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STRATEGIES FOR THE POST-SPECULATIVE CITY: AN EXAMPLE IN DELICIAS AXIS, MADRID

1. ABSTRACT

Measuring approximately 23 hectares, the Delicias Axis is an area of Madrid with great potential. It is connected by metro and train stations, and is not far from the central museum district. Furthermore, several businesses, such as Repsol, Spain's major oil company, are moving into the neighbourhood, and there are several attractions such as the Planetarium and the Train Museum on the site. People from Madrid use the park for flea markets and social activities like dance. However, the Delicias axis does not currently garner the attention it deserves.

The Delicias working group of the 4th European Urban Summer School made several proposals to improve access and connectivity of the area into the larger fabric of Madrid. Improved urban design features were envisaged to revitalise the area and make it a real destination for locals and tourists. Through field work and discussions, the group produced a development plan focusing on the goals of attracting tertiary activities and linking the area with the adjacent Tierno Galván Park, the largest green open space in south Madrid.

2. INTRODUCTION

Aiming to bring young professionals together to discuss planning issues, the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) launched the European Urban Summer School (EUSS) in 2010. A total of 15 young professionals with a wide range of backgrounds and from a broad range of countries, encompassing North and South America as well as Europe started their work in Madrid, Spain, on 8 September 2013. The excitement and motivation of students in the room was palpable.

The course was made up of field work, lectures and three group projects, which after seven days would be turned into presentations, highlighting the main challenges and solutions

proposed by the students. After an initial site-visit and the theoretical part which explained local issues, the young professionals were divided into three groups of five. The groups were well balanced comprising professionals with different types of planning backgrounds.

Throughout the coursework, the need to link the three pillars of sustainability - social, economical and environmental- was a guiding principle. The diversity of students attending the summer school was a real asset because students had to keep an open mind while exchanging views with each other and ultimately deciding on a consensus.

3. CONTEXT

3.1. The group and its cooperative principles

The working process was highly collaborative throughout the summer school. On the Delicias team, named after the place of work, the profile of the team members varied from architects to environmental manager; they had distinct work experiences and nationalities. Their way of teamwork building was beneficial because it fostered taking a holistic approach to the identified problems from different points of view. During the work process the group fully felt the benefit from collaborative work, because it did not focus just on external form, but it also thought about the deeper sense of how students progressed and manifested their contributions at every step. However, this advantage was also problematic, since it was hard to reach consensus among a plethora of opinions on every detail.

With regard to local complexity, it was not only a place with lots of problems, it was a challenge for the group as a whole, which tried hard to find the best and most realistic solutions for the area. After many useful lectures made by professionals in architecture

and city management, the first step in the project was for the group to carry out field work. It returned to the site to observe the area and collect information. The members of the group looked also at contemporary solutions for the planning issues they had identified by referring to their own countries or seeking out famous examples worldwide. By examining the neighbourhood and physically inhabited spaces, and by observing people's behaviour and noticing a number of everyday gaps, the group was able to consider possible planning problems both from a personal and a professional standpoint to understand the real scenery of the area. The way of approaching what was happening on the site 'as a local' was very profitable for the group and helped it to delve deeply into the issues and discuss challenges and opportunities for the proposed area.

After working together and presenting their project outcome all of the participants of the group, as well as the summer school as a whole got feedback and guidelines for their own future work and research. This short but saturated week gave young professionals a strong impulse and a new starting point to solve the problems in particular of empty or neglected areas in their own countries. After concentrated work and research on their project the group discussed with locals the possibilities they had envisaged of changing something in the real world. In the group's view this part of the city of Madrid could be a nice location for a government-led architectural and urban design competition in the near future.

3.2. The study area

As a starting point the area presented itself as an extended underused territory situated between the entrance to the Tierno Galvan Park through railway land and ending in the area around the railway museum. It is composed of four districts

of the Arganzuela neighbourhood: Atocha, Palos de Moguer, Delicias and Legazpi. There is a lot of free unused space almost in the city centre, very close to one of the important transport nodes of Madrid –the Atocha station. This is the biggest railway station in the capital, the main railway station for commuter trains for the city and the focal point for intercity trains from all over Spain. This means that it is a portal to the city for both tourists and locals who work in Madrid but live in the outskirts. The Prado-Recoletos axis with the main famous museums of the city starts from there and leads people to the historical city centre. Close to this location is another important transport node –the Mendez Álvaro coach station, which also brings people to the city from all over the country.

The study area is surrounded by a very dense urban fabric, partly occupied by residential buildings but containing also some retail structures in it. Each residential building has its own infrastructure for inhabitants which is closed to strangers. There are no common open spaces to spend time in them and no connecting points to other parts of the area.

