin American cities through the urban form: analysis of the Concepción metropolitan area (Chile)', *Journal of Geographic Information System*, 3 (2013): 222–34; Heinrichs et al., 'Dispersión urbana'; Inostroza et al., 'Urban sprawl and fragmentation in Latin America'.
- 59 X. Gainza and F. Livert, 'Urban form and the environmental impact of commuting in a segregated city, Santiago de Chile', *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 3 (2013): 507–22; F. Sabatini et al., 'Segregación residencial en las principales ciudades chilenas: tendencias de las tres últimas décadas y posibles cursos de acción', *EURE*, 82 (2001): 21–42.

Santiago's sprawl by establishing different instruments of control – such as the 'urban limit' and the recently incorporated 'Urban Zones of Conditioned Development' (ZODUC) – and infilling policies for the series of marginal interstices that offer good location and land capacity for further urbanisation. However, interstices have always been present as they are generated as inevitable incidental by-products of urban development.⁶⁰ These large (though marginal) interstitial areas now occupy a substantial proportion of urban land.

As will be argued in this chapter, while 'interstitial spaces' are an unintended consequence of the planning process, they are now expected as the inevitable outcome of the same process. This means that, while they have historically failed in controlling undesirable urban sprawl, planning mechanisms simultaneously create distortions that lead to further land fragmentation and thus, the emergence of more interstitiality. This contradictory nature is understood as the failure of 'command and control' rationales upon market-driven planning regimes (fig. 2.2).⁶¹

Santiago's sprawl describes a range of interstitial spaces recognised by planners, policy-makers, developers, politicians, residents and the specialised literature as both marginal and also valuable. On the one hand, they are marginal as they are still found outside planning regimes or simply undeveloped. On the other hand, they are synonyms for spatial diversity and land capability for changing suburban inertias of low-quality urbanisation and socio-residential segregation. The nature of the interstices found in Santiago closely resemble those already described and include agricultural and industrial lands, brownfields, landfills, public spaces, geographical restrictions, conurbation zones, former airports, military facilities, small-scale farming areas, research centres, infrastructural spaces and security buffers. Some of them are currently well located near

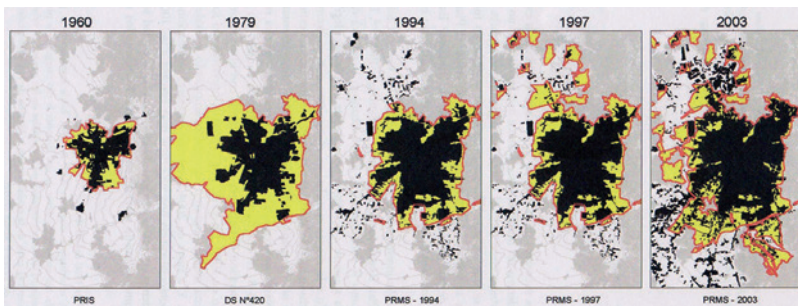


Figure 2.2. Historical expansion of Santiago (Galetovic, 2006).

60 Garde, 'Marginal spaces in the urban landscape'.

61 P. Gross, 'Santiago de Chile (1925–1990): planificación urbana y modelos políticos', *EURE*, 52 (1991): 27–52; Phelps, *An Anatomy of Sprawl*.

transport, energy supply, services and populated surroundings, making them attractive for both public and private investments.⁶²

The determinants of Santiago's interstices are varied and interlinked, and are mainly tied to growth regulations or the absence of urban regeneration policies. These determinants are mainly placed in a planning system that operates upon individual initiatives on outer lands which are separated from the peri-urban fringes. Regarding inner interstices, reconversions are still embryonic, partially successful, considered to be expensive, inefficient or socially unaffordable and thus, not viable without a well-defined regeneration policy.⁶³ Furthermore, land liberalisation, the inclusion of outer rural villages and the absence of taxation instruments for empty lands contribute to land fragmentation and dispersed growth that leave interstices outwith the remit of planning agendas and thus not considered within mainstream policy debates over housing or infrastructural provision. Excluded in this manner, interstitial spaces come to define their own dynamics while becoming marginalised, or are considered in contested narratives of integration that emphasise market trends or the reinforcement of public benefits.⁶⁴ This is the case at the site called 'La Platina' within the La Pintana commune, for instance, where the large empty site (c. 300 hectares) emerges as an opportunity to create more services, public spaces and recreational areas that integrate local residents. However, at the same time, the private sector views this area as full of potential to create more private and social housing developments. A similar situation is described for the area in front of La Platina called 'Campus Antumapu', which is a property belonging to the Universidad de Chile intended for educational purposes. The land capacity and lack of physical restrictions are perceived as suitable for housing developments by both the private sector and central authorities. However, the university describes the place as suitable for hosting parks and sport facilities. Simultaneously, the municipality see the place as an opportunity to *stop* social housing developments with the associated concentration of poverty and would prefer instead to dedicate the area to private development that would attract more middle-class people to the communal boundary. Finally, local residents see the place as a 'piece of countryside' that provides beauty, peace and green areas useful for their leisure and social encounters.⁶⁵

