

## EUSS11 Student projects summaries

### Projects: Arroja-Odivelas and Sintra – Praia das Maças

by Judith Ryser

For their practical work, the summer school students were allocated two sites, in need of urban transformation in the context of declining local authority funding. The purpose of the design projects was to generate creative solutions to revitalise a commuter suburb of Lisbon (Arroja-Odivelas) and a coastal village (Sintra – Praia das Macas) with summer tourism. The background to these projects was the acknowledgement that the public sector was no longer in a position to fund urban regeneration. The students were expected to produce alternative planning approaches with new stakeholders and funding opportunities.

Analysis of traditional high street and proposals for transformation within contemporary constraints.

One background study towards the summer school design tasks consisted of an analysis of the decline of traditional high streets. It was expected to assist students in rethinking the declining public realm in their study areas which amounts to a generic planning problem in many parts of the world, and in particular in Europe.

Traditionally, it was the task of the public sector to invest in infrastructure renewal, including traffic management, traffic calming, parking, pedestrianisation, street furniture, street lighting, and signage. The public realm was usually owned by the public sector which was responsible for its maintenance, improvement and provision of safe communal facilities, such as play areas or sitting out spaces. When trying to combat the decline of high streets, the public sector offered shop keepings incentives to keep their businesses there. More recently, public authorities also got involved in marketing their urban assets to attract and retain users and investors. However, since the latest economic crisis public funds were shrinking and no longer available for any activities other than basic services. In areas with low income populations whose spending powers were shrinking even

more after the crisis as they faced higher taxes, while finding it difficult to dispose of their assets, the public realm was declining even more rapidly which, in turn, led to a downward spiral of devaluing neighbourhoods.

Commercial urbanism was proposed as an alternative to traditional publicly funded and managed urbanism. The characteristics of commercial urbanism were seen as fostering a new style economy, mobilising new artisans, younger self-employed and social entrepreneurs who were expected to revitalise traditional products and create new jobs. Another aspect of commercial urbanism was to increase the night economy. Provided it was able to reconcile conflicting land uses, such as residential and night life, this would create new ways of adding value to urban neighbourhoods and properties. Commercial urbanism consisted of sharing commercial risks and public responsibilities with traditional public authorities who would usually own the land earmarked for such innovative urban transformations. This required precise targets for risk sharing whereby municipalities would supply land or property, and reconcile noise regulations with increased night activities in compatible locations to attract new users, such as students, teenagers, old people, and others who would contribute to the local economy.

### **Sintra: a spatial strategy for the coastal village of Praia das Macas, Portugal**

**Students: Khadija Benis, Vanessa Beuchot, Florence Defert, Joana Goncalves, Amanda Rafacho, Nibal Saleh, Jost Wilker.**

#### **Spatial analysis**

Building on the background information presented by the EUSS team and the local planners, the student team undertook three preparatory

tasks: understanding the historic background, undertaking a spatial analysis of the village and its metropolitan context, and clarifying their understanding of quality of space and quality of life suitable for this location. In the short time available they undertook a rapid desk study, followed by a site visit which gave them new insights into the local issues as a basis for their projects.

They decided to focus on quality of space and quality of life as their guiding principles for their design proposals. They used traditional planning tools, land use plans and SWOT, besides their personal observations to agree on objectives for their proposal. They elaborated a concept which was expressed in micro-scale maps, together with a metropolitan spatial context map. In parallel, they came to some understanding of quality of life and quality of space they considered relevant for this specific site, its users, its current and potential uses to conceive spatial transformations to improve physical, economic and social opportunities for the village.

Praia das Macas had evolved from a fishing hamlet to a summer tourist destination of people from cities and especially Lisbon. Its sandy beaches attracted holiday makers and surfers in large numbers over a limited period of time. Such increasing influx of tourists over the summer season created unsustainable demands on the locality and its services. Some second homes were built on the periphery, but people living permanently in the village remained a fraction of the summer population. Despite these changes, the village preserved a family friendly environment and a cosy atmosphere in a still attractive natural environment with leisure facilities along the beaches and in the village centre.

The SWOT analysis confirmed these strengths, but also uncovered weaknesses, mainly traffic congestion and excessive amount of parked

cars, poor sidewalks and some run down sites with derelict buildings. If these problems were not addressed, the team imagined that beaches with better environmental conditions and greater tourist attractions would compete for the summer tourists of Praia das Macas who are contributing considerably to the local economy. Development opportunities were identified as the outstanding site, its sea views, its natural environment and cultural heritage, and its recreational potential for swimming, walking, surfing and resting.

### **Design proposals**

The key changes the students proposed were to enhance the existing heritage sites, to reconnect the town centre with its rich environment by opening sea views and improving physical connections, but most importantly to find solutions for the conflicting traffic situation, flows as well as parking. They proposed to regenerate the village centre by redesigning the square, improving its uses by calming traffic and reorganising parking to improve road safety, and by creating a more active footfall in the surrounding buildings to turn the square into a destination.

