

Emerging urban challenges

Addressing transgenic territories

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Abstract

The present exercise considers the metropolitan relation between the municipalities of Amadora, Lisboa and Odivelas, in Portugal, around some of their main road infrastructures, deepening intervention lines on the relation of those roads with some of their heavy materials, such as the large leisure and consumption facilities and some health amenities appearing right close to it. Like other emerging areas, this territory results from the sum of different types of urbanisation and spaces of varying sizes, which connect and separate built-up areas of the cities and their neighbourhoods. It is these areas - the spaces between cities, shopping centres, logistics areas, industrial areas, small urban centres and other forms of occupation - which we propose to study in terms of their health, ecological, landscape and communication aspects, and which constitute systems essential to the sustainability of the new agglomerations. Thus, reinforcing networks, axes and nodes and favouring polarising condensations of facilities, activities, means of transport or urban parks, in a perspective of acupuncture or urban fencing. In this sense, the research consists of the construction of strategic lines of urban design of intermediate scale and propositional nature that give special attention to some emerging urban formations particularly little studied.

Keywords

Urban acupuncture, Shopping centres, Road infrastructures, Lisbon Metropolitan Area

1. Introduction

This work presents a combined reflection of the partial results of an ongoing postdoctoral research - The role of the peripheral shopping centers when building the contemporary diffuse city, Lisbon (Beta +), Barcelona (Alpha -) and London (Alpha ++ cases (CEECIND/01829/2017)- and the work developed within the scope of the New Urban Challenges discipline of the Master's Program in Spatial Planning and Urbanism of the FA-IST-IGOT consortium, which the author of the article was able to direct between March and July of this academic year 2021-2022.

It thus begins by presenting the theoretical framework of the investigation – making an approximation to the condition of the contemporary city; then, it presents the research methodology, explaining the case study and the working methods used; discusses the research results, presenting two contributions of a design nature to qualify the case study and finally, closes the article with the presentation of a brief conclusion.

2. Background Research/Scholarly Literature

As explained by Graça (2010: 343), the contemporary city is characterized by a diffuse structure (resulting from decentralization and endogenous growth); a punctual concentration (resulting from accessibility and mobility constraints); a polarized and decentralized logic (derived from networks of relationships at different scales - local, regional, national and even international) and is organized on a flow dynamics (which gives it “product character” and which builds its capacity, identification, differentiation and competitiveness); the square and the street are no longer the places of social interaction par excellence, but become places of punctual and occasional social gathering. Therefore, they cease to be a “place” and become a “connection”, recognized only for their ability to allow the transit of people and cars.

According to Bernardo Secchi (1993: 116-117) when it ceases to be a recognizable meeting place, the only thing that is asked of the public space is that it “be permeable and that it can be crossed with as little friction as possible”. As Álvaro Domingues, Rosario Pavia and Francoise Choay, among others, so brilliantly explain, after the compact city, concentrated and separated from its surroundings; after the extensive, metropolitan-scale city that expands to its peripheries through mass transport and the automobile; we are now facing a new phase of urban growth, the city goes beyond its spatial framework and is no longer a continuous and spatially coherent entity (it weakens the cohesion of urban fabrics and generates a weak image of its spaces). Fragmentation is its matrix.

Although fragmentation is not a completely new phenomenon, it acquires a larger scale and affects a larger population volume. Winning a larger scale causes two things: the fracturing illegibility of the territory and the loss of a sense of identity and when affecting a larger population volume, it causes the disintegration of relationships between individuals. However, according to Stefano Boeri (2000: 365), this fragmentation would be characterized more by the isolation of elements than by its chaotic accumulation. “The principle of difference no longer works between homogeneous and distinct parts of the city (between 19th century fabric, medieval centre, social housing on the periphery) but between each molecule of the new diffuse city”.

According to Stefano Boeri (2000: 366) “the principle of variety works by leaps, combining urban types scattered throughout the territory, instead of combining the individuality of the homogeneous city.” Each urban element will be a distinct and separate component from the rest. The network does not respect geographical proximity or any other criteria of the compact city. The physical proximity of the traditional city gives rise to the discontinuity of the economic logic of post-Fordism.

However, if the fragments of this “city of products” are physically separated by voids and discontinuities, through imperceptible networks (that is, the usage patterns of its users) it maintains a close connection between itself. Each actor builds his image of the city, as in a “city a la carte” (Robert Fishman, 1990: 24-55) due to the multiplicity of dispersed and isolated elements. Bernardo Secchi (1993: 116) stated that the network of relationships between places was and is totally different from person to person and that each actor will have their own collection of collages of their own urban landscapes. The city is thus no longer seen as a static arrangement of objects in a unitary space but as a domain of invisible networked relationships.

It is now telecommunications (telephone, radio, TV, fax, satellite, GPS, mobile phone, internet) that allow us to overcome the physical distances of the discontinuity.

Finally, according to Graça (2010: 347), it is important to ask whether this hybrid tissue will be diversified and heterogeneous? What if the diversity of functions and activities actually build urbanity or just its simulacrum? Are there really new centralities in these fabrics?

According to Peter Hall (1998: 43-50), “metropolitan nuclei” are created, which are density phenomena in the form of key urban elements. If in the compact city the key elements were historic buildings or public spaces, in the contemporary city it will be the shopping center, the office buildings, university campus, train stations or other large collective facilities to mark and refocus the new urban landscape.

However, unlike what happens in the compact city, the urbanity of this enlarged city does not structure its density in the physical continuity of its fabrics and in the network of public spaces - according to Graça (2010: 347) - “the urban metastases that are formed around the power of attraction of the facilities (...) are discontinuous fabrics connected by invisible networks.”

3. Methodology

3.1. Case study

The urbanisation process of the territory existing at the confluence of the Pontinha area (Lisbon), with the neighbouring municipalities of Amadora and Odivelas appears as a representative case of suburban expansion in the Greater Lisbon region, carried out mainly by the private sector. Making use of the urban planning permission and the legal figure of the “urban allotment”, institutionalised in 1965, it overlapped any other practice and/or instruments of territorial planning and management.

However, during the 1990s, with the considerable improvement in accessibility networks, new forms of municipal planning and the renewal of business strategies for the qualification and promotion of new developments, a new direction was given to that urbanisation. The explosion of private allotments and the logic of fragmented urbanisation was followed by an important initiative from the central government which placed this territory in a position of excellence within the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. With the creation of the regional road access axes - framed by the quadrilateral defined by the CREL (1995), the CRIL (1997/98) and the IC16 Pontinha (1998) and IC22 Odivelas (1995) highways - the distance to the South bank and the Cascais coastal line was reduced and a direct link to the North and West roads was established. At the same time, there was a push towards a new model of territorial organisation, with the reinforcement of intra-municipal accessibility in urbanised and densely populated areas (Loures PDM 1994 / Master Plan for Municipal Accessibility) and the Odivelas local authority was trying to lead a new phase of development with the urbanisation of Colinas do Cruzeiro, covering an area of 65 ha, destined for the construction of 4000 dwellings, reversing the image of a dormitory periphery and the urban disintegration that had characterised the growth of this inner area of the municipality since the 1960s.

Later, a series of mobilising projects were developed in partnership with the private sector (Famões Technological Pole, the Paiã Business Park, the preliminary study for the green area of Quinta dos Cedros and Alvito), with the aim of creating a network of business and technological polarisation. More recently, large commercial and leisure facilities have appeared, to which other facilities have been added (health facilities, for example, the Trofa Hospital), once again changing the centralities and polarising logics of the existing roads and territories.

