



Defining Urban Design in the Chilean context: the contributions of Munizaga

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We intend to contribute to the understanding of the initial paths and penetration routes Urban Design and Urbanistic Project notions in the urban and architectural culture in Latin America. To this end, it focuses on the trajectory and intellectual work of a Chilean architect, Gustavo Munizaga, who was responsible for writing one of the first didactic texts on urban design in Latin America and did so contemporaneously with the first manifestations of the Modern Movement's critical revision and the typomorphological approach in Chile.

Keywords: Chilean Urban Design History, Munizaga, Circulation of ideas.

Introduction

As a practical discipline, which test its concepts in distinct contexts — and eventually tears its semantic contours through borderline situations —, Urbanism has in its history multiple examples of terms originally coined for distant geocultural situations, which ended up approaching each other when they crossed different borders. This is the case of Urban Design and Urbanistic Project, notions constructed in different temporal and cultural contexts, but that had been approached by the practice — and the constant semantic displacements that it imputed to them —, as well as by cultural translation works. Even though both are very commonly used in everyday practice, their delimitations are still imprecise¹. Sert, as it is known, proposed the first one in 1953 in the United States context and, although its institutionalization was concurrent to the critics to the American Urban Renovations after mid-1950s, it reverberated CIAM's debates of the second post-war period². The Urban Project notion, on the other hand, was gestated in Continental Europe between 1970s and 1980s — notably in France, Italy and Spain —, amid the diffusion of typomorphological studies and the critical revision of Housing Projects and New Cities Policies that prioritized Modern Movement constructions and environments³.

This article intends to contribute to the understanding of the initial paths and penetration routes of these notions in the urban and architectural culture in Latin America. To this end, it focuses on the trajectory and intellectual work of a Chilean architect, Gustavo Munizaga, who was responsible for writing one of the first didactic texts on urban design in Latin America and did so contemporaneously with the first manifestations of the Modern Movement's critical revision and the typomorphological approach in Chile. The oscillations in his comprehension of Urban Design are here examined in the context of the international exchange of ideas, of his own trajectory and of the need for adaptations to the local situation. This research is based on the analyses of two of his urban design projects and in his sequence of textbooks and articles published between 1977 and 1983.

Munizaga's trajectory and Urban Design in Chile

The history of Urban Design in Chile and the professional trajectory of Munizaga intermingle in a complex net. Munizaga graduated in architecture in the Catholic University of Chile (UC) in 1962, when, despite the existence of the Institute of Planning and Housing at this university (created between 1953 and 1954), the teaching of urbanism was limited to a few theoretical disciplines, without a practical consideration⁴. To fill this gap, he pursued his studies in a master's degree in Urban Design at Harvard University, between 1964 and 1967⁵, period that he would later recognize as fundamental in his academic formation. References of what he learned in those studies would accompany him throughout his academic and professional career.

Munizaga attended to a course in which the conception of Urban Design was not limited to large-scale architecture and its adjacent spaces. A change in the comprehension of the interfaces between Urban Design and Planning was already undergoing; contributions of Lynch, Alexander, Maki and Doxiadis were part of its cultural environment. Considering the frequency of its quotations and acknowledgement in his future texts, the ideas of Fumihiko Maki seems to have been of particularly importance for the young Chilean architect. More specifically, his writings would often mention Maki's proposition of three ways of structuring the collective form that would allow unity within the diversity: the compositional form; the megastructure — which, despite



external control, would enable a freedom of functions within it —; and the group-form, a systemic approach in which a structure provides the unity of a space by the reiteration of elements and processes in its production⁶.

His mentor's ideas were experimented during his master studies, in a studio called Intercity in which a proposition of new forms of settlements in the Baltimore-Washington conurbation was investigated. Munizaga and his team — Lozano, Corea and Wample — proposed a sequence of megastructures in which each module had its own civic and commercial centre, in addition to collective equipment. The possibility of a guided expansion was researched by the proposition of an open terminal — using the concept latter incorporated in Maki's writings — and permitted the hybridization of both ideas of megastructure and collective form.

