

## ZOMBIE SPACES

Gaspar Maza Gutierrez - Ramon Parramón / Idensitat

Zombie Spaces is an ongoing project started by Idensitat in 2012 and promoted by the authors of this article, of which there have already been several editions. From the perspective of cultural and urban criticism, it is a project that aims to analyse, draw attention to and promote creative actions in a specific inhabited space in which the coexistence of various complex and not always interrelated circumstances has created a disjointed landscape. Between 2012 and 2018, different editions of this project have taken place in the cities of Badalona, Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca and Valencia.

In this article we will try to connect this concept with some other theoretical approaches and explain the common working methodology used in the different places where the project has been developed. The fact that this article was written after participating in the fourth Bahatokia session held on Zorrozaurre Island reflects the situation that this area of Bilbao is currently experiencing in relation to the concept of “Zombie Space”.



Zorrozaurre. Espacio Open. Photo by Gaspar Maza, 2023

## The concept of “zombie space” in the post-capitalist city

First of all, we would like to propose our definition of this concept, which includes the different formulations of the project that have emerged in each case. Zombie Spaces are spaces shaped by fragmented ideas that never fully materialise. They are places that exist in a disjointed way despite multiple attempts to configure them as articulated realities. They are not lifeless spaces but rather spaces where diverse forms of incohesive life converge in a seemingly chaotic structure. They are configured from the combination of speculative logic, public efforts driven by private interests, replication of decontextualised models, disconnected chronotopes, tensions between the local and the non-local, the appearance of new activities that displace the previous ones, and a disconnection with the historical processes of the place, as well as other forms where space-time-life relationships introduce dynamics that alter the connections between the various appearances of life existing in the context. All of this, combined with other elements specific to each case, turn these spaces into places where what is planned and what is built facilitates the deterioration of social relations and the conditions of inhabitability. These zombie spaces, revived by the confluence of multiple projects, many of them unfinished or aborted to make room for other projects, other policies, other economic interests and other external circumstances, have become vast urban landscapes that continue to function with the disfigurements caused by the attempts by many different people and institutions to give them a life devised in their own image and likeness.

The approach to Zombie Spaces as a project is that of a work in progress that has been gathering insights regarding the idea of analysing and bringing visibility to certain spaces, continuously updating and refining our own theories about the public space. At first, we aligned with the generalist and utopian perspective of Jordi Borja and Manuel Castells (1986) that “public space is where there is no admission fee”. However, following the pandemic of 2018, we realised the utopian and imprecise nature of this definition, leading us to adopt a more practical one: public space as such “does not exist”, which is in tune with the viewpoints of Henri Lefebvre (2013) and Manuel Delgado (2007). We now assume that behind every public space there is always an owner who will ultimately play a decisive role in its evolution as well as its usage.

From Idensitat and particularly from the studies of public sport spaces carried out previously (2010-2011), based on the observation of activities and behaviours, primarily those of foreign immigrants in public spaces, we observed how their use was predetermined not only by the design of each space but also by the informal appropriation of each one. In this regard, although the contemporary public space is being configured in such a way that the predominant behaviour is consumption, what occurs in that space when it is in a phase of transitory vagueness can follow other more unforeseen patterns influenced by a mix of elements that predefine it as a potential zombie space. The identity assumed by spaces in the process of transition, as would be the case of Zorrozaurre, is predetermined by the fact that it is an accumulation of unfinished projects and intentions, which allows it to escape (for the moment) the characteristic pattern of a consumption space.

Viewing public space by separating the analysis of the space from the analysis of the public helps us think about it and compare it with other experiences. From this perspective, the island of Zorrozaurre can be understood as “ground zero”, with a second phase of the successful “Bilbao Model” developing around it. This new phase would involve continued action on its estuary, where the Guggenheim Museum and its surroundings were the first step (Zulaica J. 2007), with the arrival of art and culture, followed by the repositioning of the Athletic Bilbao soccer stadium, the Maritime Museum, and the regeneration of numerous stretches along the estuary, where Zorrozaurre island appears to round out the model. Using the characteristic terminology in the glossary of Zombie

Spaces, different “entrails” are visible in the area, the result of different planned investments by “biters”, the results of which are visible in the form of spatial “segregation” or “pandemic”, understood as an urbanism of contagion which expands progressively along the island. Things that were once there but are no longer, such as the Artiach biscuit factory, have been replaced by other temporary activities that combine art, craft and technology in the spirit of “maker”, in this case promoted by Espacio Open. We call this “temporary alternation”, spaces that are occupied cyclically as a result of the arrhythmic activity that Zombie Spaces suffer from.