It is very unprofitable from a social, economic and environmental point of view to have such an area with no use almost in the city centre; instead it could be a place where people could spend time during the day, and enjoy nature, engage in chats and benefit from fresh air. Additionally, the local economy could greatly benefit from a enlivened neighbourhood that would attract activities and investment.

The present point of attraction in this area is the railway museum (Museo del Ferrocarril) which still uses one of its redundant rail tracks once a year during a holiday. As there are no convenient internal pedestrian connections between these structures and the surrounding working area, the railway could be revitalised for more uses. It could for example lead

tourists to the beginning of the Tierno Galvan Park where Planetarium, Auditorium and Imax Cinema are situated. Overall, this could be a profitable starting point to develop the unique features of the area.

There is therefore a potential to revitalise the train museum by putting the railroad into better use. This would create a greater attraction for the area for locals and tourists alike.

4. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Firstly, before doing some brainstorming about the problems of the site, the group carried out some research on the location. After this step, a discussion started to detect the negative points of the site that needed to be improved and how to achieve these objectives. The team then went on to consider some real possibilities of how to implement these changes in reality and which solutions would be possible to do it quickly.

The group agreed that it was not sufficient to solve only a single aspect for each of these problems, but that it was necessary to address the triad of sustainability, and thus to deal simultaneously with environmental, social and economical dimensions. The approach the group chose to achieve this integrative target was to look at a number of layers to perceive and understand the reality of the site better.

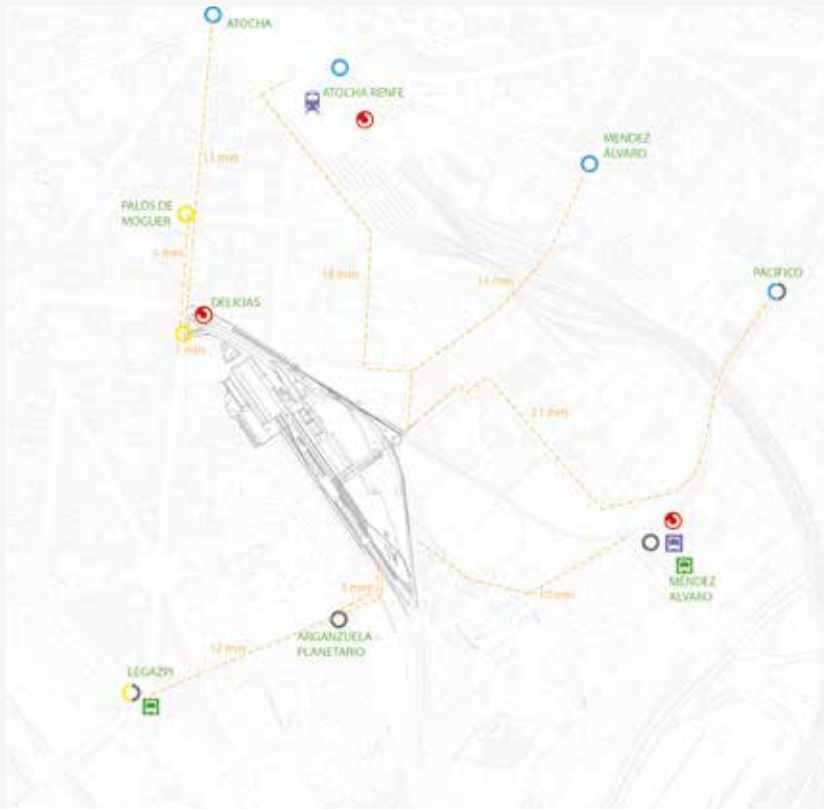
They were:

Connection layer

The empty part of the Delicias axis has good communication links with the rest of the city thanks to the metro of Madrid, as the site is situated between three metro lines (1-blue, 3-yellow and 6-grey) (Figure 1). Reaching the farthest metro station takes twenty-one minutes walking, and the two nearer stations take less than a minute. In this respect the Delicias site is one of the better connected ones in the south of the city of Madrid. Moreover, it is connected with the rest of the Madrid region by

three stations near the site, the Delicias Station on the edge of the empty site, and the Atocha Station and the Mendez Álvaro Station in the north and in the east respectively. The regional train network connects these stations to the Region of Madrid. The immediate surrounding of the site is also connected with the Region of Madrid by regional coach, which can be taken at the Mendez Alvaro coach Station or in Legazpi square.