62 M.E. Ducci, 'Área urbana de Santiago 1991–2000: expansión de la industria y la vivienda', *EURE*, 85 (2002) pp. 187–207.

63 Interview with the Director of Environmental Management, Municipality of La Pintana, 25 June 2014.

64 Interview with General Director, Ministry of Public Works – MOP, Former Director of Urban Project 'Ciudad Parque Bicentenario – CPB', MINVU, 14 May 2014; Siavelis, 2008; Roberts, 1994; Fernández and Vera, 2012.

65 Interview with Director of the Department of Regional Planning, Metropolitan Regional Government of Santiago (GORE), 6 May 2014; interview with Director of Research and Development at La Platina, National Institute of Agricultural Research (INIA), Ministry of Agriculture, La Pintana commune, 12 May 2014; interview with architect in charge

The first condition that determines Santiago's interstitiality pertains to the understanding of 'undeveloped' land. For instance, developers contend that an 'interstitial space' does not necessarily mean 'empty', 'disintegrated' or 'undeveloped'. It could be fully urbanised but still lacking in density in comparison with its surroundings. Thus, it can be a 'built-up space' but still perceived as a 'gap' when the land capacity is taken into account. Similarly, land that can be formally labelled in plans as 'urban' is not necessarily 'urbanised' and thus can remain literally empty or undeveloped for years. In fact, for developers there are no clear (or absolute) distinctions between 'empty', 'undeveloped', 'underused' or 'interstitial' as they could all be marginalised areas from the planning perspective – regardless of their degree of emptiness – with a clear need of infrastructural improvements. These are the cases of low-density areas located near railway services or motorways.⁶⁶ By extension we can deduce that the first determinant of interstitiality is not the physical or spatial condition of a place, but the way in which the place is perceived within the context of its surrounding urban fabric.

The so-called 'atomisation of properties' also triggers interstitiality in Santiago. Increasing land subdivision leads to the creation of clusters of small properties that affect large-scale interventions. Differing interests among landowners also impede the implementation of services such as supermarkets, schools, health services or any other infrastructure that requires larger parcels of land. This is a scenario where some landowners agree to develop their land but others do not, creating landscapes interspersed with interstices and pseudo-developed areas.⁶⁷

Increasing land privatisation also occasions legal disputes related to heritage and future land uses. While in litigation, plots remain in stalemate for years and effectively become 'interstitial'. These situations trigger more land-marginalisation, and after a while, uncompleted buildings or abandoned lands become common elements of the suburban landscape of Santiago. In some cases, temporary parking areas emerge as a 'meanwhile profit' that somewhat restores the visibility of these interstices and provides a certain degree of activity. The scarcity of larger unified plots, however, and the negotiation capacities among private owners make the reconversion of large interstitial spaces almost impossible. Again, outer lands become 'easy lands' considering plot sizes, lack

of Infrastructural Development, Campus Antumapu, Faculty of Veterinarian Sciences, Universidad de Chile, La Pintana commune, 16 May 2014; interview with the Secretary of the Committee of Neighbours, Villa San Ambrosio III, commune of La Pintana, 13 June 2014.

66 Interview with Honorary Advisor and real estate developer, Chilean Chamber of Construction – C.Ch.C. 27 May 2014.

67 Interview with Honorary Advisor and real estate developer, Chilean Chamber of Construction – C.Ch.C., 27 May 2014; interview with Director of Irrigation and member of the Agricultural Cooperative 'José Maza' at 'Huertos Obreros y Familiares' [Worker and Familial Orchards], La Pintana, 10 June 2014.

of restrictions, and the unified interests of landowners for real estate projects, which overcome arguments in favour of keeping agricultural activities near the city.⁶⁸ This is particularly relevant in Chile given that around 80 per cent of the population have become private home-owners, a direct outcome of the strong promotion of private property as a socially transversal commodity.