In short, this territory, like other emerging areas, results from the sum of different types of urbanisation and spaces of varying sizes, which connect and separate built-up areas of the cities and their neighbourhoods. It is these areas - the spaces between cities, shopping centres, logistics areas, industrial areas, small urban centres and other forms of occupation - which we propose to study in terms of their health, ecological, landscape and communication aspects, and which constitute systems essential to the sustainability of the new agglomerations. Thus, reinforcing networks, axes and nodes and favouring polarising condensations of facilities, activities, means of transport or urban parks, in a perspective of

acupuncture or urban darning. In this sense, the research consists of the construction of strategic lines of urban design of intermediate scale and propositional nature that give special attention to some emerging urban formations particularly little studied.

The exercise considers the metropolitan relation between the municipalities of Amadora, Lisbon and Odivelas around some of their main road infrastructures - IC16 (Radial da Pontinha), IC17 (CRIL), IC18 (CREL) and IC22 (Radial de Odivelas) - deepening intervention lines on the relation of those roads with some of their heavy materials, such as the large leisure and consumption facilities (UBBO shopping centre and Strada Outlet) and some health amenities (Trofa Hospital) appearing right close to it.



Figure 1. Case study area. Source: Pedro Bento based on Google Maps.



Figure 2. Aerial photograph of the case study area. Source: Pedro Bento based on Google Maps.

3.2. Research Methods

In order to study the action of collective spaces (in particular, the action of large shopping and urban leisure centres) in the construction of the diffuse city; to understand the urbanity of the enlarged city, through the study of urban metastases formed around the power of attraction of equipment and discontinuous fabrics connected by invisible networks; and to analyse the fragmentation of the occupation of the territory and mobility; we propose to start from a set of thematic interpretations that enable the construction of a critical and propositional approach based on disciplinary bibliography, reference case studies and reality itself.

In this sense, a complex territory is used, where the previous phenomena, related to the appearance of Mega Shopping Malls, next to motorway junctions or along large metropolitan arteries, are manifested. The aim is to explore contemporary themes (e.g. the history of consumption or the action of consumption in the transformation of the contemporary city) through territorial interpretation and the subsequent definition of an intervention strategy, territorial programming and transformation actions in continuity with pre-existing values and building links between each phase. The aim is to build a proposal of strategic lines of support to an urban project of intermediate scale, namely: territorial diagnosis, identification of conflicts and opportunities and relevant actors, instrumental and legal framework and articulated and integrating structuring of urban actions and interventions.

4. Research results (Discussion)

4.1. Introduction

Through the constitution of two working groups, it was possible to develop two proposals for intervention, very different in terms of proposed measures, but following a similar structure. First, a brief introduction is presented (explaining the framework and objectives of the work); then a territorial diagnosis is made, where the section of the IC17 (CRIL) between IC16 (Radial da Pontinha)/UBBO and the Strada Outlet is analysed in the AML context and, on the other hand, the section of the IC17 (CRIL) between IC16 (Radial da Pontinha)/UBBO and the Strada Outlet in a more local context. Using the SWOT methodology, the challenges, conflicts and opportunities present in the area under study are identified and a framework of relevant actors for the transformation of that territory is represented. Reference projects that can contribute to the development of the urban qualification project are identified and studied and, subsequently, strategic lines of urban project and spatial organization schemes and financing, planning and implementation instruments to be used are defined. Finally, the bibliographical references used for the exploration of the work are presented. Given the short space of presentation, we will focus the following subchapters on the explicitness of two strategic lines of urban project and respective spatial organization schemes.

4.2. Urban Proposal 1 - Re-thinking spatial, natural and communitarian connections for fragmented cities

The first proposal aims to redress the numerous urban voids present in the territory and generate an urban spine that could relate the different physical elements (education, health and leisure facilities, services, housing, retail) in a more robust and social cohesion urban synthesis. The working group intended to use all possible actors to obtain a truly integrated urban intervention, where some of them (highways and shopping centers), could help obtain the necessary investments and uses, without completely conditioning the use of urban space, as we see in most urban retail operations today.

The working group proposes to use part of the idle areas between malls and freeways as "open-air extensions" of malls, essentially for leisure, contemplation and consumption purposes. Making use of different instruments of public-private partnership, partial or total concession of the areas could be led to the developers of Shopping Centers, or even to the City Councils as co-owners of the area, as in the cases of Don Mills in Toronto (2021) or Ashford Park Mall in London (2022). As at the Strada Mall density is higher, the municipality could propose a rooftop common park area under a public-private cooperation with fiscal benefits, following the example of Oakridge Park Mall in Vancouver.

In the proposals for urban intervention listed above, students used the concept of regenerative and biophilic designs, in which it seeks to reverse the continued degradation of ecosystem services by designing and developing the existing built environment to restore their capacity to work for the mutual benefit of both human and non-human life. It was also valued the social community participation of the project, which is merged with ecological health in terms of both physical and psychological wellbeing.

The following interventions proposed are connected to an urban linear park along both sides of the IC16 and IC17, as a connection spine to both shopping malls and the densest neighborhoods on all parishes in Odivelas and Amadora, with landscaping, cycle ways, parking for either cars and bicycles, privileging shared transportation (rent cars or scooters). Along this linear park, a set of accesses will be developed, divided into 3 segments, facilitating access on foot, by bicycle or public transport for the local population to Shopping Malls, which until now were very dependent on private vehicles. Furthermore, specific urban furniture for leisure should be provided.

According with the group statement, the whole intervention process would take 4 phases to be completed and each one involves activities from short-term to long-term timeframe, being the phases expected to take longer than 5 years.

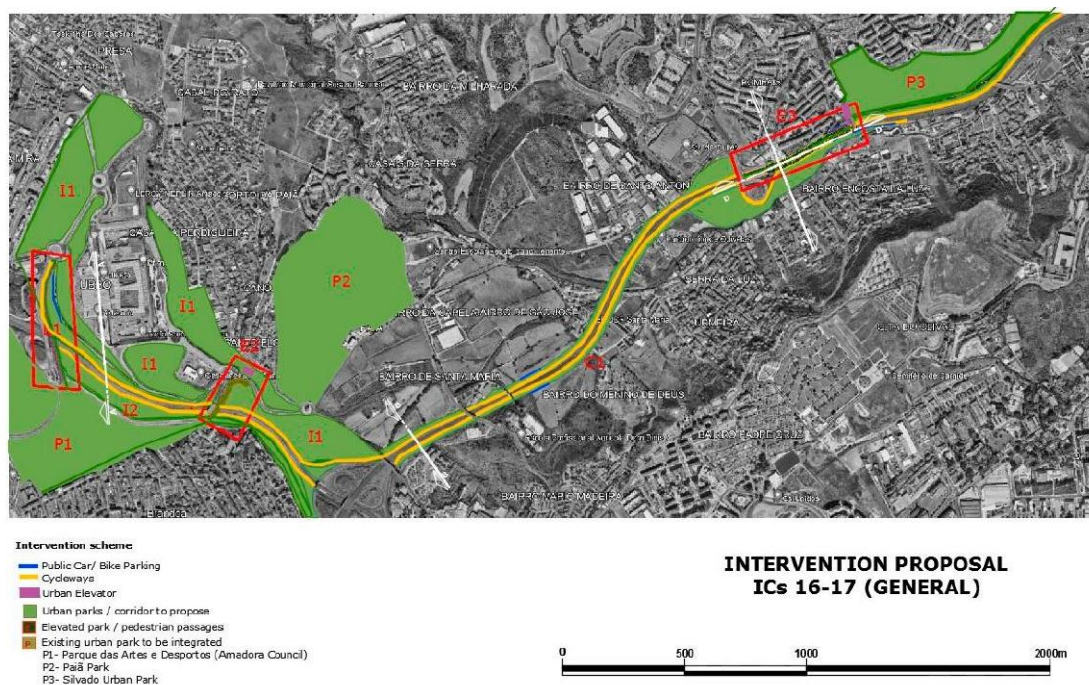


Figure 3. General Intervention Proposal Scheme. Source: Fernanda Pereira, Laura Navas and Renas Yildiz.