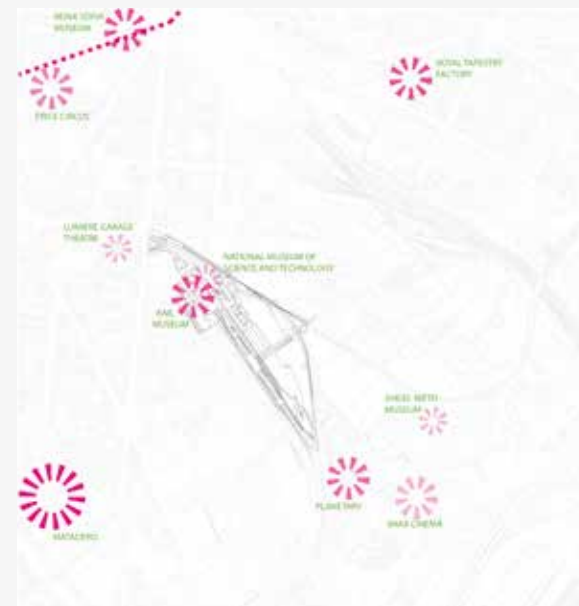
The Atocha Station connects Madrid with other Spanish cities, and the AVE (the Spanish High Speed Train) is also serving this national train station. The national coach lines departing from the Mendez Álvaro station are also offering national transport connections to this area.



1. Connection Layer

Cultural layer

The area is situated half way between the Matadero, one of the most important modern cultural centres of Madrid, and the Prado axis, where the most important national museums are located, among them the Reina Sofia Museum besides the Prado, as well as other cultural establishments, such as Price cirque (Figure 2). In the south-east there is another important cultural cluster, located in the Tierno Galvan park, which includes the Planetarium of the city of Madrid, and an IMAX cinema (the first cinema of Madrid with 3D technology). Nearby is also the Angel Nieto museum, although it is not of national importance. Cultural attractions in the vicinity of the site are compounded with the cultural establishments on the site, such as the Old Delicias Station, built at the end of the 19th century, which has become a Rail Museum, with parts of the building housing the National Museum of Science and Technology.



2. Cultural Layer

Green layer

The empty part of the Delicias axis forms the gateway to the Tierno Galván Park, a very large park in the south of the city, with 45 hectares comprising trees, fourteen grassed areas and sports fields. Nearby, is the green axis Madrid Río, a new park which was created to uncover and revitalise the Manzanares river. Its construction was completed in 2007, and this very long green area along the river connects the south of the city with the west, and joins the green areas of the north with those in the south of the R Madrid region (Figure 3). These generous open spaces are prolonged into the city by wide avenues, lined with several rows of trees which form green corridors and are linking up all the major parks.



Use layer

The area surrounding the empty site of the Delicias axis is predominantly residential. It was

built between the 18th and the 19th centuries. The nearby Mendez Álvaro axis is transforming itself at present to become the most important business district in the south of the city. The establishment of the new headquarter of Repsol on this axis is an example of this transformation, and other corporate headquarters are expected to follow on the fringe of the Delicias axis. The residential areas tend to be located around the south of the empty site of Delicias, while the business district is developing on the west of the site.

By dividing the location under study into these "layers" the group discovered that selected places could be perceived as 'spatial hinges'—which deserved special attention for the development of this area by planning solutions. In these acupuncture points, various layers converged with a strong connection between them. This meant that the design proposals for the various parts of the site had to be developed alongside each other, taking into account the connections between these 'spatial hinges'. The group decided to turn the Delicias axis into an extended park full of activities for both locals and tourists. This included places for leisure activities, such as a rope climbing wall and playgrounds, as well as places for quiet moments and rest.

After the group had specified the various functions of the selected acupuncture points further, it presented the results of its spatial strategies and design principles to the whole summer school, just over a week after the beginning of this event.

5. ACHIEVED RESULTS

With the aim to find concrete solutions for different problems in the Delicias Axis, the group considered that field work was necessary, first of all to identify punctual issues of the site, together with the best places where

interventions could bring about positive change. After this, the group started a series of working sessions, during which they focused on raising questions about the area and exploring possible tools that could be used to solve them. This process let the group to identify 11 problematic points of intervention.