At a regional scale, Santiago's suburban interstitiality is defined by conurbation zones. These link main urban areas with outer villages and towns. Within this context, partial regulations from different institutional frameworks coexist – without equal attributions on land management – and are often defined by differing interests at technical and political levels.⁶⁹ These interstitial zones are mainly driven by transport infrastructure and alternations between planned and *de facto* developments that describe a pseudo-urbanised landscape where different uses are interspersed with undeveloped lands. The rural area between Santiago and Padre Hurtado, for instance, is a recognised conurbation where agricultural activities coexist with railway services, industrial facilities and housing developments that mutually undermine both agricultural production and further suburbanisation.⁷⁰

For the Ministry of Agriculture, rural suburban spaces – such as farmlands and small scale agricultural plots – appear as a result of a 'gap of governance' that are administratively outside the urban scope but progressively urbanised.⁷¹ A case in point is the previously mentioned area of 'La Platina' within La Pintana commune – still labelled as 'rural' – which has been earmarked for agricultural research under the regulation of the Ministry of Agriculture. However, the area is already surrounded by social housing developments and included within the communal urban area. As 'urban', then, it is subject to regulations which govern street maintenance, security and future destinations and this triggers tensions with the Ministry of Housing. Simultaneously, the municipality also has some influence on the maintenance and future destination of this area, and its plans focus on the area's socio-environmental values as 'empty' or simply open space for local residents. Finally, local residents organise a series of activities in the place – sometimes with the authorisation of the municipality – to use it for sport and temporary celebrations such as Independence Day,

68 Interview with Secretary of the 'Ciudad Parque Bicentenario – CPB' Project, SERVIU, MINVU, 14 May 2014; interview with Honorary Advisor and real estate developer, Chilean Chamber of Construction – C.Ch.C., 27 May 2014.

69 R.Krzysztofik et al., 'Is the suburbanisation stage always important in the transformation of large urban agglomerations? The case of the Katowice conurbation', *Geographia Polonica*, 2 (2017): 1–15.

70 D. Boccardo, 'Tensiones de una triple vocación urbana: San Bernardo en su proceso de absorción por Santiago de Chile' *Territorios en formación*, 2 (2012) pp. 7–20; Ducci and Gonzalez, 'Anatomía de la expansión de Santiago'.

71 Interview with National Secretary of Agriculture (SEREMI 2010–2014), 13 May 2014; Jirón and Pazderka, 1999.

Christmas or school visits. In this sense, local communities also have a tension with institutional representations both local and central.⁷²

Other cases are some suburban vineyards – mainly located to the south of the city – where wine production is constrained by the surrounding urbanisation. This ambiguity also extends to industrial land outside the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Housing and Urbanisation (MINVU). This is the case at the gravel pits of La Florida-Puente Alto – a series of extraction wells located in the communal boundary of La Pintana and Puente Alto – under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Mining. However, as the pits are also immersed in the urban area they are also regulated by the Ministry of Housing and local plans defined by the two municipalities. Similarly, and as previously noted, the ‘Campus Antumapu’ describes a trapped interstitial space that still hosts educational land uses related to agricultural research. Another case that deserves closer attention is the so-called *Huertos Obreros y Familiares* [Workers and Familial Orchards] – also located within La Pintana – created in the 1940s to provide food for local families that remains as a farming space (figure 2.3). These interstices are still undeveloped lands, but they are entirely surrounded by urbanised areas despite their agricultural and industrial remit, and are therefore constrained by a series of ambiguities in governance, functionality and urbanisation pressures. In the case of the gravel pits, for instance, their industrial performance is based on the extraction of raw material that is then used in the construction industry (mainly sand and stones). However, due to their residential surroundings, the industrial functionality is a cause of tension with neighbours who constantly make claims to the authorities regarding road maintenance, air pollution, dust, rubbish, noise, and other offences of different kinds (the area is dark at night and lacks electricity), accidents (people have fallen down the wells), the presence of heavy trucks and missing people *inter alia*.⁷³

Santiago’s interstitial spaces are also outcomes of a lack of political will that derive from a lack of cross-sector coordination to develop large-scale areas at different levels, above all municipal interactions related to shared communal boundaries. Boundary areas between municipalities are critical spaces as they appear as territories of interaction between populations that live in one municipality but work in the other, for instance. In functional terms, it means that, if services belonging to a specific municipality are placed in the boundary area, they also serve the neighbouring population. This defines municipal boundaries as politically ambiguous territories, as local mayors prefer to target their interventions at their own constituency, which is to say the population already enrolled as taxpayers and voters within the communal boundary. Thus,

72 Interview with the Director of the Department of Environmental Operations. Municipality of La Pintana, 10 June 2014; interview with Director of Community Organizations at Municipality of La Pintana, 10 June 2014.