Part 1 - IC 16 – Urban strategies around Ubbo Mall (Amadora Municipality):

- Construction of 2 pedestrian garden bridges on IC16, close to Ubbo Mall. The first one linking directly Brandoa's neighbourhood - as an extension of Arts and Sports Park in Amadora (+80 meters higher than IC16 level) - to Ubbo shopping centre.
- Building of a sightseeing space for contemplation and leisure (boardwalk) on the retaining wall, from the edge of that park. The adjacent areas should have supporting infrastructure such as elevators, stairs and ramps, to better connect with the level of the park with the Gas station. From that point, users can reach either Ubbo Mall or the Paiã EcoPark;
- Exploring Ubbo's "resort concept" outside the mall walls - The construction of the first pedestrian bridge, on the eastern side of Ubbo Mall, intends to integrate Brandoa with its surrounding green areas, possibly led by a public-private partnership, in which Ubbo stakeholder could literally explore it "resort concept" outside the mall walls. Consequently, profit from leisure equipment along with consumption outdoors. This solution could be developed according to all actors needs and should be detailed in a public tender project, as the successful examples of Promenada Resort Community Mall in Chiang Mai, Thailand (with cascades and sensorial park); or Praça de Lisboa in Porto, which takes advantage of the existing topography to zone the consumption and leisure areas.
- Landscaping and urbanizing empty allotments. The empty lots could be developed by a public-private partnership (including Ubbo stakeholders themselves), turning into mixed uses (commercial, gardens, sports centers, etc.)

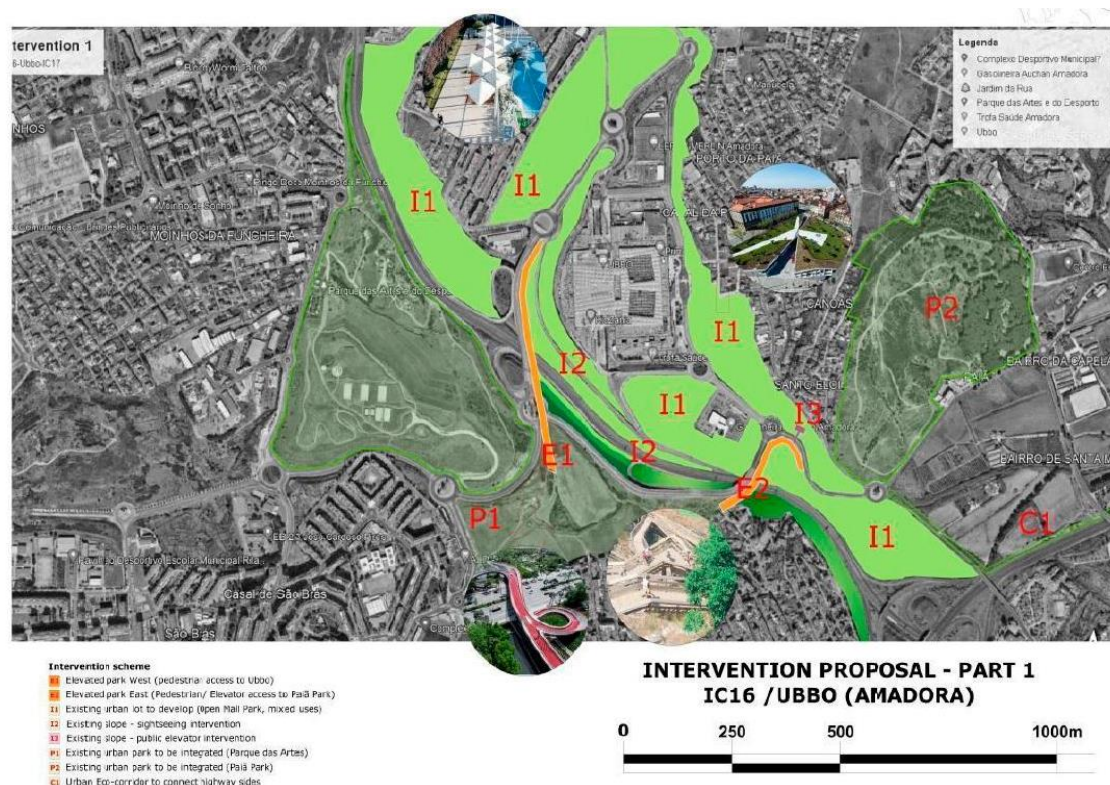


Figure 4. Intervention Proposal – Part 1. Source: Fernanda Pereira, Laura Navas and Renas Yildiz

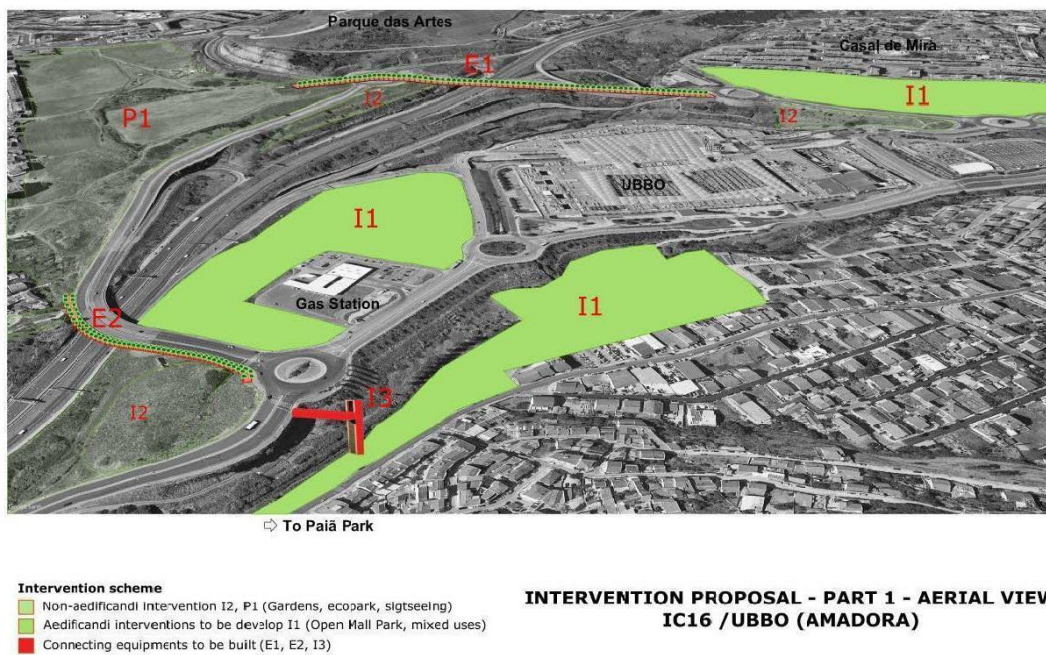


Figure 5. Aerial view – Part 1. Source: Fernanda Pereira, Laura Navas and Renas Yildiz