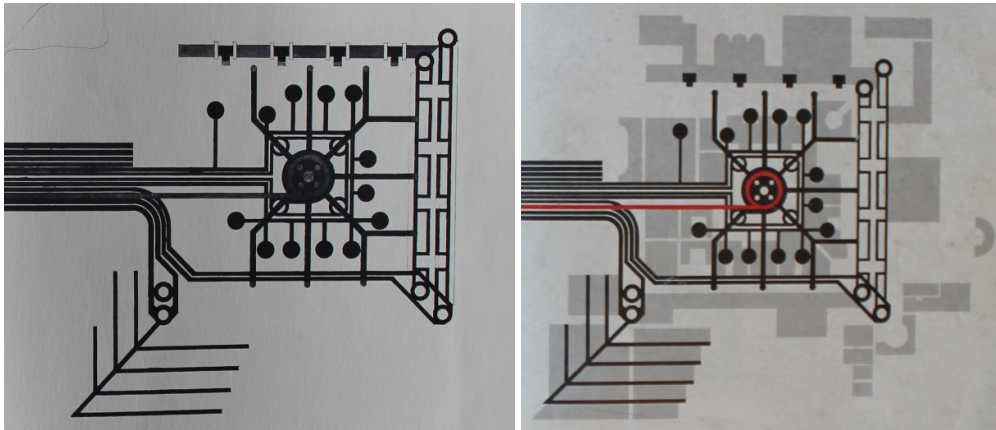


Figure 1 and 2 – Diagram of Intercity proposal, in Monacelli and Corea (1964) and diagram illustrating Munizaga's article "Estructura y Ciudad", in ARQ n. 8 (1983).

When Munizaga came back to Chile, he encountered a cultural environment of experimentation in planning which led to the implementation of several new institutions. Under the context of the Cold War struggle to control the Latin America territory, the Ford Foundation joins the efforts started by the American Aid Program (USAID) to build financed social housing in Chile, proposing a program to Alessandri government in 1963. Two years later the cooperation program — that initially aimed to produce community facilities — was revised and expanded to handle the urban and regional planning demands of Frei's government and had John Friedman as its coordinator⁷.

The cooperation between the consultant team and the local technicians took place through new governmental institutions, such as the Ministry of Habitation (MIVU – 1965), the National Planning Office (ODEPAN - 1964), and a new research centre, the Interdisciplinary Centre of Urban and Regional Development (CIDU), made in partnership between Catholic University of Chile (UC) and Ford Foundation. Conceived as an institution of research and technicians training, the CIDU actively collaborated in its initial years with the abovementioned government agencies, remarkably with one of Ministry of Habitation's autonomous corporations, the Corporation of Urban Improvement (CORMU)⁸. Responsible for the creation of a land stock and for the formulation of urban renewal plans, the CORMU had as its characteristic feature its approach to urban planning under the viewpoint of architecture⁹. Between 1965 and 1972, this corporation executed the urban renovation of San Borja and other proposals of densification of central areas. It was in this context of intense collaboration between academic and governmental institutions that Munizaga, recently arrived from his Master in Urban Design, was integrated into CIDU, been responsible for the design of Manuel Rodríguez's Sector, developed between 1968 and 1971.

Despite the term Urban Design was not, at that moment, widely diffused in Chile — a UC professor of architecture, Hernan Riesco, would acknowledge that he had heard it for the first time in 1964¹⁰ —, its notion and practice was already circulating in the Chilean specialized field. In 1971, for example, the architect Browne, who had recently returned from his master's in City Design at MIT, criticized the lack of precision of this term and the tendency to be interpreted as a large-scale architecture. Although he recognized the necessity of fill the gap between planning and architecture, he did not believe that this role was properly performed by the notion of Urban Design¹¹. In 1972, on the other side, CORMU did not use this term in the International Competition for Remodeling of Santiago Centre program.

Though the winning design was not executed — the 1973 Military Coup interrupted the process — this competition itself, which was attended by 87 teams from 25 different nationalities, became a landmark in Chilean architectural culture. Munizaga, with his teaching assistants and a group of his students from the



University of Chile (UCHile) — where he taught between 1969 and 1975, after having left UC due to an academic conflict¹² — joined with a honourable mentioned proposal¹³. This proposition reveals itself an opportunity to attempt the adaption of his North American Urban Design learning's to the Hispano-American block. Using as a reference the existing urban plot, they reinterpreted it in a new urban layout and in the location of the new proposed buildings (residential and communitarian facilities) which configured series of central patios with pedestrian access and subdivided the block into 16 parts. The idea of open terminal was present in the proposition its execution through several stages.