73 Interview with National Director of Urban Development, MINVU, 05 May 2014; interview with the Urban Planner and Advisor of Puente Alto Municipality, 30 May 2014.

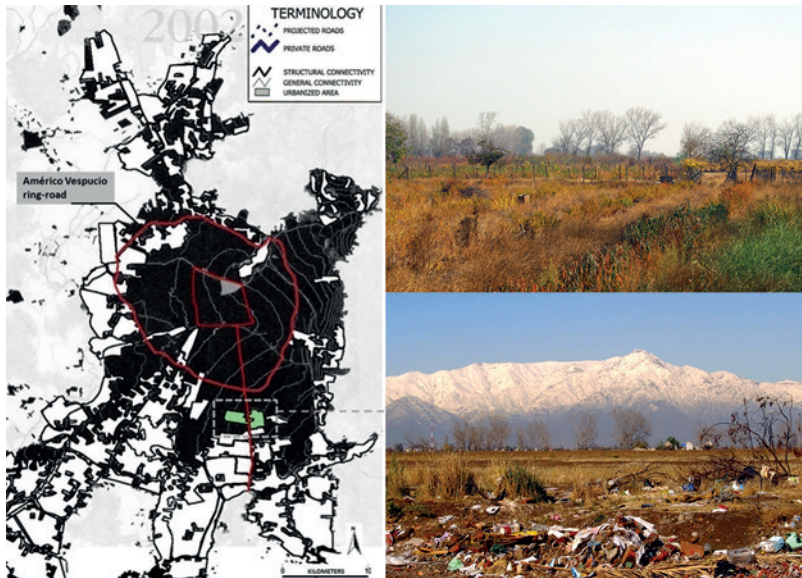


Figure 2.3. Map of Santiago and the location of La Platina and Campus Antumapu sites, La Pintana commune (left). View of Campus Antumapu (top right). View of La Platina site (bottom right) (Author's map based on Echeñique, 2006; Author's photos, May 2014).

they tend to place new services in central areas to be sure that local residents perceive the benefits of their political leadership at the next election. For this reason, boundary areas become politically abandoned territories, only of interest to central government that use them for regional infrastructure (motorways and railway services) or metropolitan land uses such as shopping malls, industry or large-scale public spaces that rely on centralised maintenance. This is the case, for instance, of the motorways placed in the boundary area between the communes of Pedro Aguirre Cerda and Lo Espejo.⁷⁴ This is more critical in cases where the local authorities of different municipalities are politically misaligned, which is to say that they belong to different parties.⁷⁵

Santiago's interstices are also outcomes of the lack of maintenance of open spaces. This affects private and public lands equally such that, eventually, they become derelict, marginal and occupied by informal groups.⁷⁶ One of the factors that influence the maintenance of these areas is the annual

74 L.E. Bresciani, 'Chile 27F 2010: la catástrofe de la falta de planificación', *EURE*, 108 (2010): 151–3; T. Chuaqui and P. Valdivieso, 'Una ciudad en busca de un gobierno: una propuesta para Santiago', *Revista de ciencia política (Santiago)*, 1 (2004): 104–27.

75 Interview with architect and consultant in charge of the urban design of 'Parque Bicentenario' in CPB project, Montealegre-Beach Architects, 9 May 2014.

76 Interview with funder member and partner of URBE Consultants, 12 May 2014.

evaluation of public expenses that define the base for next year's expenditure. If empty spaces are not part of a politically meaningful project – designed to accomplish political goals before the conclusion of the four-year presidential period – they will not be included within the annual budget and thus, their reconversion and maintenance becomes difficult.⁷⁷ Such spaces include squares and parks that after certain periods become abandoned. There are also larger agricultural sites – such as vineyards or research centres – that are not subject to infrastructural maintenance, security, rubbish removals, street cleaning and other services. This is particularly ambiguous in large-scale private properties surrounded by low-income neighbourhoods, as landowners argue that the surrounding residents informally occupy their sites, throw rubbish, misuse the space for illegal activities, and thus, that the land should be maintained using the public budget. However, local authorities argue that cleaning, security and other services cannot be provided as this is a private property.⁷⁸ Ultimately, the land enters into an increasingly deteriorating condition that affects the overall quality of the suburban space.