Graphic image of the Zombie Spaces project. Ramon Parramón,

For example, in the project developed in Valencia in 2018 we saw how some parts of the Formula 1 circuit still remained, i.e., we were able to walk through fragments of the spatial “entrails” mixed into the urban fabric. In this case, the Formula 1 circuit, transformed into an abandoned space as a result of this “temporary alternation”, was revived in the virtual space when it was converted into a successful Play Station video game.

In voodoo ritual, a zombie is a person whose will has been taken away. According to Toni Negri and Michael Hardt (2003), the zombie and the vampire are two of the most representative metaphors of late capitalism, which in the 20th century acted as a vampire that sucked your blood little by little and now in the 21st century, transformed into a zombie, can completely destroy you with its insatiable hunger. From a subtle and invisible capitalism to an aggressive and unabashed capitalism. In the cultural tradition, the zombie is a metaphor for the consequences of contemporary capitalism on people, on the public, as a result of the insatiable desire to consume. In the post-capitalist city, the zombie metaphor takes shape in spaces that ultimately affect the ways in which people inhabit them.

"Spectrotopia", by philosopher Jorge F. Gonzalo (2011), is another concept we would like to add to this idea of how the configuration of city models contributes to the creation of zombiefied spaces. Bilbao's experience with the process of creating its own regeneration model, the same way the city of Barcelona did, could end up becoming two “spectres” or “ghosts” that repeatedly try to reproduce their own transformation process. Two very similar models that come to us after each city's efforts to first erase its past and then to create a new “model” of reactivation and “over-excitement”. Is this the new type of so-called “creative capitalism” announced by Boltanski L.

Chápielo (2002)? In other words, the one that copies itself and ultimately acts as a great spectre or a great phantom model of which we have all ended up being a part.

### Zombie Spaces as a practice that adapts to different contexts

First of all, it must be noted that the Zombie Spaces project is based on the transdisciplinary articulation between art and anthropology. As an artistic practice, the approach is rooted in urban criticism, firmly embedded in the tradition of institutional critique. As an anthropological practice, it shares this critical analysis of urban anthropology, contributing methodologies such as participant observation, the conducting of interviews or the organisation of tours, integrating agents linked to the spaces on which they are working. Both disciplines make it possible to combine two aspects that are not always easy to combine: a critical perspective and a desire to transform critical analysis into a formal element. Formalising can mean taking a useful approach from the perspective of transforming the context, or one that brings the different aspects analysed together in order to make them visible within the complexity of the characteristics of these zombie spaces.





In each place where there has been a "Zombie Spaces" project (Badalona, Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca and Valencia), the methodology has consisted of an initial phase in which the context is explored, followed by a specific analysis and a deployment of actions, which in most cases has taken the form of open workshops. The aim of the workshops is to make a series of concrete proposals based on the elements analysed and the discussions held collectively. In all cases, experts in the analysis of urban contexts have been invited to participate as guests, along with the residents of the urban areas themselves and other artists or cultural agents interested in taking an active part in defining proposals or explicit formalisations. The results have been presented in exhibition format or special publications.

When we carried out the project in Palma de Mallorca, we created a glossary of concepts that tried to give meaning to the application of the idea of "Zombie Space" in the field of overcrowded tourist spaces. The icons identifying the concepts were associated with certain spaces by means of photographs of the places, their geolocation and an icon representing one of the terms in the glossary. The results were presented in an exhibition on the phenomenon of mass tourism (Ciutat de Vacances, Es Baluard, 2017). Terms such as "pandemic", "ground zero", "biters", "wanderers", "overexcitement" and "temporary alternation" were included in the glossary of the zombie terminology as it applies to the analysis of the spaces.



**ESPACIOS ZOMBI | VALENCIA SUR**  
EXPLORAR LUGARES - CREAR  
NARRATIVAS  
Taller con ruta, proyecciones y  
debate.  
20 - 21.04.2018

[SEGUIR LEYENDO](#)



**ESPACIOS ZOMBI | TEMPORALIDADES  
URBANAS**  
Glosario + imágenes de espacios en  
relación con el turismo.

Es parte de la exposición **CIUTAT DE  
VACANCES** (Venecia, Palma de  
Mallorca, Barcelona y Alicante)

[SEGUIR LEYENDO](#)



**ESPACIOS ZOMBI #3 | FRENTE  
MARÍTIMO [BCN]**  
Del 14 al 16 de julio de 2016 en Arts  
Santa Mònica

[SEGUIR LEYENDO](#)



**ESPACIOS ZOMBI #2 | BESÒS-FÒRUM  
[BCN]**  
Ciclo Debates y Taller-proyecto.  
Diciembre 2014 - Enero 2015

[SEGUIR LEYENDO](#)



**ESPACIOS ZOMBI #1 | GORG**  
2013 - 2014

[SEGUIR LEYENDO](#)



Microvídeos sobre el concepto  
**ESPACIOS ZOMBI.**

[SEGUIR LEYENDO](#)

Zombie Spaces combines both an idea that takes shape in certain places and the opportunity to deploy an analytical, collaborative and, in certain cases, propositional project, although its purpose lies in activating the critical capacity applied to the processes of transforming cities. It is therefore a practice that is subject to the spatial and temporal circumstances specific to a given context.