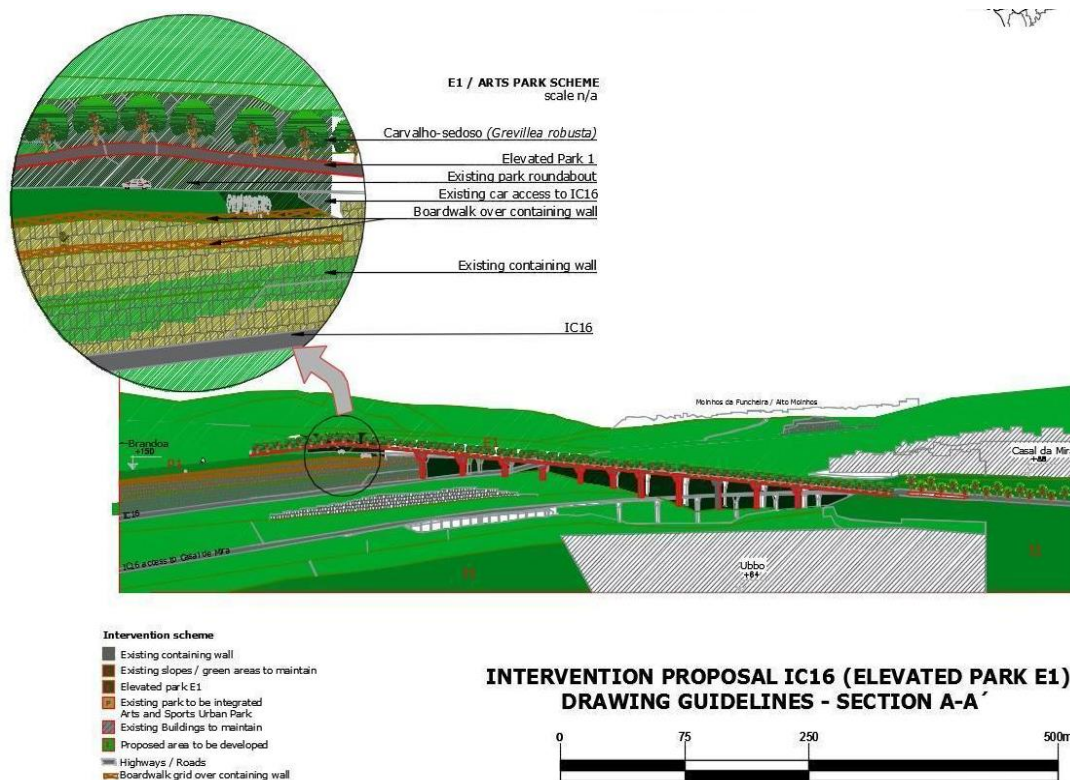
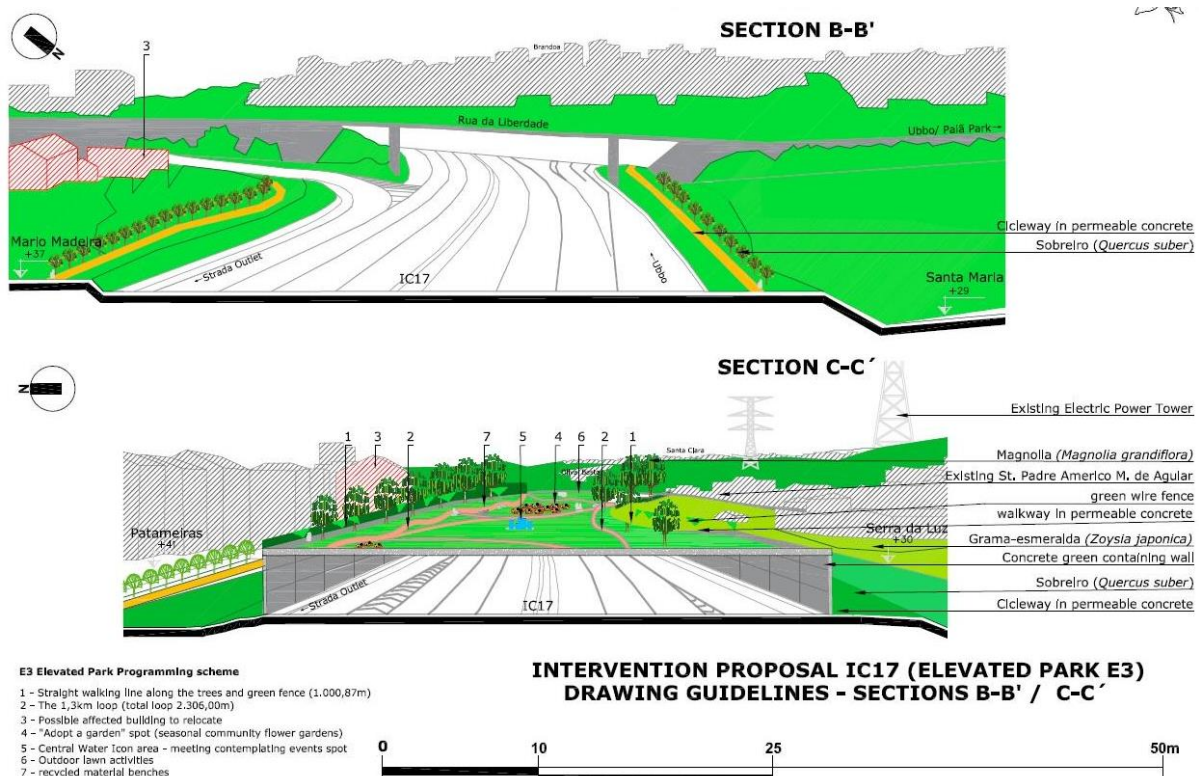
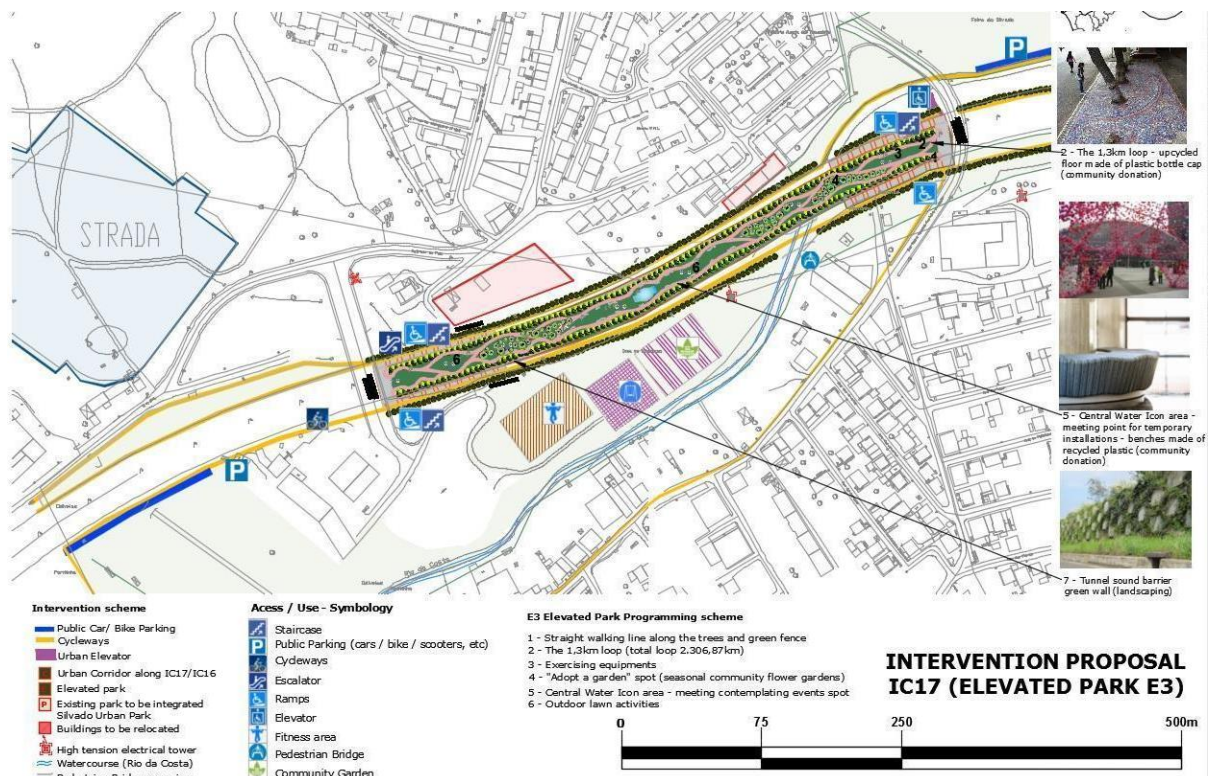