4. delicias acupuncture

Point 1 [40°24'00,07"N / 3°41'37,85"O]

Achieving a successful transformation of the Delicias Axis was not easy for young professionals who did not come from Madrid. As outsiders, what the group found was that the periphery of the Delicias site presented a facade which was unappealing. Because of that, people were passing by without noticing the existing attractive activities on the site, let alone its potential for the future. A solution for this problem would be a more attractive facade, with a larger entrance and better views into the site. A large signboard above a wider entrance would help, as well as moving a little train statue closer to the entrance to inform people about the museum building and its contents inside the gates. (Figure 5)



5. POINT 1

Point 2 [40°24'00,06"N / 3°41'33,78"O]

The Delicias Axis is a place with multiple

uses, among others a shortcut for people to use to reach the subway. However, knowing more about the area, its inhabitants started to establish another path which provided a faster passage through a green field (between “Calle Párroco Eusebio Cuenca” and “Calle Cristo del Camino”). This also included climbing up a steep slope and compacting the soil along this informal path, which would have an impact on the vegetation all along. One possible solution could be to open the existing fence formally and instate a flight of stairs to join the two levels. This would provide a better and safer access for the local commuters and could also become an advertisement for Delicias for a wider public.



6. POINT 3

Point 3 [40°24'00,68"N / 3°41'33,59"O]

Another solution to connect the main streets “Calle Ramirez de Prado” and “Calle Cristo del Camino” was to instate an underground path with a low slope to make it attractive and bring light into it. (Figure 6)

Point 4 [40°23'57,37"N / 3°41'33,72"O]

One way of bringing more attractiveness into the area was to build and open a cafe in this

spot, which would offer finger food and seating from where to enjoy the area.

Point 5 (40°23'56,04"N / 3°41'33,66"O)

At this point the path is really narrow. For that reason the adjacent buildings should be made more pleasant and in harmony with the surroundings, so that people would enjoy this passage more. Landscaping and detailed design proposals were needed to refurbish the existing passage and make it more attractive.

Point 6 (40°23'53,64"N / 3°41'30,53"O)

At this point there is a corner space without a use. The group wanted to make use of this empty space and proposed to turn it into a place where people could exercise on some free equipment. Besides creating a space with new visible activities, the change could also improve the connection between this stretch of the path with the inside of the old train station. Such an area for physical exercise would accommodate complementary activities to the well used children's playground located close to it.

Point 7 (40°23'52,12"N / 3°41'26,82"O)

Upon the closing of the train station, some of the wagons fell into disuse. Trying to recover them, the main idea was to turn them into thematic restaurants. This would create a new local culture which would always be alive.

Point 8 (40°23'46,62"N / 3°41'21,73"O)

Looking for the use of the old railroad, some special carriages are proposed to be used by the population. (Figure 7)

7. POINT 8



Point 9 (40°23'46,38"N / 3°41'23,02"O)

A great thematic 3D painting could be created on the wall to attract attention to this place by people living around it.

Point 10 (40°23'37,88"N / 3°41'12,35"O)

Reutilising the existing structure, the group proposed an open air movies or theatre, as well as some kind of rope play area close to it, to put the whole place back into use. Moreover, a new high level passage should be created to connect the top of the bridge with the other side of the railroad.

Point 11 (40°23'51,05"N / 3°41'13,53"O)

At this point the main idea was to create a building with different uses. It would include stores and shops, restaurants on the lower levels and residential premises to house inhabitants from all status levels above. During the daytime, the lower levels would be used intensely, especially by people who work in the surroundings as well as local inhabitants. At night, the upper storeys could be used as dwellings for the population. The roof would be open for public use to provide a better connection from this area to the entrance of the museum.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In conclusion, the group who studied the Delicias Axis decided to introduce different interventions along the axis. They ranged from the renovation of the portal to Train Museum at the entrance to the Delicias site, to making the passage through existing empty spaces more attractive. To that effect the group decided to fill these spaces with small scale activities, such

as fast-food points in keeping with the style of area. The group also dealt with larger structures on the site and proposed their renovation according to green and ecological methods. This amounted to a twofold approach to the site: adding real small things that could be produced immediately and longer term interventions that required more time and resources. The rapid interventions used what already existed on the site. For example, revitalising the redundant rail track and turning it into a fun railway would not take much time to create. Such a change would attract locals and tourists to this area on a permanent basis. The longer term regeneration of the site would start with the improvement of existing activities identified in the 11 points, the children play spaces, connections of the site with its surroundings links between them on site, by introducing new activities such as comfortable fast food spots etc.

However, promoting the development of the whole area is not easy at all and would require the participation of the whole community in the decisions about the future of the site.

The transformation and introduction of new uses to the Delicias axis would entail long time changes which would have an impact on the whole city centre structure. More immediately they would influence the nearby street structure and dwellings and thus the daily life of the local inhabitants. All these aspects (social, economic and environmental) would have to be incorporated into the design process.

Collaboration between all the members of the team was essential for the preparation of this paper on the work of the Delicias axis group. By dividing the development aims into subjects and attributing the elaboration of specific solutions to particular team members who provided feedback to the whole team, made the collective process of thinking very systematic led the team to a very considered conclusion.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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