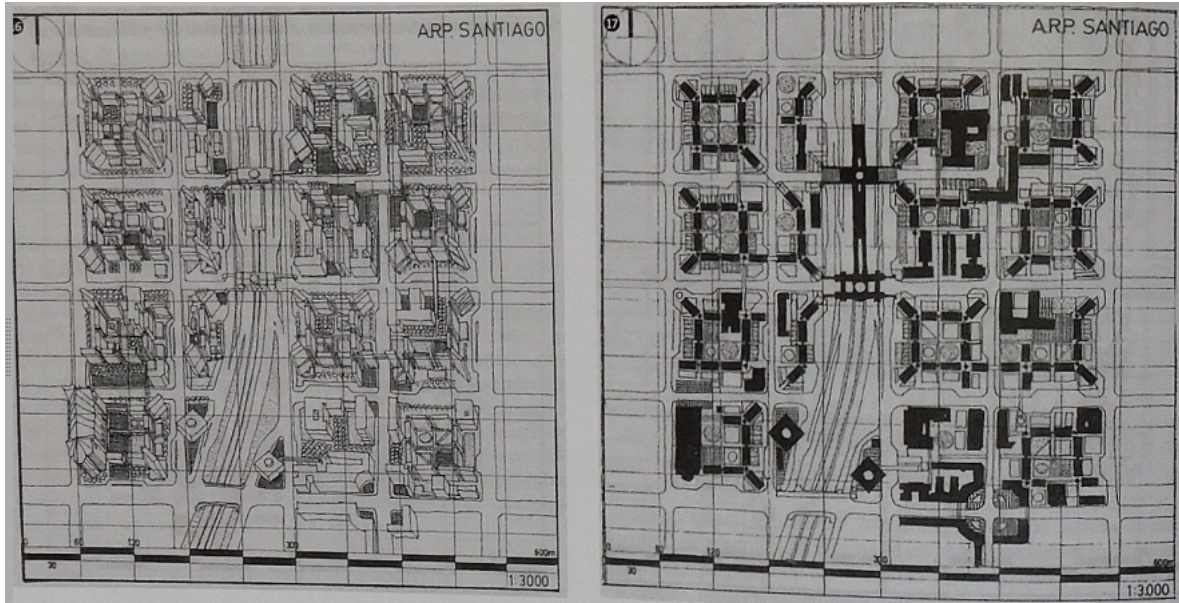


Figure 3 – Munizaga's proposal to CORMU International Competition, in Pavez (2015)

In 1974, when Riesco became Director of the UC Architecture School (EAUC), Munizaga returned to the institution as an invited teacher, receiving a tenure position in 1977. At this moment he started to work as a teacher in Urban Design studios and, due to the absence of bibliography of this subject in Spanish — few exceptions were Spreiregen (1971) and Bacon (1974) — he started to produce his own textbooks¹⁴. In those, it is possible to identify the incorporation of many of his Urban Design Master's acquaintances, to which were now added his experience with the Chilean planning institutions and his former attempts to translate these ideas to Chilean context.

There was a crescent interest in Urban Design in the EAUC that would lead, among other realizations, to a partnership with MIT in a studio to elaborate the Revitalization and Structuralizing Project for Santiago Centre (1978-1979). Coordinated by Riesco, this cooperation allowed the contribution of Halasz, from MIT, as a visiting professor and included Munizaga as participant¹⁵.

When Munizaga became a professor of Urban Design at UC, critical reviews of the Modern Movement Urbanism were starting to resonate in Chile. In the 1st Biennale of Architecture in Chile (1977), a newly created collective named CEDLA — whose architects had just returned from London — brought up the debate about the importance of historical urban fabrics and defended the typomorphological critic to Modern Movement environments. Beyond those new ideas, this collective claimed their polemic role in architectural culture through the presentation in that exhibition of an Urbanistic Project as a counterproposal to those highlighted by the CORMU competition of 1972. The CEDLA design aimed to reinterpret the built heritage and the public spaces of the existing urban fabric¹⁶. Munizaga reacted to this polemic project by publishing a letter in the newspaper *El Mercurio* criticizing its excessive formalism¹⁷.