Figure 6. Section AA'. Source: Fernanda Pereira, Laura Navas and Renas Yildiz

- 1 Elevated park on IC17 to connect to existing car bridges next to Strada Mall with gardens, ramps, community garden and space for cultural events, such as farmers markets, etc. It will also connect directly with Parque do Silvado. Maximum length 520 meters and width 35 m. Its bottom height must follow the existing car bridges (5,90m and 6,70m respectively), in order to respect the current IC17 car height. That will help on the garden water inclination (>1.5%).
- To obtain a more useful leisure and sports area, Odivelas Municipality might offer a public-private agreement to concede tax benefits if the stakeholders build a public park or equipment around or on top of the mall, as the examples of Vancouver Oakridge and Jiangchen Paradise Walk.





Figures 9 and 10. Plan and Sections BB' and CC' of the Elevated Park E3 - Intervention Proposal – Part 2.

Source: Fernanda Pereira, Laura Navas and Renas Yildiz

Part 3 – Urban strategies for the Requalification of the existing Parks and Facilities:

- Reintegration of existing parks, such as Arts and Sports park (Amadora), Silvado (Odivelas), as well as requalification of Paiã Park as an Eco-Park, in order to attract either local leisure and adventure tourism, as well as increasing the council economic development;
- The Agricultural School should also be integrated with social projects, either by helping on natural food education, community planting techniques or selling the local products from students or associated local farmers.



Figure 11. Intervention Area 1 (Ubbo / IC16) - Artes e Desporto Park (P1) and Containing wall for boardwalk (I2). Source: Fernanda Pereira, Laura Navas and Renas Yildiz



Figure 12. Intervention Area 1 (Ubbo / IC16) -Pinhal da Paiã and Paiã EcoPark (P2). Source: Fernanda Pereira, Laura Navas and Renas Yildiz



Figure 13. Intervention Area 2 (Strada / IC17) - Feira do Silvado (P3). Source: Fernanda Pereira, Laura Navas and Renas Yildiz

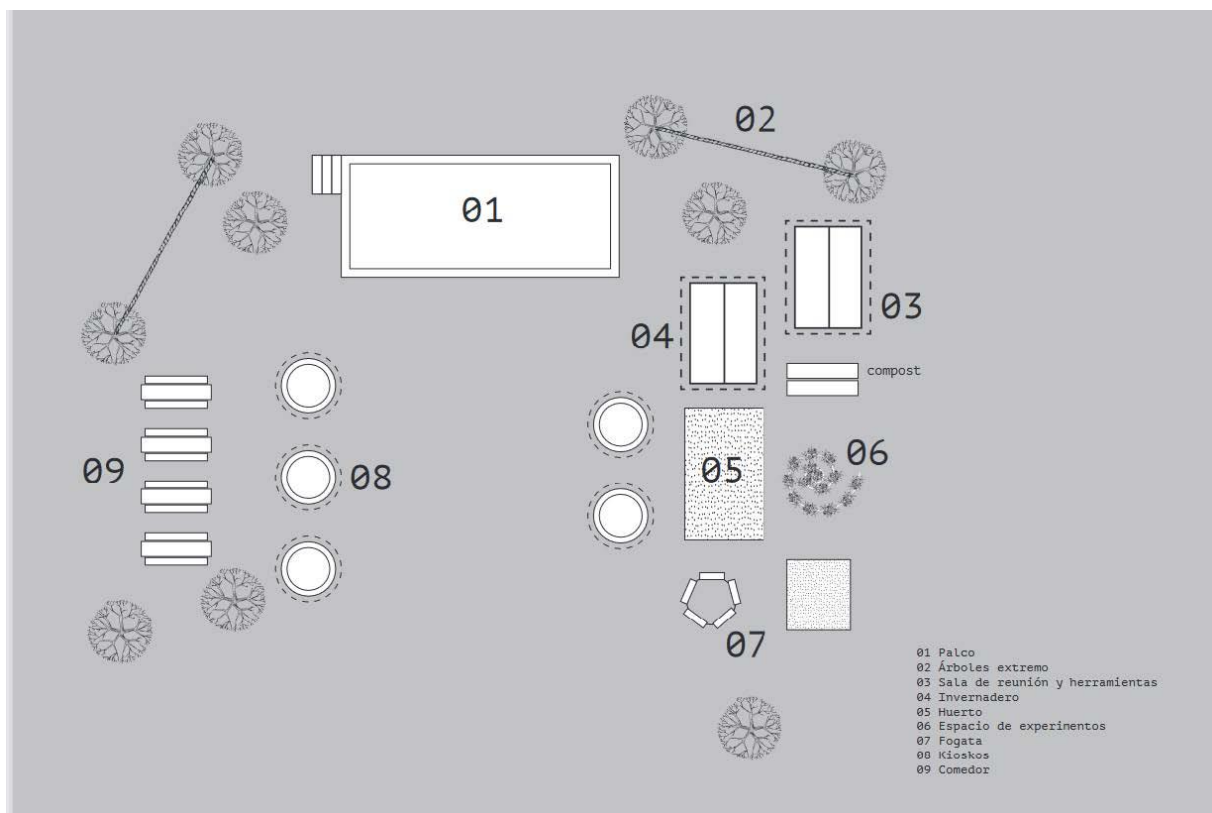


Figure 14. Community Gardens scheme guidelines. Source: Fernanda Pereira, Laura Navas and Renas Yildiz

Part 4 – Urban strategies for Transportation and Mobility:

- The local mobility should also be reviewed. Our proposal tries to reconnect existing local roads to provide faster local traffic by car or public transportation;
- Public transportation for the socially disadvantaged, elder or disabled can also have a free or cheaper public transportation from the malls or around the local commerce regions, as the examples of “SmartBus”, through public-private partnerships;
- The urban interventions prioritizes walking, biking and other ecological means of transportation, such as scooter and carsharing / carpooling. We propose a few parking lots for those means as requested by Odivelas communities Social Diagnosis. There should also include universal accessibility for disabled and elder people, such as ramps, elevators and tactile flooring.
- Systems feature digitally-enabled integrated systems designed to create reliable, easily accessible services. The bus travels with a camera and a 3D route map. However, the operator is still in charge of taking over the joystick in the event of a problem. In the long run, the bus will operate completely without staff. The bus is electrical and autonomous and navigates using a set of sensors and LIDAR (light detection and distance measurement) technology. Real-time bus tracking is available from the Phone app. It operates on two buses on each line traveling at 18 km / h. On Line 1 there are 10 stops at a distance of 7.8 km and there is a fixed route that takes 25 minutes. Line 2 connect the metro lines to the project area, luring people in to the commercial properties located inside. Line 2 consist of 20 stations at a distance of 12 km and the journey takes approximately 40 minutes.