For some scholars and policy-makers, the set of technical instruments and regulations that configure the Chilean planning system are key factors in determining suburban interstitiality. One of these instruments is the so-called 'urban limit' that circumscribes lands for future developments. Although designed to control dispersed suburbanisation, the urban limit affects the price of included lands (as they become automatically 'urban') and stimulates urbanisations on cheaper outer properties that leave empty spaces in between. Marco López argues that the 'urban limit' is a disturbing tool as the division of land into 'urban' and 'rural' by an arbitrary line increases its value without any input from, or extra cost for, the owner. This in turn encourages landowners to change the function of those portions of land outside the urban limit as their profitability increases with real estate development. In these operations, several areas of land are left empty as elements of financial speculation and, thus, in an interstitial condition that remains for years.⁷⁹ This fragmentation is also encouraged by developers as current regulations do not include any impact fees for keeping in-between lands undeveloped while they accrue value over time.⁸⁰

'Restriction zones' also define the presence of suburban interstices in Santiago. The term 'restriction' identifies an area with restricted accessibility. Important examples in Santiago are military bases or industrial lands,

77 J. Barton and J. Kopfmüller, 'Sustainable urban development in Santiago de Chile: background–concept–challenges', in D. Heinrichs, K. Krellenberg, B. Hansjürgens and F. Martínez (eds.), *Risk Habitat Megacity* (Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer, 2012), pp. 65–86.

78 Interview with consultant at the National Service of Environmental Evaluation, Ministry of Environment, 14 May 2014.

79 Interview with consultant at the National Service of Environmental Evaluation, Ministry of Environment, 14 May 2014.

80 M. López, 'Expansión de las ciudades', *EURE*, 8 (1981): 31–42

ecological reservoirs and geographical handicaps considered as dangerous for permanent or temporary activities (for example, areas that are water-flooded or contain unstable slopes). This nomenclature is also used to protect private properties under risk of informal occupation.⁸¹ However, the understanding of a 'restriction area' can change over time based on technical assessments or changes in geographical conditions. In the case of Puente Alto commune, for example, most of the restriction zones are slopes with 20 per cent inclines, which are considered to be inappropriate for urban developments. However, this situation is under revision because the area is physically suitable for urbanisation if certain mitigations are considered.⁸² In this vein, the condition of an area as 'restricted' is debatable, particularly so for construction firms based on technical improvements and the financial support for basic facilities that allow further development. Despite this, areas that are 'restricted for exclusive uses' can still be considered as interstitial due to the fact that land use changes can take around six years to complete.⁸³

Another factor that determines the presence of interstitial spaces is their financial performance as undeveloped land. This is to say that this land can be used for speculation as it will accrue value over time, especially with the arrival of services and infrastructure.⁸⁴ It is important to note that in Chile there are no tax restrictions for empty land. This clearly reflects a neoliberal nation state where land is one of the most valuable commodities. However, although the benefits of land speculation are considered to be automatic, these operations perform differently in poor areas as the acquisition of land for services, housing or infrastructure depends upon the consumption power of the area. Interstitial spaces in poor areas are only attractive for public investments, and it is difficult to keep them well maintained.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, central authorities perceive the absence of impact fees as a perverse incentive, while developers see them as a financial stimulus to encourage urban regeneration schemes.⁸⁶ Overall, land speculation in Chile is a matter of debate as it historically elicits contradictory discussion of the right to private property and the way in which this right leads to different forms of corruption and political interference.⁸⁷ This was clarified

81 Interview with resident of Villa San Gabriel, La Pintana commune, 13 June 2014; Melo, 1996.

82 Interview with urban planner and advisor, Puente Alto Municipality, 30 May 2014.

83 Interview with Minister of Housing, Urbanization and Public Lands, 2001–2004, 03 June 2014; interview with general manager of Urban Studies at Chilean Chamber of Construction, 22 May 2014.

84 L.A. Vergara, 'El Estado subsidiario y sus políticas urbanas: la expulsión de los estratos bajos de la ciudad', *GeoGraphos*, 5 (2014): 146–66.