If at first Munizaga was reticent about CEDLA's proposal, soon the distance between both would be reduced. It is important to remind that one of CEDLA founders, Humberto Eliash, had been a former assistant of Munizaga in his studio at UChile, between 1970 and 1975. On the other hand, in the same year of the 1st Biennale, José Rosas — who was interested in typomorphological contributions and in 1982 would initiate his doctorate studies under Sola-Morales's guidance — started to work as Munizaga's teaching assistant in UC. A shift in pedagogical approaches of Munizaga at UC can be noticed between 1977 and 1983: the architectural studios added the word typology to its titles, and the Urban Design ones focused on the study of Santiago through theoretical subjects — Urban Structure, in 1978; Model and Project, in 1979; Perception and Metaphor in 1980¹⁸. When Munizaga



became director of EAUC, he invited CEDLA architects to lead studios at this school: Boza, Duval and Moreno in 1980, and Murtinho and Eliash in 1981. To the young generation of students, the difference between CEDLA's studios and those of Munizaga and Rosas was not clear. In fact, both would be perceived as the main reference for an antagonistic group of students organized in UC in early 1980s: the *Contrapropuestas*¹⁹.

It is important to point that the interest for Urban Design and for the typomorphological discussion was not restricted to UC at that time. Its motivation, however, was less related to a critical review to urban planning — as it was observed in Brazil and in Argentina in the 1980s — than to seek an alternative way to incorporate urbanism contents into architecture courses in a national context of dismantling of planning institutions. On one hand, the National Policy of Urban Development (1979) transposed to the urban space the neoliberal principles, abdicating of the State control over urbanization²⁰. On the other hand, at the same moment, there was a continuing staff reduction in public and private planning research and teaching institutions²¹. In 1983, for example, in UChile under military intervention since 1976, the departmental structure of School of Architecture was abolished, and a single Urban Design chair replaced all urbanism contents of the former study program²².

Urban Design by Munizaga

To verify oscillations of Munizaga's notions of Urban Design, we did a longitudinal content analysis of four of his writings between 1978 and 1983. The first two publications, edited in 1978 and 1980, continued a work he started at CIDU in 1968, and were linked to his experience as a teacher. Both were conceived as didactic supports that aimed to guide the practice in his studios at UC. Therefore, he acknowledged these texts did not intended to present original contents, their goal was rather to "reorganize an intellectual universe that presents itself in an indeterminate and confused way"²³. The third text, from 1983, assumes a hybrid character. Although it continues the previous work, it is organized within the framework of an investigation on the notions of structure and design and to that includes contributions from his teaching practice. The last text, also from 1983, is the first one published as a book and presents reflections systematized over five years.

The analysis of this corpus was guided by two aspects: one relative to the structure of the texts — observing both the continuities and the variations of themes —, and another concerned with the bibliography presented at the end of them. Despite these references had not always had the same relevance in the central argument of Munizaga's texts, the bibliography reveals itself as a carefully and constantly remade list. In each new publication, new items are included, and others discarded, in a flow that reveals its contributions in Munizaga understanding of Urban Design. In the graphs below, it is possible to note the progressive incorporation of references deriving of neo-rationalists and a decrease of those linked with Modern Movement Urban Design partially learned at Harvard. The structure analysis, as we will discuss on following paragraphs, reveals the change in references was accompanied by the rise of new themes.