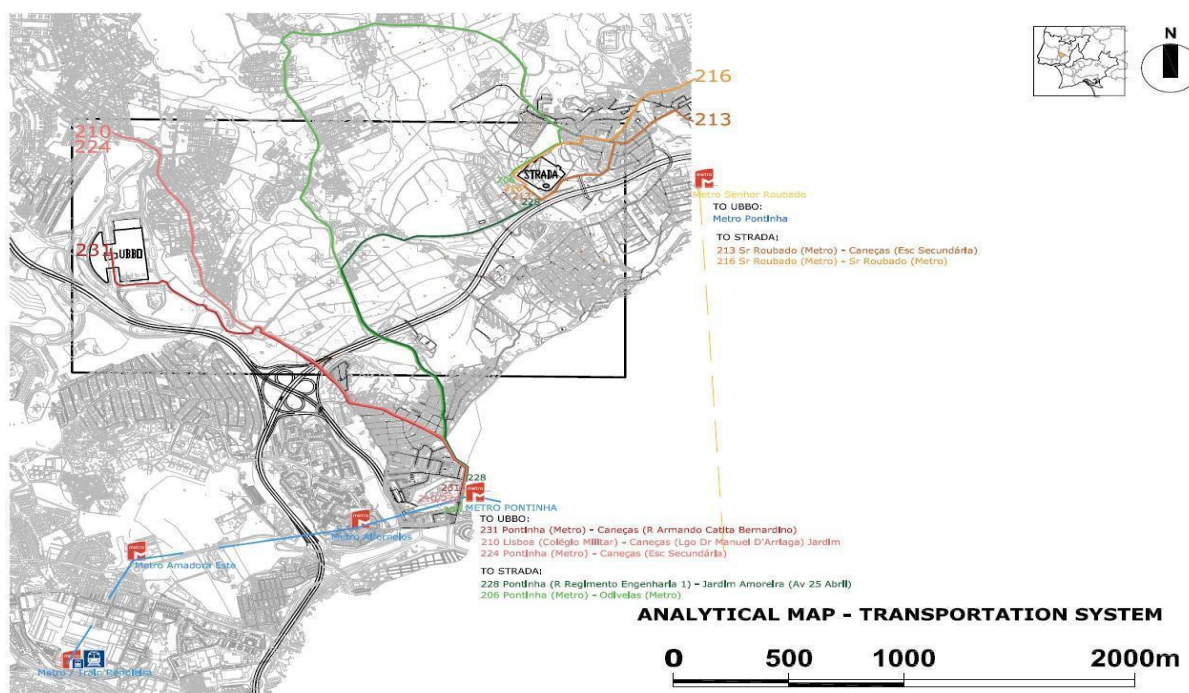


Figure 15. Current transportation system - Bus, Metro and train. Source: Fernanda Pereira, Laura Navas and Renas Yildiz

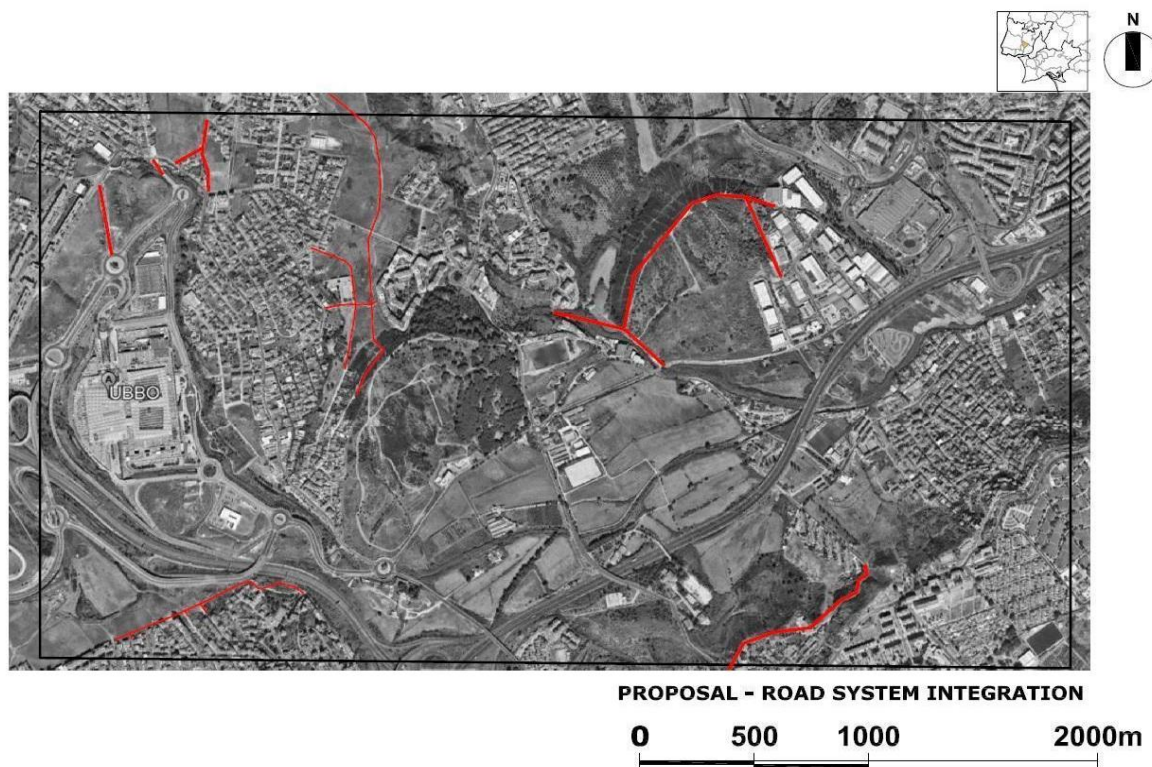


Figure 16. Part 4 - Road connection Preliminary study. Source: F. Pereira, Laura Navas and Renas Yildiz