Their micro-scale changes focused on a complete redesign of the square with new pavement, street furniture, trees and better view onto the sea, as well as the reshaping of the uncomfortable links between the village centre and the beach which had lots of steps, no through views and no activities on the way. This meant taking most of the parking out of the square to new locations, albeit easily reachable on foot. By elevating part of the square they managed to create a safer space with sea views. They adopted a similar approach to the link between the square and the beach. The main challenge was to open up views along the path to guide visitors to the seafront where they proposed new leisure activities

and a promenade. They worked with the sections they had surveyed during their site visit and photographs showing the obstacles and opportunities. They were expecting that these changes would improve life of the permanent residents as well as prolonging the tourist season as it would be less dependent on bathing alone. Already, the surfers were using the beach over a longer period, thus providing more attractions to them, including a possibility to store their equipment should contribute to prolonging the tourist season and levelling out the unsustainable fluctuation of the demand on local public services and pressures on the natural environment.

**Arroja: a revitalisation plan, Lisbon metropolitan area, Lisbon**

**Students: Pervin Senol, Kristina, Gjini, Priscila Barros, Marianne Monte, Pawel Jaworski, Pedro Afonso Fernandes, Natalia Pawlik, Themistoklis Oikonomou**

**Spatial analysis**

Using the documentation produced by the EUSS 11 team and contributed by the local authority the student team compiled relevant data for their projects about characteristics of the local population, level of education, local and commuting workplaces, together with the typology of the building stock in this peripheral suburb of Lisbon. In the light of a multicultural and increasingly footloose society their concern was to understand the diversity of the population of this neighbourhood to identify their needs and the potential contributions they could make to improve their local environment. Their objective was to transform Arroja from a space into a place, inspired by Jane Jacob's criteria of liveable places which include mixed use of residential, commercial and public amenities, small blocks leaving open connections, a diverse building stock

and a relatively dense urban fabric. They also compiled a map showing the local characteristics and attractions, without knowing though who among the local residents were using them, at what time of the day and how long for.

They noted that the suburb built sometimes in the seventies after the flower revolution was conceived according to modernist principles, with plenty of communal open spaces with a building stock dating from the same period. In effect it was a new town extension with amenities which had declined as the residents were commuting to Lisbon to work and the neighbourhood was not used much during daytime. Quite some empty sites were still awaiting missing cultural and community establishments which were never built. A lot of the open spaces were neglected, cars parked everywhere, many shops in the arcade closed, and many ground floor spaces planned for workplaces never used. Based on this analysis and their site visit they decided to concentrate on the public realm and its improvement as a means to make this neighbourhood more liveable. They identified potential vacant spaces for which they were proposing new uses and designs, including connections between them to create greater cohesion between the various parts of the neighbourhood inhabited by different communities. This included rethinking the use of the empty ground floors to create employment opportunities and thus retain some of the population in the neighbourhood during daytime. Their key design problem was how to conceive such a network of public spaces and how to realise it. Their design strategy was to select specific places where they would introduce urban acupuncture projects which they designed to accommodate diverse and complementary uses to heal the 'neighbourhood body'. That included the connections between the places, a park, a cultural or community centre, revitalising existing neglected squares, an oecumenical pole and a green way meandering along the historic landmarks.

## Design proposals

They produced a masterplan locating seven planning interventions, six place transformations, as well as links between them and connections beyond this rather enclosed neighbourhood. For each intervention they identified the existing problem of the space; who should participate in, and benefit from the change; overall planning objectives which would contribute to the regeneration of the neighbourhood as a whole; and the planning tools and urban design instruments to achieve these transitions.

They produced sketches showing the situation before and after, including in sections as the morphology of the neighbourhood was very complex. The connection project consisted mainly of redesigning streets, parking arrangements, and creating safe places to walk and play with new greenery to improve the comfort of using outdoor spaces. The idea was that people would use their neighbourhood more and on foot. They identified a neglected open space with views over the valley which they proposed to transform into a local park with shaded sitting out areas, cafes and spaces for communal cultural activities and leisure. One idea to enliven what was in fact a dormitory suburb was to create a space for events, such as ethnic or food markets, music performance, etc. where inhabitants could express their cultural identities and which would attract visitors from the surroundings. They selected a bare space in front of the declining shopping mall which should benefit from these new activities as well. The cultural centre was to be located near the social security office where inhabitants had a purpose to go anyway. Transforming a backyard space into a green area connecting the shopping mall with the medium density housing blocks was expected to add value to the area and generate a new multifunctional centrality by transforming the shopping mall into a covered street between several open spaces. They noted the absence of

any religious establishment and decided to set up an oecumenical node where a church had been planned by was never realised. The site around this building would be a node on the internal walkway and contain spaces for spontaneous activities.

In the longer term, they would mobilise the local inhabitants to take a new interest in the existing and rather run down heritage objects which they would restore and include on the internal walkway. The students also set up a longer term strategy for spatial transformations which would require more substantial investment, such as a public transport connection between the neighbourhood and Lisbon, the relocation of the power plant which occupies a central space in the neighbourhood, and the transformation of the empty ground floor areas into productive and creative spaces.