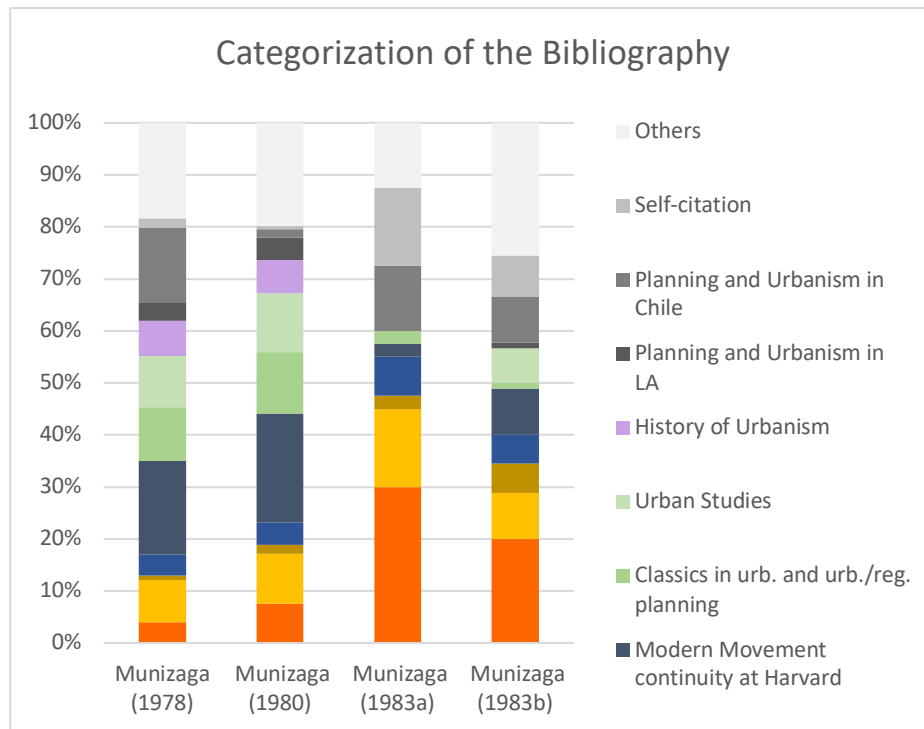


Figure 4: Percentage of the bibliography categorized according to the context of the publication. Produced by the authors.

The texts “Urban Design: Fundamentals and Processes” and “Three texts about Urban Design”, regardless of their differences in some contents and in the level of its development — the first one was uncompleted —, have both a similar structure of four parts. They begin with a delimitation of the problem and the definition of the concepts of planning, urban architecture, urbanism, urban design, city. After that, they present specific issues of urban design in the context of the “Mondial Macropolis” — the tendency of total urbanization — or the Ecumenopolis, as defined by Doxiadis. Their third part presents the urban design as a process, in which the author’s argument is supported by a historical perspective from industrial revolution to late 1970s, and by a set of models or strategies to guide urban proposals. The fourth part exposes the products and components of Urban Design, pointing what Munizaga defined at that moment as seven basic strategies: Capital cities, Satellites cities, New Cities, Specialized Functional Sectors, Regulatory plans, Central Areas Renewal and Urban Systems. As attachment to both texts, there is a chronology of urban interventions.

In his attempt to organize and categorize the writings about the theme, Munizaga seeks not to link himself directly to a single theory or body of knowledge. Thus Munizaga even recognizes the diversity in his bases for a design method: the conceptual fundament, the unit and elements from the Ekistics Theory; the variables and organization of elements of Alexander, the notions of behaviour and aggregation of Fuller; the analytical categories of Lynch and Noberg-Schultz; part of functionalism criticism of Rossi, typology of urban form of Lynch; notions of open terminals and subsystems from Maki; ideas of urban grid of Bacon and the connectors and articulators concepts of Halasz²⁴.

In this reunion of such different contributions, however, Munizaga does not always distinguish properly the authors; neither tries to contextualize them nor to condense the essence of their arguments. Instead, he undertakes the work of recombining varied origins resources to affirm convergences where it would be hardly verifiable. For example, in writing about Urban Sector and Neighbourhood Unit, and recognizing them as the fundament of CIAM’s urbanism, Munizaga²⁵ approaches them to Rossi’s Residential Areas, suppressing the key argument of the Italian architect. From late-1970s the notion of typology used in his texts is not rooted in the Italian debate, but in the classification made by Lynch in 1961.

The third publication, “Model, Structure and Project” from 1983, differs from the previous ones by its attempt to operationalize former didactic experiences as research on notions of typology, metaphors, systems and structures. To do so, it initially presents the basis of the precedent didactic experiences. After that, the pedagogical activities carried out by him and his assistants — among them Jose Rosas, in the UC, and Humberto Eliash, at the UChile — are illustrated, with brief reports of the disciplines developed between 1970 and 1983. Finally, two chapters expose theoretical reflections and possible methods used in the operationalization of two binomials: “type and typology”, and “analogy and metaphor”.



Contrary to what was pointed in the two previous publications, in the third one the notion of type is clearly supported by typomorphology studies, using as main references Rossi, Argan, Moneo, Colquhoun and Quincy. In fact, as Munizaga²⁶ explains it, this notion was experienced in his disciplines between the second half of 1982 and the first half of 1983, shortly after the workshops given by members of the CEDLA group.