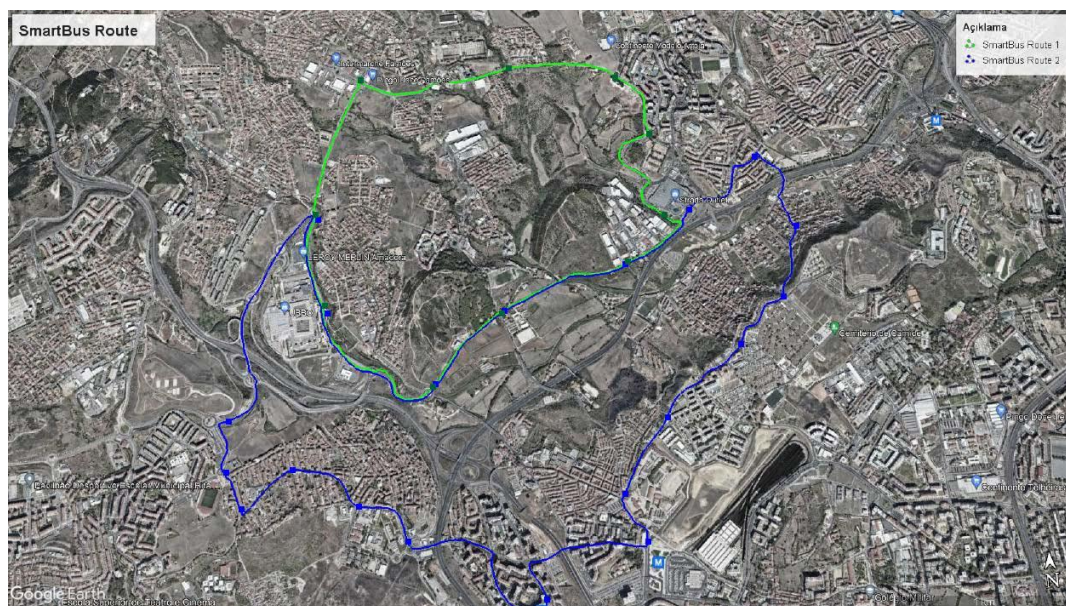


Figure 17. Part 4 - SmartBus Routes 1 – 2. Source: Fernanda Pereira, Laura Navas and Renas Yildiz

4.3. Urban Proposal 2 – Thickening the public space network of the Urban Areas of Illegal Genesis (AUGI's) and Reconsidering the impacts of collective spaces

With the perspective of generating a territory that is more cohesive, vertebrate and integrated with the local community, this proposal is fundamentally developed in two vectors. On the one hand, proposing concrete solutions for the qualification of the public spaces of the numerous precarious settlements, specifically those resulting from the Urban Areas of Illegal Genesis (AUGIs) and, on the other hand, making a propositional reflection on the role of existing shopping centers in the urban structure. nearest.

The basic objectives are twofold: on the one hand, to facilitate and improve territorial connections at the local level and, on the other hand, to encourage cultural permeability and the development of more democratic and inclusive social practices in terms of access to these facilities.



Figure 18, 19 and 20. Project Proposal. Source: André Salvador, Fernanda Magalhães e Isabella Freitas

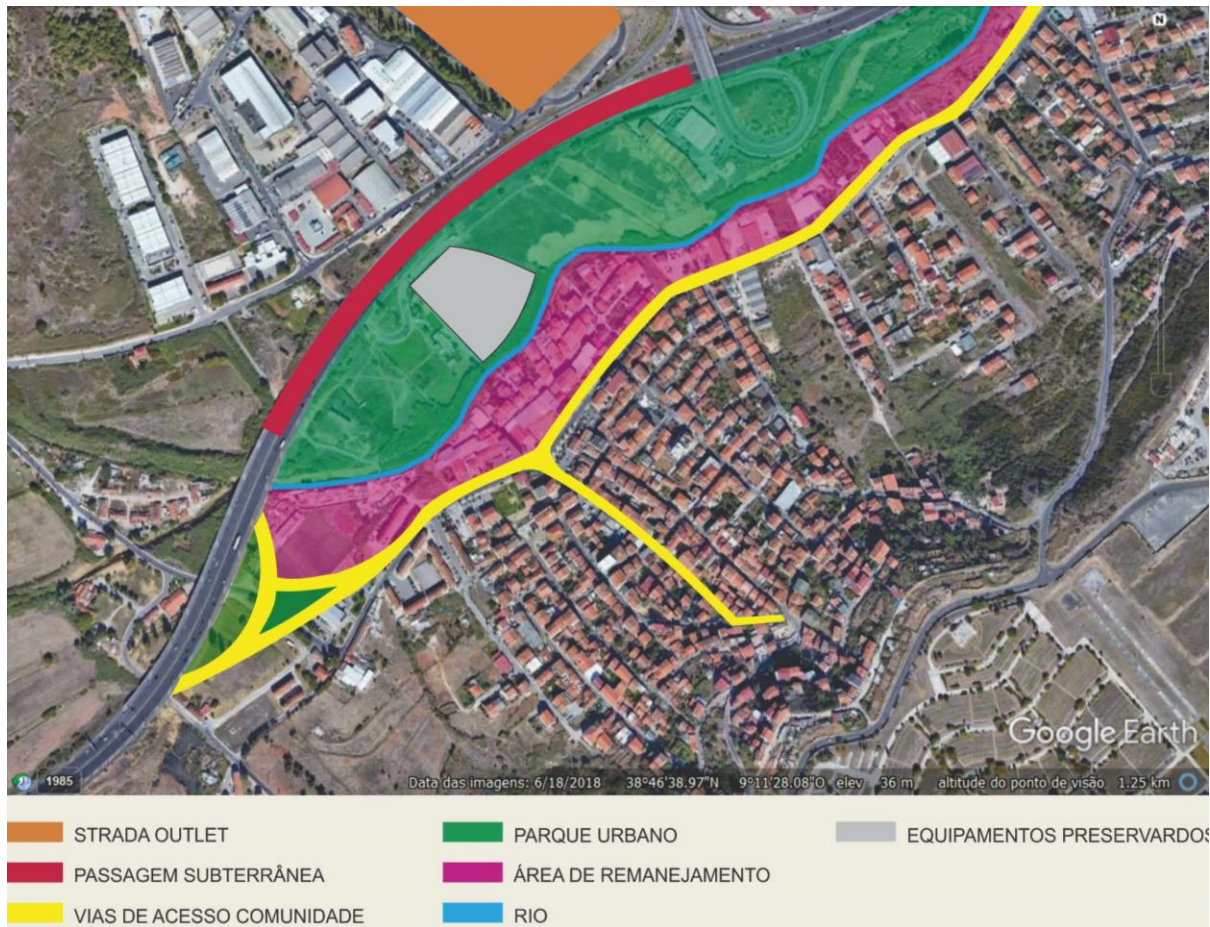
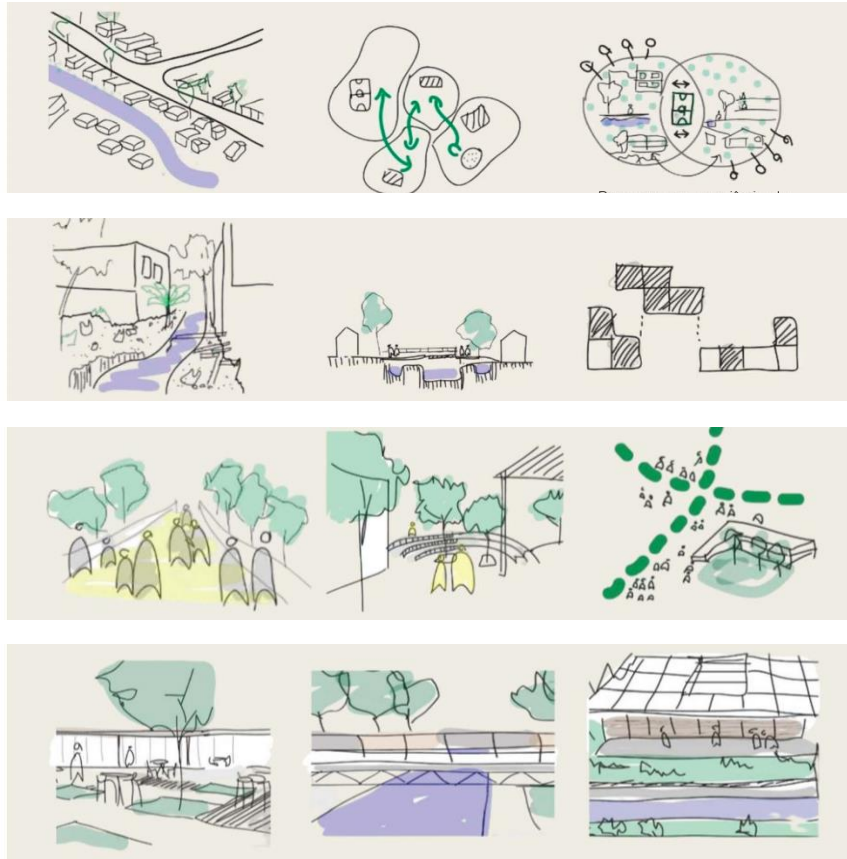