85 Interview with National Director of Urban Development, MINVU, 5 May 2014.

86 Interview with urban planner and advisor, Municipality of El Bosque, 28 May 2014; interview with Senator for the VIII Circunscription de Santiago Oriente, 22 May 2014.

87 Interview with National Director of Urban Development, MINVU, 5 May 2014.

by different studies which examined how policy frameworks were reshaped to stimulate investments and the acquisition of well-located land, resulting in the expulsion of local communities from their areas of origin. This phenomenon is closely examined by Ernesto Lopez in his studies of ‘gentrification’ that evince how the entire political and financial machinery created the conditions for land-speculation on empty plots in Santiago de Chile, principally because land was explicitly understood as a financial commodity:

Land plots are generally acquired in advance by developers seeking to fully capitalize the ground rent increased by the externalities generated by public investments or rezoning. In Santiago’s inner city, the number of properties awaiting redevelopment largely exceeds the number of properties actually developed. A report in 2006 counted a total of around 8,000 hectares of empty or underused lots within the urban parameter of Greater Santiago (this is only 500 hectares less than the entire main URSA [Urban Renewal Subsidy Area]) and a total of 1,000 hectares of abandoned or sub-utilized plots in the inner-city area (Trivelli, 2006) that produce further devaluation in their surrounding areas. This phenomenon is possible in Chile because the law against land speculation was removed by the military dictatorship (1973–1990), and regulations to control these practices have been left extremely soft by the more recent democratic governments.⁸⁸

Several suburban interstices in Santiago are also remnants of infrastructural services. Motorways, airports, research centres, railway services, military and industrial facilities, farmlands, water treatment plants and others with decreased levels of functionality still keep their security buffers, which thus express different degrees of interstitiality. These areas cannot be expanded – and thus fall into drabness and disrepair – and are difficult to recover due to the presence of heavy facilities and pollution.⁸⁹ The communes of Lo Espejo and Pedro Aguirre Cerda, for instance, have inner railway lines and motorways that define large infrastructural spaces immersed within the suburban fabric. In Pedro Aguirre Cerda, the regional motorways Autopista Central and Autopista del Sol in the north, and Lo Ovalle Avenue in the south, define large interstitial spaces placed within communal boundaries that reinforce spatial segregation at local and metropolitan levels (figure 2.4). These interstices have a strong impact on residents’ daily lives; therefore, they demand physical barriers to improve safety and pedestrian connectivity. However, security reasons and high costs leave them undeveloped and restricted to temporary uses.⁹⁰

88 E. López-Morales, ‘Real estate market, state-entrepreneurialism and urban policy in the “gentrification by ground rent dispossession” of Santiago de Chile’, *Journal of Latin American Geography*, 1 (2010): 156.

89 Interview with Director of Ciudad Parque Bicentenario, CPB, 2001–2004, 15 May 2014.

90 Interview with urban planner and advisor, Municipality of Lo Espejo, 28 May 2014; interview with urban planner and advisor, Municipality of Pedro Aguirre Cerda, 4 June 2014.



Figure 2.4. The interstitial boundary space between Lo Espejo and Pedro Aguirre Cerda communes (author's photo, May 2014)

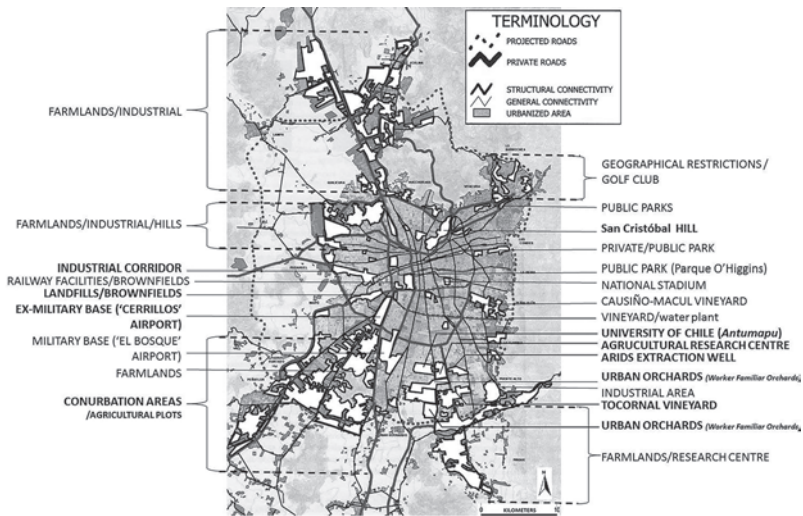


Figure 2.5. Map of Santiago and its suburban interstitial spaces (author's map based on Echeñique, 2006).