If in previous works collaborators are only named in the introduction and in the report of didactic experiences, in the book “Structure and City”, from the same year, they assume the role of co-authors. Edited by Munizaga, in this book he is the author of only three of its seven chapters — having Jose Rosas as co-author in one of them. Notions that were experienced in didactic exercises in previous five years are exposed and deepened in each chapter. A common framework that would allow the reduction the dissonances between different notions and would insert them within the same operation is sought through this edition. In this sense, the Structure — understood as an ontological order and as a morphological, functional and semiological reference — was proposed and analysed through notions of configurations, systems, types and metaphors. Despite the thematic displacements noticed through Munizaga’s writings, it should be pointed that in the proposal developed for the central area of Santiago, presented in its last chapter, the megaforms and semiological structures learned at Harvard were still present, but now hybridized with the new contributions of typomorphology.

Conclusions

The exposition made throughout this text made explicit the key role of Munizaga in the cultural translation of Urban Design to the Chilean context. This is confirmed not only by being part of the first generations of students graduated from the Harvard master course, but also by the fact that he became directly involved with planning institutions and teaching activity since his return to Chile.

If, in a first moment, he assumed the position of cultural translator of his Urban Design acquaintances from the North American context, latter he would produce new notions by hybridization. His continuous conflict with local contingencies, whether through the practical experiences, pedagogical experiments, advisory or planning, and his continuous contacts with academics from other countries, enabled him to perform a hybridism between the ideas of the Modern Movement and its critical review.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

¹ Krieger and Saunders, *Urban Design*, 2008.

² Munford, *Defining Urban Design*, 2009.

³ Sainz Gutierrez, *El proyecto urbano en España*, 2006.

⁴ Gross, “Medio siglo de temática urbana”, 1994, 130-145.

⁵ Munizaga, “Gustavo Munizaga, correspondent from Chile”, 1977; “Urban Patterns of Santiago”, 1979; *Estructura y Ciudad*, 1983.

⁶ Maki and Goldberg, “Linkage in Collective Form” 1962, 100-104.

⁷ Friedman, “Do Planning Ideas Travel?”, 2010.

⁸ Gross, “Medio siglo de temática urbana”, 1994, 130-145.

⁹ Perez de Arce, “Jardín de Senderos entrecruzados”, 1994, 146-151.

¹⁰ PIAPP, *Revitalización y estructuración del centro de Santiago*, 1979.

¹¹ Browne, “A propósito de un dilema: Arquitectos y Planificadores”, 1971.

¹² Strabucchi ed., *Cien años de arquitectura en la Universidad Católica de Chile*, 1994.

¹³ Pavez, *Diseño Urbano Inclusivo para Santiago Centro*, 2015

¹⁴ Munizaga, “Gustavo Munizaga, correspondent from Chile”, 1977.

¹⁵ PIAPP-UC, *op. Cit.*, 1979.

¹⁶ Souza, “Tessituras híbridas ou duplo regresso”, 2013.



- ¹⁷ Munizaga, "Carta a El Mercurio", 1977.
- ¹⁸ Munizaga et al., *Modelo, Estructura y Proyecto*, 1983
- ¹⁹ Souza, *op. cit.*, 2013.
- ²⁰ Gross, *loc. cit.*, 1994
- ²¹ Gross, *loc. cit.*, 1994 and Pavez, *loc. cit.*, 2009.
- ²² Pavez, *La institución del urbanismo*, 2009
- ²³ Munizaga, *Diseño Urbano*, 1978
- ²⁴ Munizaga, *Tres textos sobre Diseño Urbano*, 1980
- ²⁵ Munizaga, *op. cit.*, 1978
- ²⁶ Munizaga et. al, *op. cit.*, 1983.

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Image sources

Figure 1: Monacelli, Theodore, and Mario Corea. *Intercity II: comparative analysis of intercity developments*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University GSD, 1964.

Figure 2: Munizaga, Gustavo. “Estructura y Ciudad”. *ARQ*, no. 8 (1983): 4-9.

Figure 3: Pavez, Maria Isabel, ed. *Diseño Urbano Inclusivo para Santiago Centro*. Santiago: Universidad de Chile, 2015.