Figure 21. Project detail. Source: André Salvador, Fernanda Magalhães e Isabella Freitas

Regarding concrete solutions for the qualification of public spaces in the precarious settlements existing in the study area, it is proposed, instead of demolition and complete reconstruction of the urban fabric, the maintenance of the different fabrics and the insertion of a system of connected public spaces (Figures 18 to 21). It is empty spaces, not full ones, that are the key elements to design the porous city and allow it to operate better and in an interconnected way. In this regard, we try to maintain the general structure of the building structure, preserving the local memory and avoiding large-scale reconstructions.

Occasionally, and for safety reasons, the demolition of some buildings at risk, mostly located by the river, is proposed, forcing the occasional relocation of some families. In other situations, the removal of buildings and the insertion of quality public spaces in their place (such as a public walkway that crosses the site), allows the reconstruction and expansion of the public space system. It is also proposed, within this scope, the reprofiling (Figure 28) of the streets and the use of most of the existing streets and alleys to create the necessary accesses to the AUGIs. These measures are intended to contribute to the opening up of neighborhoods, countering the closed nature of the ghetto that they currently suffer, and to contribute to the qualification of these neighborhoods and the communities that inhabit them.

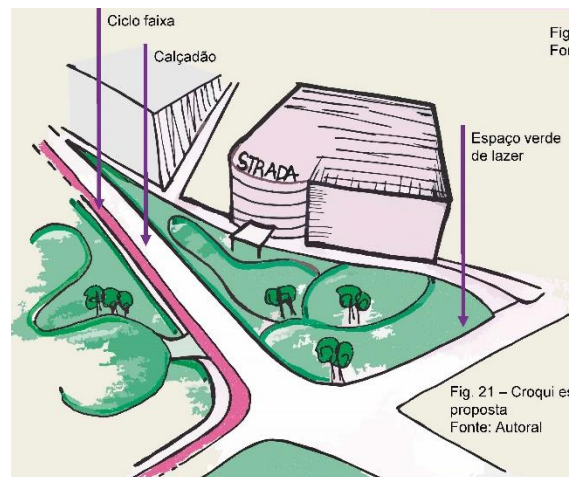
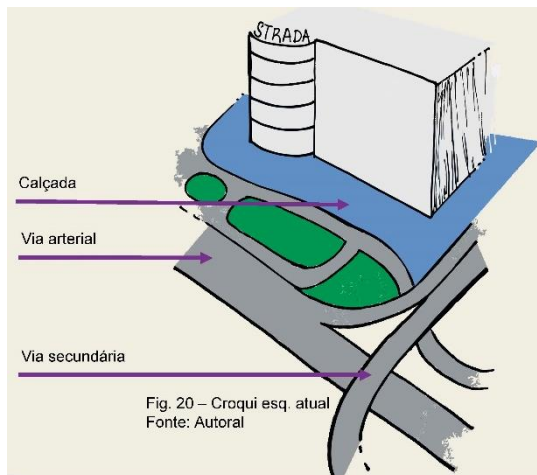
Finally, the green infrastructure is reinforced with the expansion and/or qualification of all green spaces. Thus, from the creation of an interconnected network of open spaces, its natural resources are used for the benefit of the population that lives and transits there (Figures 22 to 25).



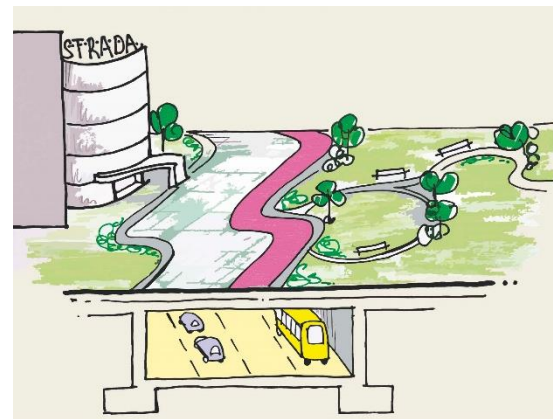
Figures 22 to 25. Strategic lines schemes. Source: A.Salvador, F. Magalhães e I. Freita

Regarding the reflection on the role of existing shopping centers in the nearest urban structure, the following consideration was made. The urban fabric, in which the UBBO and Strada Outlet shopping centers are located, is marked by a heavy infrastructure network (IC17, IC16, IC22 and respective nodes), which exclusively serves road traffic, not guaranteeing optimal accessibility conditions for pedestrians or the easy and direct access of the local community to commercial facilities. To reverse this situation, it is proposed to bury a section of the IC17 (Figure 29), located in front of the StradaOutlet shopping mall, allowing greater physical and visual permeability between both sides of the infrastructure, as well as easier access to the equipment by the communities of the AUGIs and the introduction of a more generous public promenade, a bike path and vegetation, ensuring better interaction between the community and the mall (Figures 26 and 27).

The remaining guidelines of the project aim to improve the mobility of citizens, strengthen public transport in the neighborhood, implement urban services such as water distribution, sewage collection, street lighting, post offices and garbage collection and promote new leisure spaces.



Figures 26 and 27. Current status sketch and proposed scheme. Source: A.Salvador, F. Magalhães e I. Freitas



Figures 28 and 29. Single platform scheme (without segregation between pedestrian and vehicles) and Schematic section of the Underpass. Source: André Salvador, Fernanda Magalhães e Isabella Freitas

5. Concluding Remarks

As Nuno Portas stated in "The End of the Puzzle" text (2011: p. 168) "the extensive, discontinuous and fragmented urban corresponds to much of our current context. It is no longer possible to look at it as an exception or a mistake". And as Jean-Michel Roux (2006: p. 115, 116) also explained "to present single-family housing, access to property, cars, shopping centres as the culprits of crime, and as entities of a diabolical nature, is to take the effects for the causes". We need that "inversion of the gaze" (Reichen, 2008, p. 40) and to treat the urbanized territory from the extensive urban, recognizing it as a complex system with autonomous characteristics, with its own logic and identity. The two proposals presented here have no other pretension than to propose scenarios that are attentive and sensitive to the contemporary territory, in this case centered in one of the most challenging areas of the Lisbon urban region, and make constructive and propositional contributions to the creation of coherent and legible urban spaces and, as far as possible, help to create a system of collective spaces at a territorial scale with the same valences and values of the canonical public space systems of the historical city.

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