As seen, interstitial spaces within Santiago are triggered by various determinants and lead to different degrees of marginality at spatial and political levels. Although apparently inert, they show different degrees of activity linked to planning regimes of control and production within the urbanised space of the city. They illustrate the coexistence of different institutions, which have various impacts on surroundings that question their marginal condition as invisible or inert spaces excluded from suburban transformations. Although they share a general condition as ‘gaps’ – in physical and political terms – they resist socio-spatial standardisation as they differ in terms of origins, spatial characteristics, functions and surrounding population. Indeed, for policy-makers, scholars, residents and practitioners almost every interstitial space has its own identity, challenges and potentials that should be addressed case-by-case (fig. 2.5).⁹¹

Conclusions

Both built-up land and interstitial spaces define Santiago’s suburban sprawl. However, while the built-up landscape tends to be homogeneously characterised, interstitial spaces are varied and show different levels of marginalisation, integration, spatial consolidation, emptiness or activity that contrast with its residential counterpart. The marginalisation of interstitial spaces is always relative, dependent upon predominant orthodoxies in planning that define them as under-developed, underused or simply inert and thus suitable for land-use reconversion. However, socio-environmental approaches show that interstitial spaces can host alternative social practices performed by excluded populations and marginal groups, and potential ecologies defined by their still unexplored environmental contents.

We should be mindful of the quantitative significance of the interstices, their implications and the ways in which they are produced, as they clearly influence suburban performance. They are produced within the very core of the planning system as most of their determinants rely on absences or contradictions within formal regulations and norms. Based on the case of Santiago de Chile, it is clear that interstitial spaces are dynamically produced, and triggered by a range of interlinked determinants embedded within regulations of control. They are contained within narratives on housing shortage, land commodification, standardisation of planning instruments, ideological and political misalignments, absences of regeneration policies and the weaknesses of planning policy at local levels.

Despite the undeniable potential contained within ‘interstitial spaces’, their marginal condition – both spatial and institutional – illustrates the paradox of standard planning regimes: while they try to control the production of space, they simultaneously produce marginal interstices which are then assumed to be

91 Interview with Director of the School of Construction and Researcher, Universidad de la Américas, 23 June 2014.

anomalies that should be corrected. This paradox is reinforced by the fact that interstices are the expression of the inorganic character of suburban sprawl, where land-capitalisation appears as the main driver upon regulation and norms. Or rather, the very term ‘inorganic character’ leads to a further paradox yet to be explored in the existing literature. While some interstitial spaces are disconnected, many others are interlinked, articulated or simply close to each other. In this way, they could be considered a relational network that connects different elements of the city and articulates the entire urban fabric. Such a conception of ‘interstitial space’ is, of course, far closer to its anatomical, or organic, definition. Moreover, viewed in this way, the relational potential of this connective tissue would re-establish the importance of interstitiality as an essential structure for the functioning of the whole urban system, thus overcoming its marginalisation. In this light, interstitial spaces should be given far greater importance as an alternative entrance into urban studies, as they provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding urban sprawl and (sub)urbanisation processes, not only from the production of the formalised built-up space but also its more invisible and marginalised components, namely, the interstices.

