

Mapping absence: no-data as an operative framework for territorial analysis

Başak Uçar

TED University, Department of Architecture

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Contemporary territories are increasingly mediated through digital systems that do not simply represent space, but actively structure its visibility. Within these systems, certain areas remain partially or entirely absent. These absences (manifesting as missing, obscured, or inaccessible data) are not neutral omissions, but are produced through uneven development, infrastructural disparities, and political decisions that regulate access, representation, and knowledge. As such, no-data zones reveal how territorial realities are selectively constructed and governed.

This paper examines the potential of architectures of no-data as a critical framework for interpreting complex data environments, analyzing spatial relationships and patterns, uncovering hidden connections, and informing research processes and outcomes. The study was conducted within a graduate-level elective architecture course, in which students engaged with digital spatial archives as primary sites of inquiry.

By selecting and critically analyzing datasets such as satellite imagery, environmental records, and urban data platforms, the study maps multiple forms of absence, including infrastructural gaps, demographic invisibility, discontinuities in territorial connections, and the underrepresentation of informal settlements. Through representational strategies that foreground these absences, the projects reinterpret no-data as an active spatial condition, demonstrating how invisibility aligns with processes of marginalization while simultaneously exposing overlooked spatial, cultural, and environmental realities.

Positioned within the networked information age, this research establishes a pedagogical and analytical framework that integrates multi-scalar thinking with data-driven spatial interpretation. It understands absence as a condition produced through socio-political inequalities and regimes of control, while also using it as a critical lens to interrogate these very structures. In this sense, no-data is not framed as a generative resource in itself, but as evidence of uneven territorial processes that, when made visible, can inform more just and accountable spatial practices.