Bibliography:

- Boltanski L, Chápielo E (2002): El Nuevo espíritu del capitalismo. ED Akal Madrid
- Borja J./ Castells M (1998): Local y global. La gestión de las ciudades en la era de la información. Ed Taurus: Barcelona
- Delgado M (2007): Sociedades Movedizas. Pasos hacia una antropología de las calles. ED Anagrama. Barcelona.
- Fernández Gonzalo J. (2011): Filosofía zombi. Barcelona. Ed. Anagrama
- Lefebvre H. (2013): La producción del espacio. Ed. capitán Swing. Madrid
- Maza G. y Ramírez D: (2016) (Compila): "Espacios zombie" (Dossier of readings). Valencia 2016 en [www.idensitat.net](http://www.idensitat.net)
- Negri A. Hardt M: (2003): EL trabajo de Dionisos. Madrid EK Akal
- Parramón, R. (2020): Especies de procesos y especies de espacios. En revista PH 101 (2020) (Especial monográfico) De lo público al bien común: emergencia de otros modelos de gestión del patrimonio cultural. Ed. Instituto Andaluz de Patrimonio Histórico (IAPH)
- Zulaika J (2007). Crónica de una seducción. The Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao. Ed Nerea

**GASPAR MAZA GUTIERREZ.** He holds a degree in Geography and History from the University of Barcelona, a post-graduate degree in Social Education from the University of Barcelona and a PhD in Social Anthropology from Rovira i Virgili University in Tarragona. His PhD thesis was titled "Production, Reproduction and Changes in Urban Marginalisation. Youth in the Raval Neighbourhood of Barcelona 1986-1998." He worked for the Barcelona City Council as a social educator in the Ciutat Vella district from 1987-2004. Since 2005 he has been working as a professor in the Anthropology Department at the Rovira i Virgili University of Tarragona, where he teaches various courses in the Anthropology degree Programme and the Master's Programme in Urban Anthropology. He is also a professor at the Reus School of Architecture and has taught at the Elisava School of Design (2010-14) and the School of Physical Activity and Sport Sciences (CAFE) (2014-2018) at Ramon Llull University. He is a member of Idensitat and regularly takes part in the development of different projects related to sport, creativity and territory or tourism. His work focuses on issues related to the reproduction of social exclusion, the use of public space, and sporting activities with groups of at-risk youth. He plays an active role in the research and development of community projects in different neighbourhoods and cities. Another line of research he works on is based on issues related to immigration and transnational migration processes, as well as different projects related to visual culture or tourism. He is the author of several articles and books on each of these subjects.

**Ramon Parramón.** He is the director and founder of Idensitat, a collective project where he conducts his research practice as an artist and cultural manager. He is a Serra Húnter Programme professor at the School of Fine Arts of the University of Barcelona (UB). He holds a degree in Fine Arts (University of Barcelona) and a PhD from the University of Vigo. He is an assistant professor and member of the faculty of both the PERMEA Master's degree in Mediation and Education through Art (UV-CMCV) (2018-) and the Master's degree in Cultural Management at UOC-UdG. Former Assistant Director of EINA Centre Universitari de Disseny i Art de Barcelona (UAB) (2019-2021); Director of ACVIC, Centre d'Arts Contemporàneas (2010-2018); Head of Master's degrees and post-graduate studies at Elisava Escola Superior de Disseny i Enginyeria in Barcelona (2000-2010); and professor of the Master's degree in Research in Art and Design (EINA- UAB) (2017-2022), his lines of research focus on the relationship between artistic practices and social space. He has written articles that have been published in different books and journals on these topics.

**IDENSITAT** is an art project that explores ways of influencing the spatial, temporal and social dimensions of a territory through creative processes. It is designed as a system that incorporates other projects, actions or interventions that extend into different spaces and contexts. It promotes a conglomeration of strategies to carry out activities that combine research, production, management, education and communication. At the same time, it is a system based on collaborative dynamics aimed at connecting contemporary artistic practice with other disciplines in order to develop mechanisms that can be connected to certain orbits of social space.

DENSITAT collaborates with numerous artists and creators in different fields, bringing them in contact with people or collectives that work in local contexts. It operates in an itinerant production environment, travelling through the territory with the proposals it promotes and opening up spaces for reflection from which to conduct analyses and make transformation proposals linked to public space.