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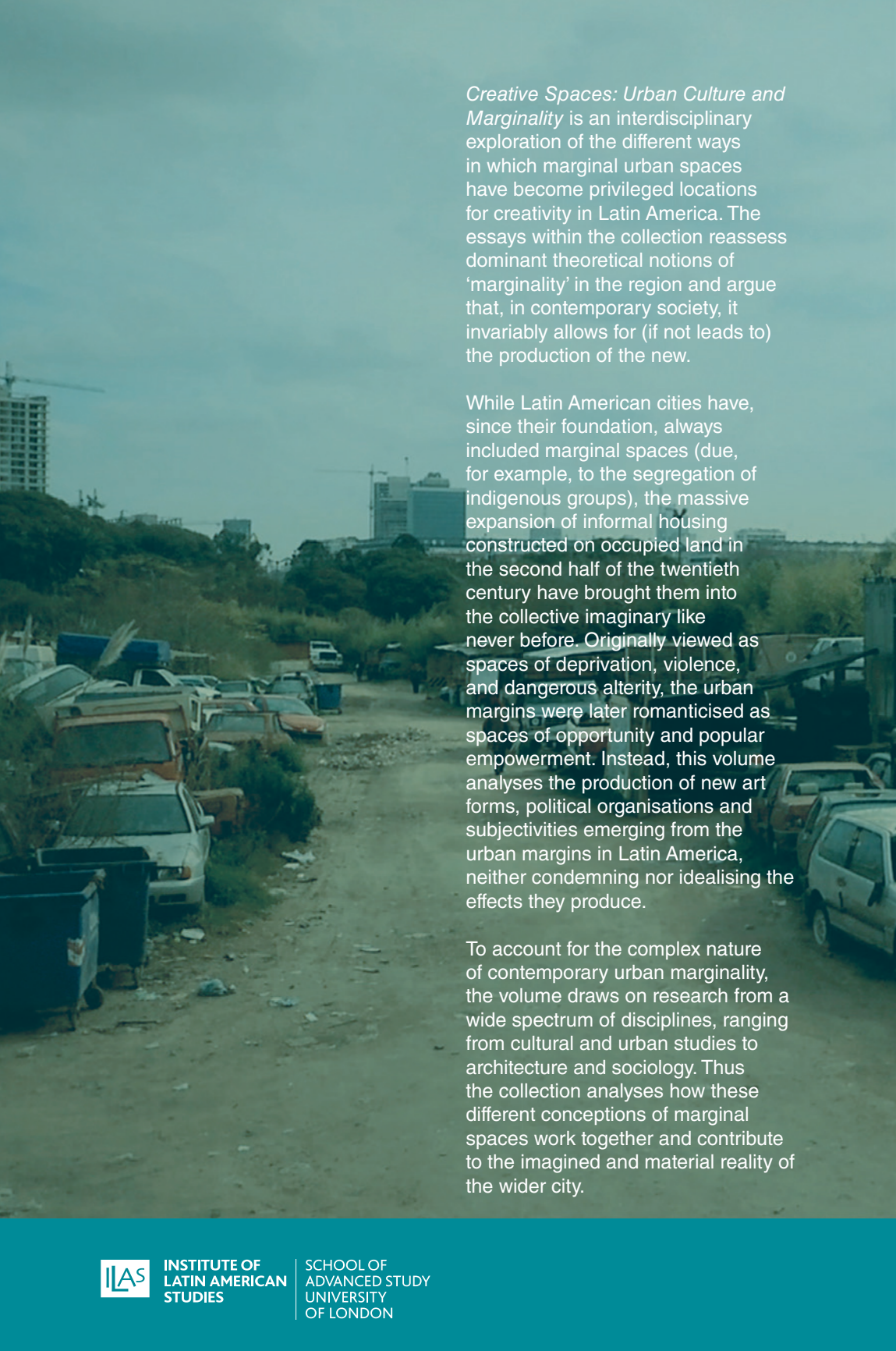
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A photograph of an urban informal settlement, likely a favela or shanty town. The scene shows a dirt road lined with parked cars, some of which are older and appear to be in various states of use or disrepair. In the background, there are several multi-story buildings, some under construction, and a construction crane is visible on the left. The overall atmosphere is one of a densely populated, low-income urban area.

Creative Spaces: Urban Culture and Marginality is an interdisciplinary exploration of the different ways in which marginal urban spaces have become privileged locations for creativity in Latin America. The essays within the collection reassess dominant theoretical notions of ‘marginality’ in the region and argue that, in contemporary society, it invariably allows for (if not leads to) the production of the new.

While Latin American cities have, since their foundation, always included marginal spaces (due, for example, to the segregation of indigenous groups), the massive expansion of informal housing constructed on occupied land in the second half of the twentieth century have brought them into the collective imaginary like never before. Originally viewed as spaces of deprivation, violence, and dangerous alterity, the urban margins were later romanticised as spaces of opportunity and popular empowerment. Instead, this volume analyses the production of new art forms, political organisations and subjectivities emerging from the urban margins in Latin America, neither condemning nor idealising the effects they produce.

To account for the complex nature of contemporary urban marginality, the volume draws on research from a wide spectrum of disciplines, ranging from cultural and urban studies to architecture and sociology. Thus the collection analyses how these different conceptions of marginal spaces work together and contribute to the imagined and material reality of the wider city.

